

Mel May
Mel Characterization Meeting

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the March 10 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/RDiKbfhUjsQ>. In brown are conversations about the Descriptive Experience Sampling process that took place during the interview. In green are Russ's comments, and in blue are Julian's comments about and explanations of the Descriptive Experience Sampling process inserted after the interview. If you have corrections, suggestions, or questions, please post them as YouTube comments.

RTH = Russ Hurlburt
JBK = Julian Bass-Krueger
Mel = Mel May

0:00 Russ comments: This meeting was scheduled to be a rectification meeting, but Russ didn't think we were ready for that—he thought we needed to discuss most basically what we were intending to do.

The conversation was not scripted or outlined; for convenience I will put a rough outline in the margin.

Background—why we are not ready for rectification

0:02 RTH: Okay. So on our *calendar*, this is going to be a rectification meeting. But I don't think it actually is going to be a rectification meeting, cuz I don't think we're quite ready for that. That's my *theory*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And I would, and my thought was that I would probably explain why I, why it is that that is my theory about it, that that might be a good place for us to start. Is everybody in agreement with that? [Mel: Sure.][JBK: Mm hmm.] So let me share my screen. [pause] (It's always a little dilemma what I'm supposed to do here. So I think maybe I'm supposed to share screen 3.) And now can you see Kerry's, informal, independent, informal characteristics?

Russ comments: "Kerry" refers to Part XI of this series. A month or so ago, RTH, JBK, and Mel had participated in a rectification meeting for Kerry's samples.

0:57 JBK: [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Yeah.

Review of the rectification of Kerry (Part XI), a pretty standard rectification

0:59 RTH: Okay. So what I, what I thought, I, what I thought I would do is I would, we would start there, which is what we've all done, and, and then explain why it is that we're not doing it. So what we did with Kerry, at the end of our green meetings with Kerry, we each wrote a independent informal characterization. And this was Julian's and this was Russ's, and this was Mel's [he refers to columns on the screen] that I, ba basically, we all wrote 'em in our own way, but I lined them up according to similar similarity in

content. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And *then* in the fourth column over here, *I* said, as I recall it, this is, these seems seem like common things across all of them. Let's call this "ISee," let's call this "ISee nothing beyond." [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And then those, these characteristics became what would have been the columns in the rectification spreadsheet. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] That's what we, that's what we did with Kerry. And that's what we generally do in, in my DES studies.

Why is Mel's rectification problematic?

- 2:02 RTH: (continues) But I, I, but this is what's happened where we are now with Mel. [replaces document on screen] So this is the same thing with Mel, except there's no fourth column. And that's what, that's what I thought we needed to talk about today, because it usually is the case that it's sort of obvious to me and to everybody what should be in the fourth column, but it's not obvious to me (and maybe to everybody, but that's what the conversation is about to be about) what should be in, in the fourth column with Mel.
- 2:37 So *in general* what happens is everybody seems to agree that this is what should be there. And so I make a spreadsheet and then we come back for the rectification meeting where we try to determine where we have differed in, about this column. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But that seems to me to be easier to do *usually* than with Mel.
- 3:00 And the question then becomes, well, is Russ right about that? Or is he hypersensitive or whatever? *Or* can we, can we determine the.... So the *outcome* of this meeting is going to be either: we're gonna be able to figure out what goes in the fourth column here, in which case then we can proceed to a rectification meeting—I'll send you the spreadsheet, you'll rate 'em, and then we'll get together. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] *Or* we are going to say Mel's experience is enough different for most other people that we just can't, it's not, it's not typical, reasonable and usual, whatever, [Mel: Hmm.] productive, I guess would be the better word there. Productive to do a rectification meeting. And so the different, so does everybody, everybody agree with so far, anybody have a different opinion about what we should be doing here?
- 3:50 JBK: No.
- 3:52 RTH: So the, the, the difference it seems to me, and I haven't really thought too much about this since I made this table, but, uh, the difference seems to me that *Julian* broke things down....
- 4:04 JBK: I did do more breaking down. I'm not committed to the breaking down, but yeah, I did do more of it.
- 4:11 RTH: ...and Mel and I didn't do the breaking, didn't do much breaking down. And the question is whether, whether we should follow *Julian's* model or whether we should follow *Russ and Mel's* model or whether we should figure out what to do about it. And I'm, I don't, I'm not committed to anything here. I'm, I'm happy to have this, happy to have us figure out what to do here about it.
- 4:40 JBK: I feel like if we describe Mel, it'll be more as a continuum, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] that sometimes you had some nothing things, sometimes it really seemed like nothing,

nothing. Sometimes it seemed like maybe a little bit of something, a little bit of writing an email. And then yeah, I think we'll kind of describe something that's more of a continuum and then describe your samples where you were absorbed in conversation or movies or whatever. And then maybe describe ones where you were very absorbed. Um, yeah. Whether it's useful to break down and, and like distinguish different ones. I, I don't know. I mean,

How to get to a faithful description of Mel?

