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# Singular Thought : in Defence of Acquaintance

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## *Summary*

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## 1. *Singularism vs Descriptivism*

Descriptivism is the view that our mental relation to individual objects goes through properties of those objects. What is given to us are, first and foremost, properties whose worldly instantiation we are able to detect, and only indirectly objects. That is so because (according to the view) our knowledge of objects is mediated by our knowledge of their properties. Objects are given to us only qua instantiators of whatever properties we take them to have. On this view, my friend John is only given to me as the  $x$  who has all (or perhaps most of) the properties I take him to have: being my friend, being called 'John', having a certain appearance, having a certain history (e.g. having been my classmate in such and such years), and so on and so forth. Whoever has the relevant properties — assuming a single individual does — is John. Likewise, the computer I am typing on is the  $x$  that has the properties of being (or looking like) a computer, being in front of me, having been bought by

me at such and such a place at such and such a time, being currently used by me for typing, and so on and so forth.

Since, according to Descriptivism, we live in a qualitative world of properties — a world where objects only have secondary or derivative status — it would be philosophically revealing if we purged our language of its singular terms, as Quine recommended (Quine 1960 : 181-6). Thus regimented, our language would be able to express only so-called ‘general propositions’, i.e. propositions about properties, such as the proposition that every F is G, or the proposition that nothing is both F and G. Translated into such a descriptivist language, statements allegedly about individual objects turn out to express general propositions : ‘a is G’ translates as ‘the F is G’, and, as Russell pointed out, ‘the F is G’ expresses a general proposition just like ‘An F is G’, ‘Every F is G’ or ‘No F is G’.

In contrast to Descriptivism, Singularism holds that our thought is about individual objects as much as it is about properties. Objects are given to us directly, in experience, and we do not necessarily think of them as the bearers of such and such properties (even though the properties of objects are revealed to us when we encounter them in experience). On this view the Quinean ‘elimination of singular terms’ is a bad idea. We can think of individual objects in two ways, according to Singularism. We can think of them directly, if we are acquainted with them in experience ; or we can think of them indirectly, qua bearers of such and such properties. It can be maintained that the content of a ‘descriptive’ thought — a thought that is only indirectly about individual objects — is a general proposition, i.e. a proposition that involves only properties ; but Singularism differs from Descriptivism in holding that, in addition to such thoughts, there are also *singular thoughts* : thoughts that are directly about individual objects, and whose content is a singular proposition — a proposition involving individual objects as well as properties.

To a large extent, the history of the philosophy of language and mind in the twentieth century centers around the debate between Singularism and Descriptivism. Analytic philosophy in England started with Russell’s and Moore’s advocacy of ‘direct realism’, a doctrine according to which we are directly acquainted with objects and properties in the world. Over the years, despite radical changes in his doctrines, Russell kept opposing knowledge by acquaintance to knowledge by description. Russell’s insistence on acquaintance and direct reference led him to reject Frege’s sense/reference distinction, on the grounds that, if reference is mediated by sense, we lose the idea of direct acquaintance and succumb to Descriptivism (Hylton 2005). As I am about to argue (§2), this was Russell’s major mistake. First, contrary to what Russell thought, Frege’s distinction is not incompatible

with Singularism (even though Frege himself had clear descriptivist tendencies) ; that we have learnt from the work of Gareth Evans, another major twentieth-century advocate of Singularism (Evans 1982, 1985 ; see McDowell 1977 and 1984). Second, and more important, once you give up Frege's sense/reference distinction in favor of a monostratal semantics à la Russell, you are bound to embrace some form Descriptivism : that is exactly what happened to Russell. After Russell himself became a Descriptivist, Descriptivism became the orthodoxy. It took decades before the community of analytic philosophers as a whole rediscovered Singularism and rejected Descriptivism.

Today, in the twenty-first century, the situation is changing once again. Some philosophers attempt to revive Descriptivism by putting forward more sophisticated versions aimed at disarming some of the objections that made it fall into discredit in the seventies. Others attack Singularism construed as a dogma we unquestioningly inherited from our elders. Acquaintance, they tell us, is a myth.<sup>1</sup> My aim in this paper is to defend Singularism by showing, first, that it is a better and more promising view than even the most sophisticated versions of Descriptivism, and second, that the anti-acquaintance objections miss their target.

## 2. *Russell's Mistake*

For Russell, knowledge is, or rests on, a direct relation between the mind and things outside the mind. This relation Russell calls 'acquaintance'. Without a direct relation of acquaintance between the mind and its objects, no genuine 'knowledge of the external world' would be possible, Russell thought. That is the doctrine of *direct realism*, which Russell and Moore opposed to neo-Hegelian idealism. This non-negotiable principle – that knowledge is based on a direct relation of acquaintance between the mind and its objects – leaves it open what exactly acquaintance amounts to, and in particular, which entities one can be acquainted with and which one cannot. But Russell thought that the principle of acquaintance itself had semantic consequences, and that it was incompatible with Frege's doctrine about sense and reference.

Besides knowing objects, the mind knows truths about objects. Let us assume, as both Frege and Russell did in their discussion involving that example, that we know that Mont

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<sup>1</sup> Thus the most recent book on the topic starts with the following declaration : « None of the several reasons that have been offered for imposing an acquaintance constraint on singular thought can stand up to scrutiny. Acquaintance is an unnecessary artifact, an unwanted relic of a bygone era in the philosophy of language and mind » (Hawthorne and Manley forthcoming : Chapter 1).

Blanc is 4000 metres high. Knowledge here is a relation between the mind and a 'proposition', namely, the (true) proposition that Mont Blanc is 4000 metres high. Frege and Russell agreed that the mind is related to propositions (in Frege's terminology : thoughts) which it 'grasps' ; but they disagreed about the nature and constituency of such propositions. For Frege, a proposition about Mont Blanc does not involve Mont Blanc itself (the *reference* of the proper name 'Mont Blanc') but a mode of presentation of Mont Blanc (the *sense* of the proper name). For Russell, grasping and believing the proposition that Mont Blanc is 4000 metres high gives us knowledge about Mont Blanc only if Mont Blanc itself is a constituent of the proposition. If the proposition contains some mediating entity rather than the object itself, it will not be about the object in the strong sense which is required for knowledge. So, unless « Mont Blanc itself is a component part [of the proposition], ... we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mont Blanc » (Letter to Frege, in Frege 1980 : 169). Russell therefore advocated a one-level semantics, in which the meaning or content of a representation (whether linguistic or mental) is its reference, and nothing else. The meaning of a singular term is an individual object ; the meaning of a predicate is a property or a relation ; the meaning of a sentence is a proposition, that is, an 'objective complex' involving objects (if the proposition is singular) and properties or relations.

But as I said, that departure from Frege was a major mistake. Like Frege, Russell accepts that propositions are the content of attitudes such as belief. In order to play that role, propositions must obey certain obvious constraints. For example, it must not be possible for a rational subject to believe and disbelieve one and the same proposition. But it is certainly possible for a rational subject looking at a particular mountain to believe that the mountain in question is less than 4000 metres high even though (i) that mountain is Mont Blanc, and (ii) the subject in question believes that Mont Blanc is 4000 metres high. Such a situation may happen if the subject does not realize that the mountain she is seeing is Mont Blanc. In that sort of case Frege is safe, for he can appeal to senses or modes of presentation : what the subject is said simultaneously to believe and disbelieve is not one and the same proposition (viz. the proposition that a given mountain is 4000 metres high) but two distinct propositions, involving two distinct modes of presentation of what turns out to be the same mountain. The subject believes of that mountain under mode of presentation  $m_1$  that it is less than 4000 metres high, and of the same mountain under mode of presentation  $m_2$  that it is 4000 metres high. Since  $m_1 \neq m_2$ , there is no irrationality on the subject's part. Russell, however, is forced to say that the subject holds contradictory beliefs. Since, in his framework, no senses go into the proposition believed, but only the mountain itself (the same in both cases), he cannot

avoid the conclusion that the subject simultaneously believes and disbelieves the proposition consisting of the mountain in question and the property of being 4000 metres high.

At this point two rescue options are available but they are both deeply unattractive. The first option consists in denying that propositions understood à la Russell — *R*-propositions, for short — are the complete content of the attitudes, i.e. that in terms of which we should account for the subject's rationality. On this option, *R*-propositions are said to be believed or disbelieved only under guises. This option, which has been pursued by some philosophers in the so-called 'neo-Russellian' camp, amounts to a concession of defeat ; for guises are nothing but modes of presentation, and modes of presentation are now allowed to enter into finer-grained propositions construed as the *complete* content of the attitudes. Far from conflicting with Frege's construal of propositions as involving senses, this view merely introduces a new, coarser-grained notion of 'proposition', namely *R*-propositions, playing a different role and corresponding roughly to an equivalence class of Fregean propositions. This is a variant of Frege's two-level approach rather than a genuine alternative of the sort Russell was after. In any case, Russell himself insisted that propositions in his sense — *R*-propositions — *are* the object of the attitudes and should therefore be answerable to considerations of cognitive significance. There is no difference between Russellian propositions and Fregean propositions on this score. This means that the option I have just sketched was not really available to Russell.

The other option is what Russell went for. It consists in maintaining the general principle of direct reference, while giving up its application to the case at hand (and to any case that raises the same sort of objection). So, in the Mont Blanc case, contrary to what Russell initially thought, the subject does *not* hold a belief that is about Mont Blanc in the strong and direct sense which he was interested in characterizing. The fact that the subject is disposed to ascribe contradictory predicates to the same mountain shows that she thinks of that mountain under distinct guises, hence that her belief(s) are only indirectly about the mountain. What the subject really believes, in the above scenario, are the following propositions : that *the mountain she is seeing* is less than 4000 metres high, and that *the mountain known as 'Mont Blanc'* is 4000 metres high. These propositions contradict each other only given the extra premiss that the mountain the subject is seeing is the mountain known as 'Mont Blanc'. In the case at hand, precisely, the subject does not believe the extra premiss, so her rationality is preserved. As for Russell, his theoretical position is also preserved : he can maintain that, for the subject to entertain a singular belief about an object *a*, *a* must be a component part of the proposition which she believes. In our scenario the

propositions believed by the subject only involve properties such as the property of being currently seen by the subject or the property of being known as 'Mont Blanc' ; they do not involve Mont Blanc itself. It follows that the subject does *not* hold a singular belief about Mont Blanc, appearances notwithstanding. She holds only general beliefs about whatever mountain she is seeing, or whatever mountain is called 'Mont Blanc'. The subject's thought concerns Mont Blanc only indirectly, via descriptions such as 'the mountain I see' or 'the mountain called *Mont Blanc*' ; and the same thing is true whenever the subject is disposed to ascribe contradictory predicates to some object her thought is, in some loose sense, 'about'. Russell is thus led to hold that we are acquainted with, and can directly refer to, only a very limited number of individual objects: objects that are given to us *in such a transparent manner that no identity mistake can arise*. The list of such objects is rather short : ourselves, or our sense data, are the candidates that come to mind. The *other* things — ordinary objects like Mont Blanc, this chair, or my friend John — we know only 'by description', via properties which these objects possess and with which we *are* acquainted.

