

Agnes Bolinska

Formal Description

The sampling process was unusual for Agnes in three ways. First, she had volunteered to be a DES participant as part of a workshop demonstration of DES: we would sample for two days, conducting a private expositional interview as usual for each day; then for the third sampling, the expositional interview would be conducted in public in the workshop. Agnes was the co-organizer of the workshop, so the first three sampling days were conducted with the workshop sampling either looming or in process. (Then, with the workshop completed, we sampled for four additional, more-or-less standard DES days.) Second, Agnes herself is (as were most of the workshop participants) a professional philosopher, a rather atypical population. Third, Agnes had just completed 11 days as a DES co-interviewer (of Michael Dickson; see [Part XV](#)), so her own sampling was conducted in the shadow of that experience, which was itself atypical. Taken together, that history suggests that samples from the last few of Agnes's sampling days might be expected to be more straightforward-for-Agnes DES samples than were the first three (or more) days. Overall, we discussed a total of 29 samples, of which 25 were day 2 or later (excluding day 1 as is usual in DES) and 19 were day 4 or later (excluding the first three days where the extraneous influences were likely to be strongest) .

Many of Agnes's samples involved some kind of inchoateness / unclarity / uncertainty / diffuseness / undifferentiatedness of experience. Sometimes this inchoateness / unclarity / uncertainty / diffuseness / undifferentiatedness was about the timing of the beep: when, exactly, did the beep occur in the stream of experience? Often the beep startled her. We can't say whether the startle caused her to lose track of the experience that was ongoing at the beep; or whether her experience would have been inchoate even without the startle reaction; or whether some third characteristic of her experience (e.g., its depth), caused both the startle and the seeming inchoateness; or whether this was a small-sample random finding. Sometimes this inchoateness / unclarity / uncertainty / diffuseness / undifferentiatedness was about the details of experience itself: what, exactly, was experienced at that moment? Sometimes both. An instance of both kinds of undifferentiatedness was sample 5.5: Agnes was sitting on her porch eating breakfast. The neighborhood kitty had jumped on her lap, and Agnes was seeing the kitty, feeling her fur while petting her, feeling the kitty's sharp paws press into her lap; trying to maneuver the kitty into position where Agnes could eat breakfast. Those kinds of sensory aspects occurred in the vicinity of this sample, but Agnes could not be confident about exactly when in that vicinity the beep occurred. Furthermore, what was ongoing at the moment of the beep was not clear: were these experiences separate? Simultaneous ?

Sequential? Agnes could not say. We (neither the interviewers nor Agnes) could say whether the uncertainty about experience was the result of uncertainty about the onset of the beep, or whether the imprecision about beep onset was the result of uncertainty about experience, or both.

One frequent kind of Agnes's diffuseness of experience involved external seeing without making any particular seen object the focus of her experience (that is, her seeing had no "figure" as described by the Gestalt psychologists). For example, in sample 7.3, Agnes, who was worried that the kitty was sick, saw the kitty, the pavement (on which the kitty sat), the porch, and the bottom of the house; none of those (including the kitty which was the object of Agnes's concern) was visually prominent. That is, her experience was *not* of seeing the kitty as the perceptual figure and the pavement, the porch, and the house the perceptual ground; she saw all those aspects more-or-less equally, without making anything the figure. Sample 6.3 was similar: Agnes was sitting in her yard working on a paper. She had started writing the sentence "Suppose that they...", and at the beep had paused and looked up. She saw her yard—the upper deck, the railing, the plants—without seeing any particular aspect of her yard; that is, there was no visual figure (the deck, the railing, etc.)—she was experientially seeing all of them equally. Sample 5.3 was also similar: she was sitting on her porch in a pause from working on a paper. She saw the houses across the street and the pillars of the porch on which she was sitting, but neither the houses nor the porch was the focus of her seeing—she saw all of them but did not make any particular object the figure of her seeing.

One sample (7.5) seemed to involve seeing with at least some but not a complete figurization. Agnes was working at her computer and saw the computer screen, a seeing that seemed to be a weak or partial figure/ground phenomenon because she did experience herself as seeing the screen more than the surrounding objects. However, she was not making anything on the screen the visual figure (which was surprising because she was working in one particular Google-doc window; she saw not only that window but equally the rest of the windows on the screen).

Two samples involved a seeing with a clear figurization. At sample 4.4, Agnes was revising a paper and was seeing the heading "mindfulness-based stress reduction..."; Agnes was confident that that heading was seen as the figure and the rest of the paper was ground. Simultaneously she was innerly saying "mindfulness-based stress" and the beep happened at the word "stress," at which time she broke off the speaking. A similar sample was sample 7.2, where Agnes was typing an email, typing and innerly saying "I am planning to stay till...;" the beep occurred at "till." Simultaneously, Agnes was seeing that sentence on the screen (focused on it and seeing everything else in the background).

The lack of figurization applied not only to visual experiences. In the cognitive realm, Agnes sometimes experienced herself as expectantly awaiting the arrival of a thought, even though the content of that thought was not present to her. We have discussed two instances already: in both samples 6.3 and 5.3, Agnes was working a paper and was in what could be described as an anticipatory cognitive pause—awaiting the arrival of the cognitive content that would allow her to continue the writing. There was no content in that pause—it was some sort of cognitive expectancy.

Samples 5.2 and 5.4 are two additional examples of Agnes's being in an anticipatory pause, where there was either nothing being experienced or there was an inchoate expectation of something about to be experienced or enacted. At sample 5.4, Agnes was reaching to unplug her phone with some sense, not well articulated, that there were two messages that she should answer. The messages themselves were not present to her, but that there were two of them was somehow experienced. At sample 5.2, Agnes was revising an academic paper and just had some insight about how to respond to a reviewer's comment. She had just hit *Enter* twice to make space for writing that insight; at the moment of the beep she felt a diffuse bodily and mental anticipatory excitement that she was about to write this little insight.

To more or less degree, that imprecision about something experiential was a recurring issue throughout sampling. We emphasize (a) that this is not merely sloppiness on the part of Agnes or the investigators. She and we were motivated and careful; nonetheless, we often couldn't answer questions about beep timing or experience; and (b) that sometimes Agnes's experience was apparently apprehended with precision and clarity. When Agnes's experience was clear, the beep onset was also clear; for example, at samples 4.4 and 7.2 (described above) Agnes was confident both where the beep occurred (at sample 4.4 at the typed and innerly spoken word "stress" in "mindfulness-based stress"; at sample 7.2, at the typed and innerly spoken word "till" in "I am planning to stay till...") in both cases Agnes was seeing that sentence on the screen (focused on it and seeing everything else in the background). That is, in both of those samples she could say *both* exactly where the beep occurred *and* the experience she described was clearly focused.

Agnes frequently experienced bodily or tactile sensations. For example, at sample 7.1 she was standing at her desk and felt the shift of weight/pressure from her left to her right foot; at sample, 7.6, she felt a tightening in her forehead and her brow furrowing; at sample 7.5, she was leaning on her hands and felt the pressure of her hands against her lips. There was no sensory awareness before the fourth day of sampling. It is common in

DES sampling for participants who ultimately have frequent sensory awareness not to describe that phenomenon early in their sampling (Hurlburt et al., 2009).

None of Agnes's samples included inner seeing (aka seeing an image) or unsymbolized thinking. Only one of her samples involved innerly speaking other than while reading or typing.

Hurlburt, R. T., Heavey, C. L., & Bensaheb, A. (2009). [Sensory awareness](#). *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 16(10-12), 231-251.