- 5:30 RTH: So my, my worry about that (and I'm not, I'm, I wanna repeat that I'm, I'm not, I don't see myself as knowing the Truth with a capital T about this) but [Mel: Mm-hmm.] it, I'm, I worry that if we were to do what Julian just described, either as a continuum or as a breaking down, that we would in some way miss the important part of Mel, Mel's experience. Because I'm not... I, I We might be able to agree in some way, in some case, that Mel seems more nothing, less nothing about this. But I'm, I'm not sure that that would actually characterize Mel's experience. That makes it, that would make it seem like: well, Mel had a continuum and we were gonna rate her on, we were gonna rate her samples on this continuum of how much of it was nothing or something. [JBK: Hmm.] And I'm not convinced yet (well, maybe I'll be convinced at the end of today), but the, I'm not convinced that that would do Mel justice.
- 6:43 Mel: I sort of found, I think on a similar line, when I was trying to write this, that I was drawn to highlighting what is, um, I was gonna say actively not in my experience, but, y'know, I was drawn to describing what I have the ability to block out. I guess I found noting that more interesting than highlighting the, like, slight differences in nothingness and stuff. I, I found that if we were thinking broad-picture about characterization, it was what I was able to not get distracted by (in embedded commas) that I found most peculiar, I suppose as opposed to a Kerry where you're picking out the individual things that are, y'know, the elements that make up *her*. I found it was more the stuff that made me up was sort of the opposite, if that makes any sense. Which then probably makes it hard to, uh, codify and spreadsheet.
- 7:55 RTH: So that, that's interesting. I don't have, I don't think I have thought about it from that perspective.
- 8:00 Mel: So I can't remember what I wrote, but like, if you scroll down [he does so] shades of nothingness. Yes, yes, yes. And then there was something, and maybe you've not even left it in.
- 8:10 RTH: I think, I think I've left everything in. My goal was to leave everything in when I do this. It doesn't mean I do it, but....
- 8:16 Mel: Um, and I also, (I find it weird to write this about myself) but, um, here I wrote, "but for the most part it's her ability to block out distractions or other stimulus that's most notable." That's not necessarily the best way to describe that, but you can see what I'm getting at. That like I've found in our discussions, yes, we all agree that there's some sort of nothingness as the general standard. But I think in every discussion we've had, y'know, Julian with the *Saltburn* or with the whatever, it's, and Russ you've

described it as like “not particularizing” or whatever. I think that sort of element is most interesting, because otherwise we’re going to have, but I’m (I don’t know, maybe this is the most helpful bit, Russ) but otherwise we’re gonna have 13 samples of some degree of nothingness, whatever way we choose to slice that pie. Um, so I’m sort of with you, like, if we think about the end goal out of that spreadsheet, one way or another, it says nothing or nothing-sliced-up for the most part. And how helpful is that?

9:35 RTH: [scrolls back to the top of the document] So let me, let me (a) try to remember and (b) try to explain what it was that I was trying to write here. And I, and I probably should have looked at this before, but.... [pause, reads] So I think, I think the question that I had in mind trying to figure out—and maybe this is Mel’s question, which I, Mel’s comments, which I just haven’t quite figured out—is, is *nothing* and *being carried along by* [those are terms that occur frequently in the green document] the same thing or is that a different thing? And maybe Mel is saying, “well, one way to care, one way to think about that is what is it that we can block out? And in one case it’s a movie and in another case it’s everything else.” But it’s, it seems to me that *being carried along by* and *nothing* is more similar than it is different.

10:50 Mel: Mmm! I think I agree!