For a singularist that option is a disaster. It enables Russell to maintain the contrast between the two kinds of knowledge – direct and indirect, by acquaintance or by description – only by so drastically limiting the first kind that Russell now appears as the champion of Descriptivism. On the resulting view, almost all of our knowledge of individual objects is knowledge by description. The most typical sort of knowledge of objects by acquaintance, namely perceptual knowledge (such as the knowledge one gains of Mont Blanc when one sees the peak), now counts as knowledge by description. Defeat has not been conceded, since the idea of acquaintance remains (and acquaintance still is the foundation for all our knowledge) ; but defeat has taken place nonetheless. In contrast to our knowledge of the internal world, our knowledge of the external world – our knowledge of the mountains and chairs around us – is indirect, descriptive knowledge based on properties. Descriptivism rules.

The disaster could have been avoided. For Frege's two-level semantics, far from entailing the indirectness of all our knowledge, was in fact the surest way of protecting Singularism from cognitive significance objections of the sort Russell's Singularism succumbed to. Let me spell this out.

First, Frege's two-level semantics does not entail the indirectness of all our knowledge, because it is possible to make room for *non-descriptive senses*, i.e. senses that are acquaintance-based. On the 'neo-Fregean' approach advocated by Evans and others, there is a basic distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, as in Russell's approach. When I see the mountain, I get acquainted with it. But this does not mean

that the mountain is not presented to me in a particular way, distinct from other ways it might be presented to me. In experience, we are acquainted with objects, but this is compatible with there being modes of presentation under which we are acquainted with them. What follows from the contrast between the two kinds of knowledge is not the lack of any mode of presentation in the acquaintance case, but only the lack of any *descriptive* mode of presentation. Russell's claim that a two-level semantics à la Frege is incompatible with Singularism therefore depends upon an overly narrow, descriptivist construal of 'sense', a construal that was encouraged by Frege himself but which was by no means mandatory.

Second, once we have acquaintance-based senses in addition to the objects of acquaintance (the referents), cognitive significance objections are powerless to threaten Singularism. It is no longer possible to claim that the subject is not in direct contact with the object, on the grounds that identity mistakes are possible. Identity mistakes admittedly presuppose that the object is given to the subject under varying modes of presentation, but the object's being given under a mode of presentation no longer entails that it is not given 'directly'. Modes of presentation are now construed as *ways the object is given to the subject*, and an object may be given either directly, in experience, or indirectly, via descriptions. Nondescriptive modes of presentation are ways the object is (directly) given to the subject in experience, while descriptive modes of presentation are ways the object is (indirectly) given via properties which it uniquely instantiates. When, facing Mont Blanc, the subject thinks 'that mountain is less than 4000 metres high', she thinks of Mont Blanc under a nondescriptive mode of presentation based on her perceptual relation to Mont Blanc. Such a mode of presentation presupposes acquaintance and can only be grasped by a subject who is suitably related to the object the thought is about. When the subject thinks 'The tallest mountain in Europe is 4000 metres high', her thought is about Mont Blanc only in a weaker, indirect sense : she now thinks of Mont Blanc under a descriptive mode of presentation, and the resulting thought is one that can be grasped even if one is not acquainted with Mont Blanc. The neo-Fregean framework therefore enables us to maintain the basic contrast which Russell's one-level semantics forced him to give up : that between a demonstrative thought such as 'That mountain is less than 4000 metres high', which is singular and can only be grasped if one is suitably acquainted with the mountain, and a descriptive thought like 'The tallest mountain in Europe is 4000 metres high' which is general in nature and sets no such acquaintance requirement.

The idea of 'directness' turns out to be ambiguous. 'Direct reference' can mean that the only meaning or content of a representation is its reference, to the exclusion of any sense



or mode of presentation, as in Russell's one-level semantics ; or it can mean, as in singularist frameworks, that the subject is directly acquainted with the object in experience and does not think of it descriptively as the instantiator of such and such property. The two ideas are clearly independent, and it was a mistake on Russell's part to argue from Singularism to the rejection of Frege's two-level approach. I call it a major mistake because I think Russell's one-level semantics is what killed Singularism by letting it succumb to cognitive significance objections.

My aim in this paper is to defend Singularism ; so I will assume a two-level semantics with a sense-reference distinction. In such a framework, the singularist distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance reduces to the distinction between two kinds of sense or mode of presentation : descriptive and nondescriptive. Before presenting my version of the view, based on the idea of mental file, I want to say something more about Descriptivism. If the Fregean, two-level framework can accommodate the basic distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, as following Evans I have argued it can, why should it not be possible for Descriptivism itself to accommodate that distinction ? Can we not make Descriptivism sophisticated enough to solve the problems it faces and account for whatever facts have to be accounted for ? In the next section, I will show that, indeed, some of the singularist objections can be met by moving to more sophisticated versions of Descriptivism. I will present what I take to be the best possible version, since the best possible versions of both theories should be used in assessing the relative merits of Descriptivism and Singularism.

### 3. *Can Descriptivism Account for Singularity ?*

The most obvious problem with Descriptivism is that it ascribes, or seems to ascribe, the wrong truth-conditions to *prima facie* singular thoughts – e.g. the thought that that peak [pointing to Mont Blanc] is less than 4000 metres high. I assume that such thoughts have *singular truth-conditions* (Recanati 1988 : 113, 1993 : 16). A thought has singular truth-conditions whenever the following schema holds :

There is an object  $x$  such that the thought is true iff...  $x$  ...

In our example, there is a certain object  $x$ , namely Mont Blanc, such that the thought 'That peak is less than 4000 metres high' is true if and only if  $x$  is (a peak whose height is) less than

4000 metres. An individual object is irreducibly involved in the thought's truth-conditions, which cannot be stated without referring to it. That fact is arguably what motivates Russellian talk of 'singular propositions' involving the object itself. But Descriptivism has trouble capturing that singularity : it construes such thoughts as (directly) only about properties. Thus Russell, in his descriptivist phase, would have analysed the proposition expressed by 'That peak is less than 4000 metres high' as 'containing', in addition to the property of being less than 4000 metres high, not an object (the peak) but *another property*, for instance the property of being a peak currently seen by the subject. As a result the thought only has general truth-conditions : it is true iff *some object or other* has a certain complex of properties. Any object will do : there is no specific object *x* such that the thought is true iff *x* has the relevant properties. The connection to the individual object which the subject is actually seeing is lost, as is the contrast between such thoughts and truly general thoughts (such as the thought that *some peak* is less than 4000 metres high, or the thought that *the tallest peak in Europe* is 4000 metres high).

There may still be philosophers who are skeptical of the 'intuition' that demonstrative judgments have singular truth-conditions that tie them to particular objects. Invoking that intuition, they may argue, simply begs the question against the descriptivist. I will not go into that debate, for denying our truth-conditional intuitions regarding rigidity and singular reference is not the dominant strategy to adopt if you are a descriptivist faced with the above objection. The dominant strategy consists in showing that Descriptivism has the resources for accounting for the singularity intuition.

To get the truth-conditions right, it is claimed, the descriptivist has only to go two-dimensional. On this view, what 'That peak is less than 4000 metres high' expresses is the general proposition that *the peak actually seen by the subject* is less than 4000 metres high. What the operator 'actually' does here is rigidify the description. The proposition is still general, but the rigidifier forces the description to pick out its referent in the 'context' rather than in the 'circumstance of evaluation'. In the context at hand, the description denotes an object (viz. Mont Blanc — the peak which happens to be currently seen by the subject). That object is not a component of the proposition — the proposition only contains properties, to keep using Russell's metaphor — but the property through which it is determined, and which *is* a constituent of the proposition, only has a reference-fixing role in the singular case (as opposed to the descriptive case): it serves to determine, in context, which object is relevant for evaluating the thought as true or false. In the two-dimensional framework, what characterizes the singular case is the fact that truth-evaluation takes place at a later stage than

reference determination: what is evaluated for truth at the second stage is only the claim that the referent (determined at the first stage through the referent-fixing property) possesses the predicated property – in our example, the property of being less than 4000 metres high. This two-stage approach makes it possible to capture the singularity intuition : there is an object  $x$ , namely whatever turns out in context to have the referent-fixing property, such that the thought is true iff  $x$  satisfies the predicate. Still, that object  $x$  is not directly given as a component of the proposition : the proposition is general – it contains only properties – but the rigidifier restricts one of the properties to a referent-fixing role and makes the resulting truth-conditions suitably singular.

The two-dimensional move goes a long way toward accounting for the singularity intuition ; but I do not think it suffices. One reason is that it is possible to rigidify a description in a sentence ‘The F is G’ without thereby making the sentence express a ‘singular proposition’ that cannot be grasped unless one is acquainted with the reference of the description. I am not denying that a sentence ‘The F is G’ *can* be used to express a singular proposition : following Donnellan, I hold that that happens whenever a description is used ‘referentially’ as opposed to ‘attributively’. Typically, when a description is used referentially, the speaker is acquainted with some object  $a$  he wants to talk about and he chooses the description ‘the F’ to refer to  $a$  because he believes, or pretends to believe, that  $a$  is the F. To understand such a use, the hearer herself must be acquainted with  $a$  and she must grasp the speaker’s intention to refer to  $a$  by the use of the description ‘the F’. The important point is that the speaker has a certain object in mind as being the F, and the hearer must know which individual that is. But a rigidified use of a definite description ‘the F’ can be fully understood even though the hearer does not know which object is referred to, in context, by that description. In other words, a rigid use need not be referential : it may be attributive. Thus I may say : ‘The actual F, whoever he is, is G’. To understand this, one must understand the utterance as ascribing the property of being G to whoever turns out in context to uniquely possess the property of being F ; but there is no need to independently *identify* the object in question, and no acquaintance constraint applies. This difference between a description that is merely ‘rigidified’ and one that is referentially used shows that the ‘singularity’ which the two-dimensional move enables the descriptivist to capture is not the strong form of singularity which the singularist is after.

