"Descriptive Readings" of Indexicals and Demonstratives

Abstract: Nunberg [1993] pointed out that indexicals and demonstratives have uses in which they allow the sentences they occur in to convey claims that don’t seem to be about particular people, times, places and so on:

1. (uttered by Glenn standing at the newly opened door, scolding Tracy for opening the door so readily when she heard the doorbell) ‘I could have been a murderer!’

2. (uttered pointing at the Vice President) ‘He is usually a member of the same party as the President.’

3. (uttered by a condemned prisoner) ‘I am traditionally allowed to order whatever I want for my last meal.’ I provide a positive account of how the relevant readings arise, arguing that different mechanisms give rise to the readings in different cases.