10:53 JBK: I think I, I also agree. I kind of had a weird journey where I feel like I started there, and then became convinced otherwise, or in my descriptions I wanted to consider nothing as a possibility for these carried-along moments. And then in argument, Russ, you, like I was shaken out of that. But I, I feel like it’s not, it’s not *nothing*, like calling in, *nothing* is wrong. It’s, it’s like the distinctions between nothing and something are almost irrelevant in a way.

11:37 RTH: So I will say that when I wrote, in my recollection of writing this, when I was trying to figure out, was writing this, I had the, I had a thought, I should say, that this is where, this may be close to where Julian started. So I, I think I’m agreeing with what you just said. Then I went back and looked at it and the, and the what, what got, what got us down the wrong track, or a different track or whatever, was that you wanted to say that that was *content free*. [JBK: Yeah.] You wanted to say that there was no content in the movie [*Saltburn*; see interview 8], which I didn’t think was correct. I thought Mel was totally into the content of the movie. She, she knew what was happening in the movie. And so I, I was objecting to “content free.” But maybe what you actually wanted to be saying—or *were* saying and I didn’t hear or whatever—is more like *not figurized*. It’s not like it’s content free, it’s that there’s no additional-ized, no figure-ized-on-Mel’s-part content.

11:37 Russ comments: RE “you wanted to say that that was *content free*.”
See interview 2 (4:47), interview 4 (40:39), and and interview 8 (at the end of the transcript in the section called “Email exchanges in the course of writing the descriptions of these samples”). There are other discussions in other interviews.

12:55 JBK: Yeah. I think, I think something, there’s definitely something I wanted to say about it, that it, it seemed to describe it I feel like we’d have to come up with something some

way to describe it. [Mel: Yeah, I know.] It's not figurized... Not figurized I kind of think of the figure ground thing. So...

13:15 RTH: That was what I had in mind. *Not figurized* means, means: Mel is not making an experientially figure / ground on her own.

13:27 JBK: Okay. I kind of kind of get it with the metaphor.

13:31 RTH: And, and so if she's watching a movie, and the director or the actor, whomever, is, y'know, conveying a car chase or whatever, [JBK: Mm-hmm.], it's not like she doesn't have any content—there's no car chase content—it's that she is not creating *of her own* [Mel: Mmm.] the content. And when there's, and when there's *nothing* going on, what I think that says is it's not like there's nothing *actually happening* around her—there's the sound of the air conditioner and the dog barking in or whatever—but she's not, she's not *singling out* something. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

14:19 JBK: Nothing singled out.

14:21 RTH: So maybe *singled out* is better than *not figurized*. [Mel: That feels...] That's what I meant by particularized, particularizedly experiential. I, I couldn't figure out what to say about that.

14:32 Mel: Yeah. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] But exactly that is at the heart of it. That is sort of what I was trying to say in a roundabout way at the start, too. I think that's the interesting thing. The levels of nothingness is sort of exactly missing the point. I think it's this not singling anything out, regardless of what it is, for the most part, in all of these samples, that's sort of the case, not, just being carried along by whatever it is, movie conversation or I'm autopilot vacuuming, whatever it is. Nothing is singled out for the most part. [JBK: Mm-hmm.]

15:24 RTH: Including when there's, when, when there's nothing. I'm lying, um, lying in the sun and I don't feel anything. It's, it's not like there's nothing going on, but it's, there is nothing which is experientialized, that's that that singled out, experientialized, figurized, made present. [He is trying out different terms here]

The rectification procedure

16:05 RTH: (continues) So, so, so let me, let me back up a little bit and talk about the, the process. Lemme speculate a little bit about the process or describe a little bit about the process. So what I think might happen here is we might agree amongst ourselves today, that, that we, that we... and it, and it seems like we *are*, it seems to me like we are sort of in agreement that the heart of the matter for Mel's experience is: she doesn't do a lot of Mel-izing. What's go, what's, what's going on? She's, she's taking it in, sometimes. Sometimes she's not taking it in.

16:50 Mel: Editorializing almost. There's no editorializing.

16:57 JBK: Definitely not. Yeah.