Of course, I have (still) not said what acquaintance is, and what counts as ‘identifying’ what the speaker is talking about. It is time to say a bit more. The crucial distinction we need at this stage is that between two modes of determination of the reference : what Kent Bach

calls the *satisfactional* and the *relational* modes. Here is what Bach, inspired by Burge (1977), wrote about this twenty years ago :

If *all* your thoughts about things could only be descriptive, your total conception of the world would be merely qualitative. You would never be related in thought to anything in particular. Thinking of something would never be a case of having it 'in mind', as we say colloquially, or as some philosophers have said, of being '*en rapport*', in 'cognitive contact', or 'epistemically intimate' with it. But picturesque phrases aside, just what is this special relation ? Whatever it is, it is different from that involved in thinking of something under a description. If we can even speak of a relation in the latter case, it is surely not a real (or natural) relation. Since the object of a descriptive thought is determined SATISFACTIONALLY, the fact that the thought is of that object does not require any connection between thought and object. However, the object of a *de re* thought is determined RELATIONALLY. For something to be the object of a *de re* thought, it must stand in a certain kind of relation to that very thought. (Bach 1987 : 12 ; see also Bach 1986 : 188-9 and the references therein)

In perception, we are related to the object we perceive. The perceptual relation is what enables us to gain (perceptual) information from the object. In communication too we are related to the object we hear about, albeit in a more indirect manner (via communicative chains). In general there is acquaintance with an object whenever we are so related to that object that we can gain information from it, on the basis of that relation. Acquaintance relations are epistemically rewarding (ER) relations, on this view. (Of course, which relations are epistemically rewarding depends upon one's cognitive equipment, since one must be capable of exploiting the relations to gain information.) To think of an object directly or nondescriptively is to think of it through some such relation. In such a case, what determines the reference – what one's thought is about – is the relation : the reference is the object to which we stand in the relevant relation, even if that object does not have the properties we take it to have. Donnellan gives the following example :

One is at a party and, seeing an interesting-looking person holding a martini glass, one asks, « Who is the man drinking a martini ? » If it should turn out that there is only water in the glass, one has nevertheless asked a question about a particular person, a question that it is possible for someone to answer. (Donnellan 1966 : 48)

Here the speaker uses the description ‘the man drinking a martini’. Had the description been used attributively, its reference (if any) would be determined ‘satisfactionally’ as whoever uniquely possesses the property of being a man drinking a martini. But the description has been used referentially : the speaker has a certain object in mind, i.e. he stands in some ER relation to some object he wants to say something about. Despite the speaker’s choice of the description to pick out the man in question, what determines his reference is the relevant ER relation : here, the perceptual relation singles out a man (the interesting-looking person the speaker is watching) who as a matter of fact drinks water, not martini.

Referential descriptions raise all sorts of theoretical problems, but when it comes to demonstratives of the sort illustrated by our earlier example (‘That peak is less than 4000 metres high’), it is pretty clear that what determines what the thought is about is the relevant relation. The thought is about what the speaker is looking at, namely Mont Blanc. The relational character of reference determination in such cases is what is arguably missing from the descriptivist picture, even after the two-dimensional move. It is that relational character that anchors the thought to a particular object and makes it singular in the strong sense. As Peirce insisted, singularity as such cannot be described,<sup>2</sup> it can only be given through actual world relations (Collected Papers, III, §419). For Peirce, as for all the authors who made roughly the same point (e.g. Austin and Strawson), singularity and indexicality are closely related : for indexicals systematically exploit the contextual relations in which we stand to what we talk about. For that reason, Kent Bach calls nondescriptive modes of presentation *mental indexicals* ; for they, too, systematically exploit the contextual relations in which we stand to what we think about.

Can Descriptivism be further amended so as to capture the relational character of singular thought ? At first sight, it cannot ; for Descriptivism holds that, with a few notable exceptions (thoughts about oneself, or about one’s mental occurrences), all thoughts are descriptive ; and this entails that reference is (almost) always determined satisfactionally. However, a distinction can be drawn, *within* the general category of descriptive thought, between two sub-categories, one of which corresponds to that of *prima facie* singular thoughts. Such thoughts, it may be argued, are descriptive, *but* the descriptive condition or property that fixes the reference is distinguished by its relational or token-reflexive character. So, in the Mont Blanc example, the demonstrative ‘that peak’ is analysed as a description

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Describe and describe and describe, and you never can describe a date, a position, or any homaloidal quantity’ (Peirce 1967 : 260).

involving a certain relation of the thinker (or of the thought-occurrence) to the peak : e.g. ‘the peak I am seeing’, or perhaps, ‘the peak that is causing this visual experience’ (Searle 1983). In the case of a ‘descriptive thought’ such as ‘The tallest peak is 4000 metres high’, that token-reflexive feature is missing. It is therefore possible to make the two-dimensional version of Descriptivism even more sophisticated by letting it account for *prima facie* singular thoughts in terms of the relational or token-reflexive character of the properties that fix the reference. For example, a singular thought such as ‘That peak is less than 4000 metres high’ can be analysed as containing (i) the thinking subject (or, possibly, the mental occurrence of the thought), (ii) a relation  $R$  between the subject (or the thought-token) and some other object  $y$ , and (iii) a property  $P$  predicated of  $y$ . In the case of ‘That peak is less than 4000 metres high’,  $R$  might be the following relation :

$$(\lambda x) (\lambda y) [y \text{ is a peak} \ \& \ x \text{ is watching } y \ \& \ \text{for all } z, \text{ if } z \text{ is a peak and } x \text{ is watching } z, \text{ then } z = y]$$

Applied to the first component of the thought (the thinking subject), this gives us a property, namely the property of being the peak the subject is looking at. The role of that property, in the two dimensional framework, is to fix the reference, i.e. to determine the object  $y$  (viz., Mont Blanc) whose possession or lack of possession of the predicated property (being less than 4000 metres high) determines the thought’s truth-value.

This analysis — 2-D Relational Descriptivism, as we may call it — is the best version of Descriptivism I can think of, but it still raises two crucial objections. First, to grasp the singular thought expressed by an utterance such as ‘That peak is less than 4000 metres high’, it is not sufficient for the hearer merely to understand that the speaker is looking at a (unique) peak and saying of it that it is less than 4000 metres high : the hearer herself must come to occupy an epistemic position enabling her to entertain a singular thought about the same object. As we have seen, entertaining such a thought involves standing in a suitable ER relation to the object of the thought. (Typically, the hearer will have to look in the same direction as the speaker, in order to see the peak for herself.) This constraint on what counts as understanding in the singular case is left unaccounted for by 2-D Relational Descriptivism. Second, 2-D Relational Descriptivism entails that acquaintance relations are always represented as part of the content of singular thoughts ; but this is debatable, to say the least. Kripke and many others have argued that acquaintance relations themselves need not be represented. For example, what determines the reference of the name ‘Aristotle’ in language

or thought is a communication chain leading back to Aristotle, but users of the name need not have any thought regarding the communication chain, nor do they need to have the very concept of a communication chain. There *being* an appropriate communication chain is sufficient. (Of course, there still are philosophers who resist that externalist conclusion. Lewis, for example, argues in favour of a view very similar to 2-D Relational Descriptivism, and he bites the bullet regarding the internalization of acquaintance relations. He holds that Aristotle is typically thought of under the description ‘the one I have heard of under the name of *Aristotle*’.<sup>3</sup> this *is* a way of referring to a communication chain that even the dumbest of us can presumably be credited with. So, perhaps, the jury is still out and we should remain neutral on the issue, whether or not the acquaintance relations are represented. But, precisely, 2-D Relational Descriptivism does not remain neutral : 2-D Relational Descriptivism is firmly committed to the internalization of acquaintance relations, and this, I take it, is a weak point that makes the position quite fragile.)

#### 4. *Nondescriptive Modes of Presentation as Mental Files*

Nondescriptive modes of presentation can be analysed in terms of mental files (Bach 1987 : 34-37 ; Forbes 1990 : 538-45 ; Recanati 1993, chapters 7, 10 & 15). The relevant idea of a mental file or ‘dossier’, introduced rather incidentally by Grice in connection with referential descriptions (Grice 1969 : 140), has been subsequently exploited by several authors, including Evans (1982 : 276). The major source for the notion is Perry (1980 : 84-89), who traces the basic inspiration back to Donnellan’s account of proper names (Donnellan 1970 and 1974). Similar notions have been introduced into linguistics at about the same time to deal with anaphora,<sup>4</sup> and into cognitive science shortly afterwards in connection with perception and attention.<sup>5</sup> I take it that, between these various uses of the file metaphor, there are nonaccidental connections that are well worth exploring (see Recanati 2005 : 293-4 and §8 below).

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<sup>3</sup> Lewis 1983 : 155 ; Lewis’s own example involves Hume rather than Aristotle.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Karttunen 1976, Reinhart 1981, and Heim 1983. See also Erteschik-Shir 1997.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Treisman 1988, 1992, Kahneman and Treisman 1984, Kahneman, Treisman & Gibbs 1992. In Recanati 1993 I mentioned Treisman’s work and its interest for the theory of reference. On the cognitive underpinning of singular thought, there now is a growing body of literature, which clearly supports Singularism : see e.g. Clarke (2000 : Chapter 4), Pylyshyn (2007), and Scholl (2002).

The main idea behind the file metaphor as I use it is the following. In his cognitive life the subject encounters various objects to which he stands in various contextual relations. Some of these relations — the acquaintance relations — are epistemically rewarding in that they enable the subject to gain information from the object. For example, by holding an object in my hand, I can get information about its weight. By looking at it I can get information about its visual appearance. The role of a mental file based on a certain acquaintance relation is to store information acquired in virtue of that relation. Such a file will typically be a *temporary* file because it exists only as long as the relation (hence the possibility of gaining information about the object by exploiting the relation) exists. So, as long as I am in the right type of perceptual contact with Mont Blanc, I can think of it demonstratively. When I am no longer in a position to perceive it or to focus my attention on it, I can no longer think of it under the demonstrative mode of presentation since the latter involves the activation of a mental file which depends upon the existence of the right type of perceptual relation. When the relation is broken, the temporary file based on it disappears. (The information in the file is not lost, of course, but transferred into other files.)

In this framework there is an array of acquaintance relations, and among them, some are distinguished by the fact that certain types of file specifically correspond to them. One particular case of that sort is the ‘self’ file. According to Perry (2000), the concept of self is a type of mental file that is based upon a special relation which every individual bears to himself or herself, namely identity. In virtue of *being* a certain individual, I am in a position to gain information concerning that individual in all sorts of ways in which I can gain information about no one else, e.g. through proprioception and kinaesthesia. The mental file ‘self’ serves as repository for information gained in this way. Note that this is not the only sort of information about oneself that can go into the file. There is much information about myself that I cannot get in the first person way, e.g. through proprioception or introspection. Information about my date of birth is a case in point : when I was born is something I learn through communication, in the same way in which I learn my parents’ birthdates. That information goes into my SELF file, however, because I take it to concern the same person about whom I also have direct first-person information, i.e. myself. So a file based on a certain ER relation contains two sorts of information : information gained in the special way that goes with that relation (first-person information, in the case of the SELF file), and information not gained in this way but concerning the same individual as information gained in that way.



Not all files are based on specific contextual relations enabling us to gain information about the referent in particular ways. Some files (the *indexical* files) are based on specific contextual relations, such as one's relation of identity to oneself or the relation to what we hold in our hand, but others (the *encyclopedic* files) are based on a more general-purpose tracking relation. Thus my file about Mont Blanc contains all the information I can get about the mountain, *however it is gained*. It is not tied to a particular way of gaining information, nor to a specific ER relation. An encyclopedic file may exploit a number of ER relations to the reference of the file, in an opportunistic manner, instead of being based on a single one. Any relation will do, provided it preserves the link to the object. In this case, what determines the reference of the file is the overarching tracking relation : the relation between the file and the object it has been created to track (however it *is* tracked). Not being based on a specific ER relation, an encyclopedia entry is not short-lived, as the other type of file typically is.<sup>6</sup> It survives when our contextual relation to the reference changes.

Whether it is indexical or encyclopedic, a file contains all the predicates which the subject takes the referent of the file to satisfy. The referent need not actually satisfy the predicates in the file, since the subject may be quite mistaken. Such mistakes are possible because what determines the reference is not the content of the file but the relevant relation to the object. The file corresponds to an information channel, and the reference is the object from which the information derives, whether that information is genuine information or misinformation.

Among the predicates in a file, some have the distinguishing property that they are 'singular', i.e. they are supposed to be satisfied by a unique object. '(The) tallest mountain in Europe' is a case in point. That's a predicate which my Mont Blanc file contains, along with other predicates such as 'called Mont Blanc' or '4000 metres high', but it differs from these predicates in being singular (Table 1).

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<sup>6</sup> The *SELF* file is an exception : it's an indexical file that is not short-lived. Recognitional concepts are also an exception in this regard (Recanati 2007 : 251-2).

### Mont Blanc

*-Called 'Mont Blanc'*

*-4000 metres high*

*-the tallest mountain in Europe*

*-not as high as Mount Everest*

*-used as an example in the Frege-Russell correspondence*

Table 1 : my Mont Blanc file

Singular predicates, when they occur in a thought, are what I call descriptive modes of presentation. A singular predicate 'the  $F$ ' denotes whatever possesses the property  $F$  if a single object does, and nothing otherwise.<sup>7</sup> Descriptivism holds that, in *prima facie* singular thought, we exercise descriptive modes of presentation, whose denotation is determined satisfactorily. In contrast, I hold that we do not think of objects in this manner when we entertain a singular thought : we think of them under nondescriptive modes of presentation. What are these nondescriptive modes of presentation ? My answer is that they are mental files. To entertain a singular thought about an object  $a$  is to activate a mental file based upon some acquaintance relation with  $a$ , for example the above Mont Blanc file. In such a case, the mode of presentation is not constituted by the properties which the thinker takes the referent to have (i.e. the properties represented in the file) but, rather, by the file itself. The file is what plays the role which Fregean theory assigns to modes of presentation. In the Fregean framework, modes of presentation provide a solution to the following puzzle : A rational subject can think of a given object  $a$  both that it is and that it is not  $F$  — how can that be ? Frege solved the problem by appealing to modes of presentation over and above the objects thought about. A rational subject can believe of  $a$ , thought of under a mode of presentation  $m$ , that it is  $F$ , and at the same time believe of the same object  $a$ , thought of under a different mode of presentation  $m'$ , that it is not  $F$ . Insofar as the modes of presentation are distinct, there is no irrationality. On the present understanding, modes of presentation are mental files : in all the relevant instances (e.g. Quine's 'Orcutt' example), the subject has two distinct files

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<sup>7</sup> Formally, a singular predicate 'the  $F$ ' can be represented as a partial function from situations to individuals. With respect to any situation in which there is a unique  $F$ , the function returns that object as value. The function is undefined for all situations in which there is no  $F$  or more than one.

about one and the same object, and that is what enables him or her to ascribe contrary predicates to that object without (internal) contradiction.

The fact that nondescriptive modes of presentation are mental files, while descriptive modes of presentation are singular predicates which may occur as part of the content of mental files, is the key to solving a number of standing difficulties in the theory of singular thought. In particular, it helps us understand the communication of singular thoughts (Recanati 1995).

Consider indexicals or definite descriptions. They both have a certain descriptive meaning, corresponding to the ‘character’ in the case of indexicals, and to the encoded singular predicate in the case of a definite description. The character of an indexical – at least in the case of pure indexicals – itself can be construed as a singular predicate (something like ‘the speaker’, in the case of ‘I’, or ‘the hearer’ in the case of ‘you’). But that singular predicate is not what the expression contributes to the thought expressed : what the expression contributes, rather, is the mental file to the content of which the predicate belongs. So the speaker expresses a thought with his own ‘self’ file as a constituent, when he says ‘I’. The word ‘I’ expresses the singular predicate ‘the speaker’, but that predicate is contained in the speaker’s self file (since the speaker is conscious of being the speaker) and it stands for the whole file to the content of which it belongs. When the hearer processes the speaker’s utterance, the same singular predicate ‘the speaker’ evokes, in the hearer’s mind, the hearer’s mental file containing that predicate, and that file is the hearer’s file about the person speaking to him. So, in understanding the speaker’s utterance, the hearer forms a singular thought about the speaker that matches the thought expressed by the speaker since both thoughts have the same singular truth-conditions, but differs from that thought in that the (nondescriptive) modes of presentation they involve are distinct for the speaker and for the hearer : the speaker thinks of the referent of ‘I’ as being himself — he exercises his *SELF* concept — while the hearer thinks of the referent of ‘I’ in a third person way.

Any theory of singular thought has to account for their communication and for the fact that, in crucial cases such as the communication of ‘I’ thoughts, the hearer is simply *not* in a position to entertain the thought which the speaker expresses. As Frege puts it,

Every one is presented to himself in a particular and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else. So, when Dr. Lauben thinks that he has been wounded, he will probably take as a basis this primitive way in which he is presented to himself. And only Dr. Lauben himself can grasp thoughts determined in this way. But now

he may want to communicate with others. He cannot communicate a thought which he alone can grasp. (Frege 1918-19: 66)

So what can Dr Lauben do ? Frege's answer is well known :

If he now says 'I have been wounded', he must use the 'I' in a sense which can be grasped by others, perhaps in the sense of 'he who is speaking to you at this moment'... (Frege 1918-19: 66)

In other words, we must distinguish the *linguistic* mode of presentation associated with 'I' (the singular predicate 'the speaker' or 'he who is speaking at this moment') from the *psychological* mode of presentation that occurs in the speaker's thought (i.e. the speaker's self concept, which only he can use in thinking about himself).<sup>8</sup> The linguistic mode of presentation associated with 'I' is the same for speaker and hearer, but psychological modes of presentation exhibit no such constancy : because the speaker and the hearer do not stand in the same contextual relations to the speaker, the hearer cannot use the speaker's own psychological mode of presentation in thinking about the speaker — he cannot entertain the speaker's 'I' thought. The hearer can only think of the speaker under a *third person* mode of presentation. The role of the linguistic mode of presentation conventionally associated with 'I' is precisely to provide some kind of bridge between the psychological modes of presentation respectively occurring in the speaker's and the hearer's thoughts. On my story, which elaborates on Frege's suggestion, the singular thoughts respectively associated with the utterance 'I have been wounded' by Lauben (the speaker) and by his hearer Leo Peter both involve nondescriptive modes of presentation of Lauben (the reference of 'I'). These modes of presentation are distinct, but they have something in common which makes communication possible<sup>9</sup> : these modes of presentation are mental files, and both the speaker's mental file for himself and the hearer's mental file for the speaker contain the piece of information 'the speaker' that is encoded by the word 'I'. This means that the singular predicate encoded by an indexical *stands for the mental file to which it belongs* : what the thought contains is the mental file (a nondescriptive mode of presentation) rather than the singular predicate whose

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<sup>8</sup> The distinction between linguistic and psychological modes of presentation was introduced in Recanati 1990 and subsequently elaborated in Recanati 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Of course their reference is common, but that is not enough for communication. See the example due to Loar 1976 and discussed in Recanati 1993 : 53-58.

role is merely to stand for the file. If the thought contained the singular predicate, the referent would be thought of descriptively rather than nondescriptively.

The same sort of story applies to definite descriptions. The singular predicate encoded by a description may be what the description contributes to the thought expressed by the speaker (attributive use), but it may also stand for some file to which it belongs (referential use). In Donnellan's example, the singular predicate 'the man drinking a martini' stands for a demonstrative file based upon the speaker's ER relation to the interesting-looking person holding a martini glass. In that demonstrative file, the speaker stores information gained through the acquaintance relation, such as the information that the referent (the man he is watching) holds a martini glass and, presumably, drinks a martini. By using the description referentially, the speaker expresses a demonstrative thought about that man — a thought involving his demonstrative file as a constituent. On the hearer's side, the same mechanism is at work : the singular predicate 'the man drinking a martini' readily evokes for the hearer her own file about the presumed martini-drinker. If there is no preexisting file containing the singular predicate in the mind of the hearer, but she takes the speaker to express a singular thought, she will put herself in the right epistemic position by looking in the same direction as the speaker and *acquiring* a demonstrative file about the man holding the martini glass, which file will make it possible for her to entertain a singular thought about the man in question in order to understand what the speaker is saying.