- 17:01 RTH: And, and so what I think, what I think happens if, if we, if we get to the place where we agree (which I think maybe we are) that this is sort of the heart of the matter, then we're gonna do the best we can today of putting that into words. And it maybe it's going to be *not singled out* or *editorializing* or *particularized* or *experientialized* or *figurized* or whatever. We're gonna, we're gonna write some kind of a description that, that we can all agree about. But it, and, and we will also agree that maybe it's not very good. And *then* when we actually do the rectification meeting, when we take that description and go back and apply it [to each of Mel's samples] each individual first individually [Russ, JBK, and Mel on their own] and then jointly, then it might emerge what we're really trying to say. So this is an iterative process that I think DES is iterative all the way down. We're, we are going to make the best shot at that we can today. And then we're gonna come back and take a few more shots at it later. And out of that we're going to say, we're gonna *eventually* come to, this is a, what we think is a pretty good description of Mel. But not necessarily today.
- 18:14 We're gonna *try* today, and fall short, and we're not gonna feel bad about that. [JBK and Mel laugh softly] That's the, I guess the point is, the point of this, this method: every, everything is iterative for lack of a better term.
- 18:33 So are we, are we in agreement that sort of the heart of the matter with Mel is something about, *I'm not putting anything extra* [JBK: Mm-hmm. Yeah]
- 18:53 JBK: Uh, not putting anything extra, not taking any one thing in more than another [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Not singling out, not... [Mel: Yeah.]
- 19:19 RTH: So are, are we all, all in agreement that this is sort of the [JBK: Yeah.] I'm still not, I'm still not committed that *figurizing*, but that might be the best one. But I'm not sure.
- 19:42 So if we, if we were to use, if we were to take all these terms and use that as our sketch description and then try to apply that to all the stuff, we could do that?
- 20:00 Mel: Well, yeah. Apart from, there's definitely sensory awareness [RTH: Right. Yeah.] that's present beyond that.
- 20:07 RTH: Yeah. So the question is let, let's, let's imagine ourselves as doing this, let's say, let's say we, we agree that we're gonna write some kind of a little description that we're gonna call something in this ballpark. [Mel: Yeah.] And then we're gonna apply it to some samples where there's nothing going on, it's even less than autopilot. She's, there's nothing, you can't even say she's vacuuming. [JBK laughs softly] There's, there's nothing. And would, is there, is there some sub-dimension that we would, would want to, that we would wanna say that? Or is this, or, or would that be just this is, this is what's happening, applied to a situation where there's nothing particular going on?
- 20:07 Russ comments: RE (19:42) "take all these terms... (20:07) write some kind of a little description that we're gonna call something in this ballpark"
He eventually writes as the heading of a column in the rectification spreadsheet: "Not singling out, Not Editorializing, Not creating anything extra, Not particularizing, Not figure-izing, Not Mel-izing." The task of the rectification will be to apply that draft to each of Mel's 65 samples, and let those samples shape, polish, revise, replace

that draft and allow a faithful description of Mel's experience to emerge. See the rectification commentary.

21:03 Mel: I think it fits. I'm, I think I'm still satisfied with it, and not needing another category, but happy to hear the opposite.

About absorption / concentration

21:12 JBK: So applying that to the deeply absorbed editing the grandfather and also the totally nothing, just maybe fingers moving, but not even paying attention to the email. The, the, they, they do seem different. But the question is if we need to capture that difference with different codes or not. Cuz we can describe differences. Yeah, but then if you do codes, okay, then you have, sometimes it's something, sometimes a bit more of a something. I see arguments why that, um, that's besides the point. Um, yeah, I, I don't have an answer yet.

22:16 RTH: I don't, I don't think I have an answer, either. So I think, I think the two that you [mentioned], that the listening to the grandfather there does seem in some way that's something different from, it's more than just not singling out, but maybe not! That's, and, and if it is, what is it?

22:45 Mel: Hmm.

22:50 RTH: So maybe there's some level of concentration...

22:59 Mel: But, but also, then, in a weird way, it just feels like that's content dependent, right? So it's actually the same thing, but the *content* that I am involved with at that point is so gripping or whatever, that it's doing something different to me. But on an experiential level, I'm still not singling out, I'm not editorializing, I'm not particularizing. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] It's just that then what is the focus of my attention? It's just whatever. But I don't think it's the focus of my attention in a different way to doing the vacuuming *necessarily*. Not strongly on that. But I agree that they're different experiences, and if, if we didn't acknowledge that, even just in a description, it feels like we're missing something. However, I actually think they're like codified the same. I don't know how you don't... [JBK: Hmm.] So that's not a helpful answer really. [laughs]

24:05 JBK: But like in both cases you're not adding, you're not bringing anything to it. You're not editorializing, judging [Mel: Yeah.] or whatever. But in one case, like your granddad is more interesting than like an email about a Steadicam or the vacuum, [Mel: Yeah.] folding your laundry. So in both cases you're kind of, you're in it, but there's just more interesting, like *Saltburn* is [laughs] more interesting than some other things

24:34 Mel: Than folding my laundry!