In the two-dimensional framework, the referential/attribution distinction is typically accounted for by saying that a singular predicate determines a function from situations to individuals, which function can apply either to the context (referential use) or to the circumstance of evaluation (attributive use). Indexicals are such that the singular predicate they are conventionally associated with – their character – can only apply to the context. (In the terminology of Recanati 1993, they are 'type-referential', while definite descriptions are 'token-referential' : they can, but need not, be referentially used.) When the function determined by the singular predicate applies to the context rather than the circumstance, the predicate only has a 'reference-fixing' role. This account is, basically, Kaplan's and Stalnaker's (see Kaplan 1978 and Stalnaker 1970). It has elicited criticism on the part of some neo-Russellians who thought this relies too much on a descriptivist mechanism. Thus Genevieve Marti wrote :

What defines a referential use of a definite description, or of any device, is... the absence of a semantic mechanism to search for and determine the referent... If a

definite description can be used as a device of direct reference in this sense, the attributes associated with it should not play a role in the determination of reference. Therefore, if a definite description ‘the F’ can be used referentially, in the strong sense, it must be possible to use it to refer to an object independently of whether that object satisfies the attributes associated with ‘the F’. And that’s the characteristic mark of referential uses of descriptions according to Donnellan. (Marti 2008 : 49)

The mental-file account satisfies Marti’s referentialist desideratum : what ‘fixes the reference’ is not the singular predicate encoded by the description. When referentially used, the description refers to what the mental file containing the predicate is about, and the file is about the entity to which it is appropriately related. That entity may or may not satisfy the singular predicate. In Donnellan’s example, ‘the man drinking a martini’, the singular predicate does not even ‘fix the reference’ since the reference does not satisfy the predicate.

#### 5. *Singular Thought without Acquaintance ?*

I have argued that singular thought about an object involves a nondescriptive mode of presentation of that object, i.e. a mental file based on some acquaintance relation to the object. It follows, or seems to follow, that no singular thought is possible without acquaintance. Is that right ? Several philosophers have argued that it isn’t. As Jeshion puts it, « we are capable of having *de re* thought about objects with which we lack acquaintance. » (Jeshion 2004 : 594). That acquaintance is not necessary for singular thought is supposed to be established by a type of case, discussed by Kripke, Evans, Kaplan and others, in which the subject only knows some object ‘by description’ yet seems to be able to entertain a singular thought about that object. The cases in question involve the use of a singular term (e.g. a proper name or a demonstrative) to refer to whatever satisfies a certain description. Thus the name ‘Jack the Ripper’ was introduced to refer to whoever committed certain murders, and ‘Neptune’ was introduced to refer to whatever planet causes certain perturbations in the orbit of Uranus. (Both examples are due to Saul Kripke.) On the same pattern, Evans coined the descriptive name ‘Julius’ which refers, by stipulation, to whoever invented the zip, and Kaplan coined ‘Newman 1’ which refers, by stipulation, to the first baby to be born in the next century. If, by using such names, it is possible to express singular thoughts about those objects, this establishes that the acquaintance constraint is not acceptable.

But there is no general agreement about descriptive names and whether or not sentences involving them express singular thoughts. Evans holds that they do not. Qua proper name, the name 'Julius' is rigid : the associated description ('whoever invented the zip') only serves to fix its reference. Still, the thought expressed is descriptive :

The thought expressed by 'Julius is F' may equivalently be expressed by 'The inventor of the zip is F'... Someone who understands and accepts the one sentence as true gets himself into exactly the same belief state as someone who accepts the other. Belief states are distinguished by the evidence which gives rise to them, and the expectations, behaviour, and further beliefs which may be derived from them (in conjunction with other beliefs) ; in in all these respects, the belief states associated with the two sentences are indistinguishable. We do not produce new thoughts (new beliefs) simply by 'a stroke of the pen' (in Grice's phrase) — simply by introducing a new name in the language. (Evans 1982 : 50)

Donnellan comes to the same conclusion : « the fact that a name is introduced as a rigid designator does not by itself put a person in a position to have de re propositional attitudes toward the entity rigidly designated » (Donnellan 1977 : 23). If it did, then Leverrier — the astronomer who introduced the descriptive name 'Neptune' after inferring that a hitherto unknown planet was responsible for certain perturbations — would have been able to gain a piece of astronomical knowledge (to the effect that, if some planet causes the relevant perturbations, it is Neptune which does) simply by performing an act of linguistic stipulation. The unacceptability of that conclusion establishes that the introduction of a descriptive name is not sufficient for singular thought (though it gives us rigidity). As Donnellan puts it, the acquaintance constraint 'account[s] for why the sort of stipulations we have been discussing do not put us in a position... to know anything about the entity for which we have introduced a rigid designator' (Donnellan 1977 : 25)

But the principle Evans appeals to (that we cannot produce new thoughts 'by a stroke of the pen') runs counter to a no less plausible principle which Kaplan calls the 'Instrumental Thesis' and which, he says, follows from the causal/historical chain picture of the reference of names<sup>10</sup> :

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<sup>10</sup> This picture, Kaplan says in a footnote (1989b : 602-3), first appears in print in Donnellan 1970 (thus antedating Kripke). Kaplan forgets Geach, who explicitly put forward the picture in the following passage of 'The Perils of Pauline', published in 1969 : « For the use of a

The notion that the referent can be carried by a name for early past to present suggests that the language itself carries meanings, and thus that we can *acquire* meanings through the instrument of language. This... provides the opportunity for an *instrumental* use of language to broaden the realm of what can be expressed and to broaden the horizons of thought itself.

On my view, our connection with a linguistic community in which names and other meaning-bearing elements are passed down to us enables us to entertain thoughts *through the language* that would not otherwise be accessible to us. Call this the *Instrumental Thesis*. (Kaplan 1989b : 603).<sup>11</sup>

One of the applications of the Instrumental Thesis, Kaplan points out, is to the case of descriptive names :

The introduction of a new proper name by means of a dubbing in terms of description and the active contemplation of characters involving dthat-terms — two mechanism for providing direct reference to the denotation of an arbitrary definite description — constitute a form of cognitive restructuring ; they broaden our range of thought. (Kaplan 1989a : 560, fn 76)

We can introduce a name by describing the referent... Such names are still directly referential and, in my view, still have the capacity to enlarge what we can express and apprehend. If we were to discover that Aristotle had been predicted and dubbed one year before his birth, ... the name... would still be a *name*, with all its attendant powers. (Kaplan 1989b : 605)

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word as a proper name there must in the first instance be someone acquainted with the object named. But language is an institution, a tradition ; and the use of a given name for a given object, like other features of language, can be handed on from one generation to another ; the acquaintance required for the use of a proper name may be mediate, not immediate. Plato knew Socrates, and Aristotle knew Plato, and Theophrastus knew Aristotle, and so on in apostolic succession down to our own times ; that is why we can legitimately use ‘Socrates’ as a name the way we do. It is not our knowledge of this chain that validates our use, but the existence of such a chain ; just as according to Catholic doctrine a man is a true bishop if there is in fact a chain of consecrations going back to the Apostles, not if we know that there is. » (Geach 1972 : 155)

<sup>11</sup> For a similar view, see Millikan 2000 : Chapter 6.



So we cannot simply *assume* that no new thought is introduced simply via a linguistic stipulation. This, rather, is part of what is in question. Kaplan himself holds that, simply by manipulating the linguistic apparatus of direct reference, it is possible to entertain a singular thought about an object known to us only by description.

How can we settle the issue ? Our intuitions in this area vary from case to case, Jeshion points out (Jeshion forthcoming : §3). Moreover, they are not very sharp. To adapt an example from Stephen Schiffer (1981 : 49), suppose I see big footprints on the sand and say ‘He must be a giant’. Do I, or do I not, express/entertain a singular thought about whoever made these footprints ? If we say I don’t, as singularists are prone to do, what about the case in which someone is buried into the sand and just one toe is emerging ? Here, if I say, ‘he must be a giant’, it is hard to resist the intuition that a singular thought is expressed. With the help of such examples, it is not too difficult to imagine a continuum of cases between straightforward instances of knowledge by acquaintance and straightforward instances of knowledge by description, most instances in between being intermediate cases with a more or less tenuous informational link to the referent.<sup>12</sup> With respect to such intermediate cases, our intuitions tend to be shaky. Perhaps Kripke’s examples of real-life descriptive names – ‘Neptune’, ‘Jack the Ripper’ — fall into that category, for singularists seem to oscillate between two positions, betraying the lack of firm intuitions about these cases. The first position consists in insisting that e.g. Leverrier expressed no singular thought by his stipulative use of ‘Neptune’ (see Donnellan’s argument above), or that the introducers of the descriptive name ‘Jack the Ripper’ only had descriptive thoughts about the referent when they introduced the name. Alternatively, however, singularists sometimes feel the temptation to accept that there *is* singular thought in e.g. the Jack the Ripper case, and to account for this by appealing to some form of informational connection to the referent: the bodies of the victims, and the various pieces of evidence left by the murderer on the crime scenes, link the introducers of the name (the Scotland Yard people, presumably) to the referent and make it possible for them to entertain singular thoughts about him. Similarly, though Homer is known to us only as the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey, still the works themselves may be thought to constitute a link between Homer and us, which enables us to entertain singular thoughts about him. Now, Hawthorne and Manley (forthcoming : §2.10) point out, « If one can have singular thoughts about Homer in the presence of his works and Jack the Ripper in the presence of his deed, why not Neptune in the presence of its perturbations? » Indeed they

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<sup>12</sup> See Kaplan 1989a : 560-1 for the related idea that there is a continuum of cases between pure referential uses and pure attributive uses of both names and descriptions.

cite a contemporary astronomer — Herschel — who insisted that we can ‘see’ Neptune through the perturbations it causes.

The general murkiness of the situation leads Hawthorne and Manley to conclude that the best way to secure « our grip on the presence or absence of singular thought is via certain kinds of propositional attitude reports: True reports that ‘quantify in’ (where a variable within the report is bound by a quantifier outside it) as well as true reports with a referential term in the that-clause, require the presence of a singular thought » (Hawthorne and Manley forthcoming : §1.5). Accordingly they put forward the following principle they call ‘Anti-Latitude’ (Hawthorne and Manley forthcoming : §2.1):

ANTI-LATITUDE Any belief report whose complement clause contains either a singular term or a variable bound from outside by an existential quantifier requires for its truth that the subject have a singular thought.

But given the link thus established between singular thought and the appearance of singular terms or bound variables in true belief ascriptions, ‘reflection of our practices of belief-reporting provides a strong prima face case for liberalism’, they say. ‘Liberalism’, for Hawthorne and Manley, is the denial of *any* acquaintance constraint on singular thought.

I believe Hawthorne and Manley are right, up to a point : *If* one accepts Anti-Latitude, one has to give up acquaintance as a constraint on singular thought. Consider the following, rather extreme case (an instance of what Kaplan calls the ‘pseudo-de re’)<sup>13</sup>. Ann is a six-year old girl, whom John has never met and whose existence he is unaware of. But John believes that every six-year old can learn to play tennis in ten lessons. So, meeting Ann, I tell her : ‘John believes that you can learn to play tennis in ten lessons’. There is a sense in which this is true. (Admittedly, there is also a sense in which this is false.) Anti-Latitude therefore entails that John has a singular thought about Ann, even though he is not acquainted with her.<sup>14</sup> So there can be singular thought without acquaintance.

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<sup>13</sup> See Kaplan 1989a : 155, fn 71. Note that the example I give is rather special, and significantly different from the examples of pseudo de re reports discussed by Kaplan. That example was discussed in Fauconnier’s seminar in the early eighties.

<sup>14</sup> In a seminar in St Andrews in November 2008, Hawthorne and Manley said publicly that they accept this conclusion (that John has a singular thought about Ann, in the described scenario). Or rather : Hawthorne said that, and Manley did not dissent.

For a singularist, this result is clearly unacceptable. The thought that every six-year old can learn to play tennis in ten lessons is the paradigm of a *general* thought — a higher-level thought about properties. So if the criterion for singular thought is given by attitude reports, as per Anti-Latitude, we lose the very distinction we were trying to account for. A descriptivist is likely to welcome this result, but a singularist cannot accept it. This means that a singularist must reject Anti-Latitude. One may do so in two ways. One can maintain the link between singular thought and de re reports, but draw a distinction between ‘genuine’ de re reports and ‘pseudo’ de re reports --- the example of Ann and John belonging to the latter category.<sup>15</sup> Or one may reject the whole methodology of relying on de re reports to characterize on de re thought. Personally, I think it’s a bad idea to start from attitude reports, given the complexity of their semantics and their high level of context-sensitivity. (Similarly, I hold it’s a bad idea to start from locutionary reports in theorizing about what is said.<sup>16</sup>) We should rather start from the theory of thought (and, in particular, the distinction between singular and general thoughts) and use elements from that theory, along with a number of other ingredients, in trying to understand the multi-faceted phenomenon of de re attitude reports (see Direct Reference, chapter 20). To be sure, as Hawthorne and Manley point out, « those who accept [the acquaintance constraint] but reject ANTI-LATITUDE face the challenge of explicating the relevant notion of singular thought while allowing it to float free from the semantics of belief reports » (Hawthorne and Manley forthcoming : §2.7). But that is precisely what the notion of mental file is supposed to do for us : to provide a cognitive explanation, independent of our reporting practice.

I admit, of course, that there is some vagueness in the division between cases where the acquaintance constraint is met and cases where it isn’t, and a corresponding lack of firm intuitions with respect to intermediate cases. But this should not be considered a problem for the acquaintance theorist. In cases in which it is unclear whether or not there is acquaintance, it will likewise be unclear whether or not a singular thought is expressed. This is to be expected, from the acquaintance theorist’s point of view.

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<sup>15</sup> For Kaplan, pseudo-de re reports are ‘distorted’ and involve unjustified ‘falsification’. He concludes : « I do not see that the existence of the *pseudo de re* form of report poses any issues of sufficient theoretical interest to make it worth pursuing » (Kaplan 1989a : 555-556 fn).

<sup>16</sup> See Recanati 2004 : 14-16. Reliance on ‘said-that’ tests has led Cappelen and Lepore (2005) to absurd consequences, thus providing what I take to be a *reductio* of the methodology. (Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009 acknowledge the failure of ‘said-that’ tests but stick to the methodology and try to come up with a better variant.)

Far from being a problem, the lack of firm intuitions regarding ordinary examples of descriptive names such as ‘Neptune’ or ‘Jack the Ripper’ actually *protects* the acquaintance theorist from standard anti-acquaintance arguments. Jeshion’s argument in favour of ‘acquaintanceless de re thought’ is based on two premisses :

1. In cases like Jack the Ripper (or Jeshion’s favorite example : Unabomber), the introducers of the descriptive name are not acquainted with the reference.
2. Such cases nevertheless elicit clear (and reliable) intuitions of singularity.

Jeshion concludes by giving up the acquaintance requirement on singular thought : What singularity intuitions track, she says, is not the presence of acquaintance but the presence of some other feature which is independent of acquaintance, and which the theorist has to discover (Jeshion forthcoming). The presence or absence of *that* feature will explain why some instances of descriptive names elicit intuitions of singularity while others (e.g. Schiffer’s footprint example) do not. — Jeshion’s premisses can easily be rejected, however, or at least qualified. Acquaintance is arguably a matter of degree, and the Scotland Yard people have got some (admittedly tenuous) information link to the murderer. The existence of such link goes against premiss 1, to some extent, and – to the same extent – against premiss 2, insofar as the link in question should be sufficient to blur our intuitions to some degree. To make a convincing case for acquaintanceless de re thought, therefore, the right sort of example to use is one like Kaplan’s Newman 1 (the first child to be born in the next century), for which the first premiss is uncontroversial. But such examples do *not* elicit clear singularity intuitions.

Be that as it may, it is not my intention to contest the premisses of Jeshion’s anti-acquaintance argument. I admit that, by and large, the subject’s access to the referent is mainly descriptive, in the relevant examples ; and I find Kaplan’s Instrumental Thesis sufficiently attractive to seriously consider the possibility that the subject, by using a name or a demonstrative, puts herself in a position to entertain a singular thought about the referent. What I want to claim is that such a position is fully compatible with my framework. This may come as a surprise, since the phenomenon of acquaintanceless de re thought seems incompatible with my claim that singular thoughts involve mental files based on some acquaintance relation to what the thought is about. But, as I am now going to argue, it isn’t.

## 6. *Acquaintanceless Singular Thought for the Acquaintance Lover*

The mental-file framework rests on two principles:

1. The subject cannot entertain a singular thought about an object  $a$  without possessing, and exercising, a mental file whose referent is  $a$ .
2. To possess a mental file whose referent is  $a$  the subject must stand in some acquaintance relation to  $a$ .

These two principles together seem to entail that no singular thought can be entertained unless the subject is acquainted with what her thought is about. Both 1 and 2 state a relation of implication: 1 says that singular thinking entails possession of a mental file, and 2 says that possession of a mental file entails being suitably related to the referent of the file. Since implication is transitive, the conclusion that there is no acquaintanceless singular thought seems to follow. But it does not really follow.

In 2 (but not in 1), the implication at issue is to be understood in a special, normative sense. 2 says that a mental file *requires* a suitable relation to the referent, in the same way in which, according to a nonstandard interpretation of Russell which I put forward in *Direct Reference* (p. 178-9), a proper name imposes certain epistemic demands on its users. The important point about the normative interpretation is that it induces a distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* conditions on singular thought. Thus, on my interpretation of Russell, a genuine proper name may well be tokened (*de facto*) even though its *de jure* requirements are not met. Similarly, one may argue, a mental file can come into active use (*de facto*) even though the epistemic requirement stated in 2 is not satisfied. If this is right, then an acquaintance theorist may (and, I think, should) countenance the phenomenon of acquaintanceless singular thought.

In *Direct Reference* I presented Russell's view of names (on the nonstandard interpretation) as follows:

Along with the well-known view that ordinary proper names such as ‘Bismarck’ are not genuine proper names, because genuine proper names require direct acquaintance with their referents (a type of acquaintance possible only with oneself and one’s sense data), Russell seems to have held a slightly different view, namely : that ‘Bismarck’ *is* a genuine proper name, but that we are unable to entertain the thoughts which our utterances including this name are meant to express. The thought we think when we hear or say ‘Bismarck was an astute diplomatist’ is not the thought this utterance purports to express, Russell claimed, because this thought is unavailable to us ; it is available only to Bismarck himself. It is because ordinary proper names such as ‘Bismarck’ *are* genuine proper names, on this view, that they require their users to be acquainted with their referents (a condition that is not fulfilled when someone other than Bismarck uses the name ‘Bismarck’) ; this is also why an utterance including a name such as ‘Bismarck’ is meant to express a singular thought— a thought which an ordinary user of the name is unable to entertain.

In [this] framework..., a proper name is a word which *must* be used in a certain way, even though it may happen to be used in other ways. A genuine proper name is defined (normatively) by what it demands ; Russell thus speaks of ‘the direct use which (a proper name) *always wishes to have*’ (my emphasis). In the case of ‘Julius’, as in the case of ‘Bismarck’ (in Russell’s framework), there is no reason to deny that the name itself is a genuine proper name, which requires that its reference be thought of nondescriptively. This is perfectly consistent with the fact that the reference of the name *happens* to be thought of descriptively. (Recanati 1993 : 178-9)

In this passage I accept Evans’s view that, in the case of ‘Julius’, a user of the name can only think about its referent descriptively (as ‘the inventor of the zip’). I will get back to that issue shortly. What matters for present purposes is that, in that case as in the case of ‘Bismarck’ according to Russell, the normative requirement associated with the use of names is not satisfied : the subject is unable to think of the referent nondescriptively, as he should given that he is using a name. But that does not prevent him from actually using the name.

Exactly the same sort of position can be upheld with respect to *mental files*, by giving a ‘normative’ interpretation of the implication in 2. I sketched such a position in *Direct Reference*, when I said that descriptive names such as ‘Neptune’ or ‘Jack the Ripper’ are « created only in the expectation that more information about the bearer will accumulate, thus

eventuating in the possibility of thinking of the latter nondescriptively. This possibility is simply *anticipated* by the use of a descriptive name » (Recanati 1993 : 180). One way of interpreting this suggestion is that the user who knows the referent only by description nevertheless *opens a file for it* because he anticipates that he will soon be acquainted with it and needs a place to store information about it. On that interpretation, a file may be opened *before* the epistemic requirement is met. The epistemic requirement still holds, however. The only *reason* to open a file in such cases is that the user expects to stand in the appropriate relation to the referent. So *a mental file still requires, for its justification, that the subject stand in a suitable, information-bearing relation to the referent*. This, I take it, is the defining feature of acquaintance-based views. Several of options are available, within that general framework. Thus nothing prevents an acquaintance theorist from holding that *there is singular thought as soon as there is a mental file*, whether or not the associated *de jure* requirement is actually satisfied. This view is adumbrated in *Direct Reference* in the following passage :

A [descriptive] name is created in anticipation of a time at which it will be possible to think of its reference nondescriptively : when we create such a name, we suppose that we shall come to know the reference and be in a position to entertain *de re* thoughts about it. This is what happened, for example, in the case of ‘Neptune’, when the referent of the name was actually discovered. When such a ‘discovery’ occurs, the name is no longer a descriptive name ; it becomes an ordinary name for the thing in question. Now, the question I want to ask is this : *When* — at which stage in the process of its becoming an ordinary name — are we entitled to say that the reference of a descriptive name has ceased to be thought of in a *purely* descriptive manner ? Not only, one is tempted to reply, when the thinker has got ‘acquainted’ with the referent, i.e. when she is able to think of the referent under a *de re* mode of presentation involving an empirical relation to the referent. For the referent to be thought of nondescriptively, *it seems to be sufficient that the thinker acquire what Grice calls a ‘dossier’ for the definite description used to fix the reference*. (Recanati 1993 : 109 ; emphasis added)

On this view three steps must be distinguished :

- a. A name is introduced for an object but, as the object is known only by description, the subject can only entertain descriptive thoughts about that object. (That is Evans's position regarding 'Julius'.)
- b. The subject opens a mental file for the object, even though he is not actually acquainted with it (yet).
- c. The subject becomes acquainted with the referent and can start feeding the file with information from the object.

Some acquaintance theorists hold that only at stage *c* is a singular thought available to the subject : singular thought requires actual acquaintance, on this view. But, as I have suggested, this is not the only possible option to take for an acquaintance theorist. In the passage I have just quoted from *Direct Reference*, a singular thought is said to be already available at stage *b*, that is, as soon as the subject has a mental file for the object, even if that file does not rest on an actual relation of acquaintance to the object. An even more 'liberal' option is available to the acquaintance theorist : she may hold that, *as soon as* one introduces a name for an object, one *thereby* opens a file for it. Such a liberal acquaintance theorist will hold that, even in the 'Julius' or the 'Newman 1' cases, the subject entertains a singular thought about the referent : she thinks of the referent 'through' the name, rather than through the description that fixes the referent of the name. This is, basically, Kaplan's position, based on the Instrumental Thesis.

To sum up, the view I have presented, based on principles 1 and 2, is compatible with the phenomenon of acquaintanceless singular thought provided the implication in 2 is understood as normative. Thus interpreted 2 is about the normative (*de jure*) requirements of singular thought. Cases in which, *de facto*, the requirements are not satisfied do not object to a principle that says what the requirements *are*.

### *7. Three Positions*

I said that, within the mental-file framework, there are three possible options for the acquaintance theorist. Let me consider them in turn, and say which option I favour.

The first position we may call the *Strong Acquaintance View*. It is the view which anti-acquaintance people target, as if acquaintance theorists had no other option available.



According to that view, singular thought requires actual (*de facto*) acquaintance with the referent. So, descriptive names do not allow their users to grasp/entertain singular thoughts.

A possible objection to that view is that it tends to underestimate the potential impact of language on thought. Coining a name, or using a demonstrative, for what one is thinking about descriptively arguably goes some way toward changing our perspective on the object, thus paving the way for singular thought about it. *Anti-instrumentalism*, i.e. the view that there is *no* such incidence of language on thought, does not seem very plausible. But the Strong Acquaintance View need not be committed to Anti-instrumentalism. Thus someone like Evans (a strong acquaintance theorist) might argue as follows. Coining a name for the inventor of the zip does provide us with a new vehicle for thought : we now have a name, 'Julius', that we can use in thought. So much is conceded to Instrumentalism. But the name in question (or, rather, its mental counterpart) is only a constituent of the thought-*vehicle*. By tokening a thought-vehicle involving such a name, we *try* to think a singular thought (not in the sense of thought-vehicle, but in the Fregean sense of thought-*content*), and we may or may not succeed.<sup>17</sup> As Evans used to say, we 'essay' a singular thought. But there are many circumstances in which we similarly essay a singular thought and fail actually to think one. When Leverrier tried to think a singular thought by tokening another descriptive name, 'Vulcan', he failed because the name was empty. An empty name (just as an empty demonstrative of the sort one can token in hallucination) is an improper vehicle for singular thinking since, in the absence of a reference for the name or the demonstrative, no semantically evaluable thought is expressed by using them. This does not mean that the user of the singular term is not thinking anything : there are other thoughts in the vicinity, which the subject is arguably entertaining. Evans (or is it McDowell ?) discussed that issue in connection with hallucination, but in the 'Vulcan' case it is clear that the 'thoughts in the vicinity' will include general thoughts involving the definite description which is supposed (but fails) to fix the reference of the name : 'the planet that causes the perturbations in the orbit of Mercury'.

What about the 'Neptune' case, or the 'Julius' case ? Here, in contrast to the 'Vulcan' case, the reference-fixing description has a denotation. Still, in conformity to the Strong Acquaintance View, one may argue that no singular thought (in the sense of : thought-*content*) is thinkable when one uses such a descriptive name, for the following reason : the

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<sup>17</sup> On the neo-Fregean distinction between thought-vehicle and thought-content, see *Direct Reference*, pp. 98-103.

thought-vehicle involves a mental name or mental file without the appropriate informational relation to the referent, and what fixes the reference of the name/file is the relation, as we have seen. In the absence of the grounding relation, no referent can be determined, and no singular thought expressed. Again, a singular thought-vehicle is tokened, but it fails to determine an evaluable thought-content. What is entertained are only the thought contents in the vicinity, including the general thought involving the reference-fixing description.

What are we to think of this argument in favour of the Strong Acquaintance View ? I do not find it convincing. It is true that what fixes the reference of the file is the grounding relation, not the content of the file (the information it contains). But in the case of descriptive names the situation is very special : what is given before the relevant relation  $R$  actually obtains is not only the vehicle (the name/file) through which the subject tries to think singularly but *also* the referent. The descriptive name is introduced, by stipulation, as a name for a given object  $a$ . It will become an ordinary name when, and only when, a certain relation  $R$  (making information flow possible) will hold between the file and  $a$ . Maybe that will never happen, but if that ever happens (i.e. if the subject gets acquainted with  $a$ ) the referent of the file cannot be anything other than  $a$ . In other words, the referent is *determined in advance*, by stipulation. Its determination, therefore, does not have to wait until relation  $R$  actually comes about : the file and the referent are both given ahead of relation  $R$ . The only thing that can be argued is that the referent in question really becomes 'the referent' only when the relation  $R$  actually obtains. If the relation  $R$  never comes about, no connection is established between the singular vehicle and  $a$ , such that  $a$  can be deemed the referent of the file. But assuming the subject is right in his anticipation that  $R$  is going to come about, then there is no reason to deny that, through the singular vehicle and its (delayed) connection to  $a$ , the subject is able to think a singular thought about  $a$ .

What I have just said suggests that the Strong Acquaintance View is not sufficiently motivated. I may be wrong, of course : this is a complex and subtle issue, and there may be decisive arguments in favour of Evans's view which I overlook. Pending the revelation of such arguments, I am inclined to take a step further in the direction of Instrumentalism, and to accept that, through a descriptive name (or the acquaintanceless mental file that corresponds to it in thought), one may be able to think a singular thought. Still, that *need not* be the case : certain conditions have to be satisfied for the tokening of a singular vehicle in thought (involving a mental file) to be successful and constitute thinking a singular thought. The view

I am offering, therefore, attempts to steer a middle course between the Strong Acquaintance View and a view we may call *Radical Instrumentalism*.

Radical Instrumentalism says that, *simply* by coining a mental name, opening a file or using a mental demonstrative, one can think a singular thought. Even that extreme position seems to me to be compatible with the acquaintance-based view. To be sure, on that position, singular thought is no longer constrained by acquaintance, *whether actual or potential*. But singular thought involves tokening a singular vehicle in thought (a mental file, or a mental name) ; and a singular vehicle, qua type, is individuated in terms of its function, which is : the storing of information gained through acquaintance. So *singular thought is still defined in terms of acquaintance*, even if there can be singular thought in the absence of (actual or even potential) acquaintance.

Be that as it may, I reject Radical Instrumentalism, for the reason I gave above. Like Evans, I take it that certain conditions have to be satisfied for the tokening of a singular vehicle in thought (involving a mental file) to be *successful* and constitute thinking a singular thought. In particular, reference must be achieved. The referent of a descriptive name is 'determined' by the reference-fixing description as soon as the name is introduced, but the object whose *identity* is thus determined is confirmed as *referent* only through some acquaintance relation *R*. The acquaintance relation may be anticipated without undermining the reference relation which is based on it, but if the acquaintance relation never comes about, the reference relation does not either.

So I reject Radical Instrumentalism. I am not sure whether anyone holds the view, however. Its most vocal proponent, David Kaplan, significantly qualified it and made it much less radical, in a footnote :

Normally one would not introduce a proper name or a *dthat*-term to correspond to each definite description one uses. But we have the means to do so if we wish. Should we do so, we are enabled to apprehend singular propositions concerning remote individuals (those formerly known only by description). Recognizing this, we refrain. What purpose... is served by direct reference to whosoever may be the next president of Brazil? The introduction of a new proper name by means of a dubbing in terms of description and the active contemplation of characters involving *dthat*-terms – two mechanisms for providing direct reference to the denotation of

an arbitrary definite description – constitute a form of cognitive restructuring; they broaden our range of thought. To take such a step is an action normally not performed at all, and rarely if ever done capriciously. The fact that we have the means – without special experience, knowledge or whatever – to refer directly to the myriad individuals we can describe does not imply that we will do so. (Kaplan 1989a: 560 fn 76)

Jeshion, another instrumentalist, goes farther. She explicitly rejects Radical Instrumentalism construed as « the view that there are no substantive conditions of any sort on having singular thought [so that] we can freely generate singular thoughts at will by manipulating the apparatus of direct reference » (Jeshion forthcoming: §1). She says that singular thinking (which, for her as for me, proceeds through the manipulation of mental files) is not free but obeys certain constraints or conditions. Which constraints or conditions ? « A mental name », she says (§5), « can be initiated only if the individual-to-be-named is in the relevant way significant to the thinker. » In the cases which elicit singularity intuitions, « subjects have interests, goals, knowledge and affective states tied to the subject of thought.» (*id.*) So « a mental file is initiated on an individual only if that individual is significant to the agent with respect to her plans, projects, affective states, motivations” (§6).

Even though Jeshion criticizes Kaplan’s Instrumentalism for holding that « we have a means of generating “singular thought on the cheap” » (§1) her restricted form of Instrumentalism seems to me comparable to that sketched by Kaplan in his footnote (which she cites). On this family of views – Restricted Instrumentalism, as I propose to call it – we think singular thoughts about individuals by tokening singular vehicles in thought (mental files, or equivalently : mental singular terms). By using the resources of natural language, we can generate such vehicles even in the absence of acquaintance. But the generation is constrained : we token a singular vehicle only if certain conditions are satisfied.

I myself am all in favour of Restricted Instrumentalism. Like Jeshion (and Kaplan, if we take his footnote seriously), I think we don’t open a mental file unless we have a *good reason* to do so. Which reason ? I already told my story about this : we open a mental file when we expect that acquaintance with the referent will enable us to gain information from it, information which will go into the file.<sup>18</sup> The expectation of acquaintance is sufficient to open

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<sup>18</sup> In ‘Descriptive Descriptive Names’, Jeshion criticizes what she calls the ‘Anticipation Response’ : « Descriptive names are not introduced because one anticipates a future time in which one will be speaking and thinking about the named object in a psychologically neutral

a file in a justified manner. Actual acquaintance is not required. On my view, Jeshion's significance requirement works only because, when an object is relevant to our plans etc., we expect to come into various sorts of relation with it, hence the significance requirement can hardly be met without the potential acquaintance requirement also being satisfied.

Besides the conditions on the *generation* of mental files, which Jeshion emphasizes, we must, I have suggested, follow Evans in also making room also for conditions on their *success*. Even though expected acquaintance is sufficient to open a mental file, it can be denied that opening a mental file itself is sufficient to entertain a singular thought (in the sense of thought-content). Mental-file tokening is sufficient to entertain a singular thought only in the sense of thought-*vehicle*. Entertaining a singular thought-vehicle by mentally tokening a descriptive name (or, equivalently, by opening a file in anticipation) will enable us to entertain a singular thought-*content* only if we are right in our anticipation of some forthcoming informational relation *R* to the stipulated referent.

To be sure, nothing is to prevent a theorist from using 'singular thought' in the sense of 'singular thought-vehicle'. In that sense of 'singular thought', it must be accepted that Leverrier entertained a singular thought when he said to himself 'The discovery of Vulcan will make me famous'. In that harmless sense, I concede to the anti-acquaintance theorist that there can be singular thought in the absence of acquaintance, whether actual or potential. But this is perfectly compatible with the acquaintance view. My defence of acquaintance rests on two claims : (i) singular thought-vehicles are typed by their function, which involves acquaintance ; (ii) singular thought-contents can only be grasped in virtue of (possibly anticipated) acquaintance relations to their objects. This is compatible with the fact that singular thought-vehicles can be tokened even if their function is not fulfilled.

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fashion. It is rather to begin (*now* -- with the introduction of the name) speaking and thinking of the object directly, with no privileged mode of presentation. » (Jeshion 2004 : 606). But there is nothing here with which I have to disagree. In optimal circumstances, a descriptive name enables us to think about the object directly, i.e. to entertain a singular thought, as soon as it is introduced. But the name enables us to do that only because it corresponds to a mental file whose *raison d'être* is the storage of *information* about the referent. The (expected) existence of an information link is what *justifies* opening a file. This is compatible with Jeshion's point that such a file, once it exists, gives us a way of thinking of the object in a psychologically neutral fashion.

## 8. *Derived Functions for Mental Files*

So far I have distinguished the following types of case :

Case 1 : (Vulcan) A singular mental vehicle is tokened but it is unsuccessful. The vehicle's referential function is not fulfilled. As a result, no singular thought-content is expressed.

Case 2 : (Neptune) A singular thought vehicle is tokened and it is successful, since the vehicle's referential function is fulfilled. It is fulfilled because (after a delay) the file comes to play the role it is designed for. As a result, a singular thought-content is expressed.

Case 3 : (Normal referential communication) A singular thought vehicle is tokened and it is successful, since the vehicle's referential function is fulfilled. It is fulfilled because, as soon as it comes to exist, the file plays the role it is designed for. As a result, a singular thought-content is expressed.

I now want to introduce a fourth type of case which takes us further apart from the cases of normal referential communication. Not only can singular mental vehicles be tokened even though their referential function (which depends upon acquaintance) is not fulfilled, as in the Vulcan case. I believe that singular mental vehicles may also acquire and serve *derived functions* whose fulfilment does not require acquaintance.

Consider the notion of *discourse referent* as it is used in dynamic approaches to semantics. It was introduced in connection with the old 'familiarity theory' of definiteness, according to which a definite is used to refer to something that is already familiar, while an indefinite is used to introduce a new referent. This is a fruitful idea, but it faces a crucial objection : it treats pronouns as referring expressions, a clearly unacceptable view. There are many linguistic environments (eg. quantificational contexts or negative contexts) in which pronouns, whether definite or indefinite, have no referential function whatsoever. Here is how Irene Heim states the problem, and its solution :

Just think of examples like (1) and (2) :

(1) Every cat ate its food.

(2) John didn't see a cat.

(1) has a reading where ‘its’, a personal pronoun, i.e. a type of definite NP, functions as a so-called ‘bound variable pronoun’ and doesn’t refer to any particular cat. Under the preferred reading of (2), with negation taking widest scope, the indefinite ‘a cat’ fails to refer. (...)

In order to avoid untenable claims about reference, Karttunen reformulates the familiarity theory by using a new notion, that of ‘discourse reference’, in place of ‘reference’. So... a definite NP has to pick out an already familiar *discourse* referent, whereas an indefinite NP always introduces a new *discourse* referent. Since discourse reference is distinct from reference, and since, in particular, an NP may have a discourse referent even when it has no referent, this reformulation makes the familiarity theory immune to the objections encountered by its traditional version. (...)

But what are discourse referents ? (...) [They can] be identified with what I will call ‘file cards’, i.e. elements of a so-called ‘file’... A listener’s task of understanding what is being said in the course of a conversation bears relevant similarities to a file clerk’s task. Speaking metaphorically, let me say that to understand an utterance is to keep a file which, at every time in the course of the utterance, contains the information that has so far been conveyed by the utterance. (Heim 1983 : 225-6)

Karttunen’s original suggestion was that, when we process discourse, we treat even non-referential pronouns as if they referred to objects, and store the information conveyed about the fictitious objects in question (the ‘discourse referents’) in files, just as, in processing referential discourse, we store information conveyed about ordinary referents in files.<sup>19</sup> Now what relation is there between ordinary referents and discourse referents ? The notion of discourse referent may be treated as a primitive of semantic theory, a ‘theoretical construct’ (Heim 1983 : 225), and referential uses (i.e. cases in which there is a referent in the ordinary

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<sup>19</sup> Among recent theorists, some take the same perspective as Karttunen. Thus Landman introduces the notion of ‘pegs’ characterized as « objects we postulate in conversation as stand-ins for real objects. They are means of keeping track of what we talk about in information exchange... We talk about them as if they have independent existence, existence outside of us, like real objects » (Landman 1990 : 277). Note that, in his seminal DRT paper, Kamp presents indefinite descriptions like ‘a baby’ as « referential terms, not existential quantifiers » (Kamp 1981 : 192). Contrast this with textbook presentations of DRT, where it is commonly said that « definite and indefinite NPs are neither quantificational nor referential » (Kadmon 2001 : 27). The tension between these two ways of talking is relieved by taking seriously the idea that discourse referents are pseudo referents or quasi-referents, i.e., are *treated as* referents for certain purposes.

sense) as a particular case : the case in which, as Hans Kamp puts it, the discourse referent is *anchored to* some real individual (Kamp 1990 :51 ; see also Kamp & Bende-Farkas 2006 ). From a psychological point of view, however, it makes more sense to proceed in the other direction and to treat as basic *the mental files individuated by their referential function* — the sort of thing we need in theorizing about referential uses — while accounting for discourse referents and nonreferential uses in terms of that basic notion. That is how Karttunen proceeded in his original paper. His central idea seems to have been this : Whenever an indefinite like ‘a baby’ is used, it is, by default, considered as referring to some object introduced for the first time in the discourse. To interpret such a use, one must ‘tentatively set up a referent’, that is, open a file in which discourse information about the referent will be stored. Definites will then be able to (co-)refer to that already familiar referent. So in a sentence like ‘Mary had a baby and named her Sue’, ‘a baby’ sets up a referent, i.e. opens a file in which the information ‘baby Mary had’ is stored, and the definite pronoun ‘her’ in the second conjunct refers to the same discourse referent so that the new information it is associated with (to the effect that Mary named her Sue) goes into the same file. However, if the sentence is embedded under e.g. ‘I don’t believe that’, then the pretense that the baby exists comes to an end (and co-reference by means of definites is no longer possible) as soon as the embedding prefix is taken into consideration. As Karttunen says, « After considering the whole sentence beginning with ‘I don’t believe that...’, [the interpreter] may decide that there is no such baby, after all. In short, a text interpreter must keep track of the status of referents it has established and delete them when necessary » (Karttunen 1976 : §1.3). On this view discourse referents are *tentative* or *short term referents* corresponding to a portion of text and ‘existing’ in a limited realm, while ordinary referents are permanent referents existing in ‘the world as seen by the speaker’ (at the highest level).

In Karttunen’s framework, the apparatus of discourse referents is clearly an extension of the ordinary referential apparatus : the singular vehicles, or mental files, we use to cope with simple referential communication (and which have counterparts in the realm of perception), have evolved new, derived functions which enable them to be used also in thinking complex thoughts such as those expressed in (1) and (2). We need a distinction between the cases like ‘Vulcan’ in which the referential function of the file is not fulfilled (even in a delayed fashion) and the cases discussed by Karttunen because, in contrast to the Vulcan case, no one would be tempted to say that the speaker expresses *a singular thought about a cat* (even in the sense of *thought-vehicle*) by means of (1) or (2). So the ‘singular



vehicles' which are used to keep track of discourse referents in e.g. quantificational discourse are no longer bona fide singular vehicles with a referential function (which may be fulfilled or unfulfilled) : these devices have acquired a new, derived function. Still, we need some evolutionary story to explain how and why these devices have come to acquire the new function, and any such story will have to take account of the original function of the devices, which made them fit to play the new role. (Note that we also need some evolutionary story to connect the use of mental files in ordinary referential communication to their arguably more basic use in perception.)

Once in place, the idea of derived function can be appealed to to account for some problematic cases that are similar to the Vulcan case but only up to a point. Suppose I say to myself : 'My son believes that Santa Claus will come tonight'. In thinking this thought, I token the mental name (file) 'Santa Claus' in a non-referential fashion. Should we say that, by tokening the singular thought-vehicle, I fail to entertain a singular thought-content (as Leverrier in the 'Vulcan' case) ? 'Failure' seems to be the wrong term to use here. I prefer to say that, in this case, I successfully use the mental name with a derived function, in order to ascribe to my son what I called a 'pseudo-singular belief' (Recanati 2000 : 226).<sup>20</sup> Here also, the connection between the normal function and the derivative function is to be established via the notion of pretense, or some extension of that idea.

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<sup>20</sup> The idea can (perhaps) also be used to account for the meta-fictional reference to fictional characters by means of fictional names.

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