24:35 JBK: [laughs]. Yeah.

24:38 RTH: So, so maybe what we're saying is that these are all negatives: I'm *not* doing, I'm, I'm not Mel-izing. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] [pause] But there also seems to be some, some

positive thing about con, concentration. I'm *more* concentrated, I'm more concentrating on what my grandfather is saying than I am on the *Saltburn* movie. Is that... First off, is that true?

25:23 Mel: Yes.

25:24 RTH: Okay. And I am more concentrating on *Saltburn* than I am on those samples where I wasn't doing anything.

25:30 Mel: Yeah, exactly right.

25:33 RTH: So there does seem to be some positive something.

25:40 Mel: But that, that is strictly related to the content of the matter. It just depends how interesting the thing is to me, by the sounds.

25:53 RTH: So this is the, this is relevant to, or reminiscent of, the con, conversation that, that Julian and I had earlier on. And.... Cuz it doesn't seem to me that it is particularly inter-, inf-, relevant to the content. Because I think you can be, you can be totally interested in what your grandfather is saying, and you can be totally interested in the eclipse of the sun, and the con, those contents would be totally different. But the degree of concentration could be pretty much the same. Seems to me.

26:41 Mel: [pause] In theory, yes. But I don't think that's the case with my samples.

26:50 RTH: So that would, that would be to say... This is a question, I guess: Would that be to say the only concentration I could ever have would be of, of this... The, the only real really solid concentration I could have would be of my grandfather. That doesn't seem right.

27:14 Mel: What do you mean?

27:17 RTH: Well, the, the, the content where you were the most concentrated was with your grandfather. Is that the only kind of content that you could be so concentrated?

27:28 Mel: No, definitely not. This is gonna open up a whole nother can of worms though, in terms of [pause]

27:36 RTH: So I don't think, I don't think the concentration, the concentration as a characteristic of your experience is linked directly to the content. It may be the content that *piques* your concentration. [Mel: Mm.] But the concentration is a skill or characteristic or whatever that you could apply to your grandfather talking or the whatever else would be of interest to you. In which case the concentration would be sort of content-free, not intimately tied to the content.

28:19 JBK: Can't say that, Russ [laughs] [in reference to saying something was content-free]

Russ comments: This comment begins as a digression, returning to the discussion Julian and I were having about content on Mel's sampling days 2 and 8 (and elsewhere), and then comes back to the present consideration.

I think Julian's difficulty about content rests on a confusion between *experience* on the one hand and *all else* on the other—DES intends to describe directly apprehended *experience* and eschew *all else*. In the *Saltburn* case, for example, Mel was being carried along by the movie. The *movie* occupied her entire experience—the content of her experience was whatever the movie was presenting. Her *concentration* was *not* part of her experience. It is doubtless a true statement that her concentration skill is content free—she can apply her concentration to *Saltburn* or to her grandfather, or to vacuuming—but her concentration skill is part of the *all else*: unless she had a meta-awareness of herself as concentrating (which she did *not* have during *Saltburn*, or grandfather-watching, or vacuuming) then *content-free* is *not* a part of her experience.

That is: *content-free* applies to her *concentration*; but because her concentration is *not* directly apprehended, *content-free* does *not* apply to her *experience*.

Let's consider two simple examples, both from Kerry (part XI):

Kerry 4.5: Kerry was innerly speaking in a cheery, positive tone “We could wear bug nets!” (as if she were rehearsing convincing friends to join her hike).

Kerry 7.6: [Kerry is still editing the restaurant menu.] She's innerly speaking “We've maxed out our edits on this one.”

If one were interested in Kerry's *experience*, it would make sense to say that the content of Kerry's experience at sample 4.5 was inner speaking about bug nets, and at sample 7.6 was inner speaking about edits.

By contrast, if one were interested in Kerry's inner speaking, *not* as an experience but as a process that Kerry can deploy (as at 4.5) about bug nets and (as at 7.6) about edits, one could say that her *inner speaking* was content free: the *inner speaking itself* has no content-preference—Kerry's inner speaking can be equally deployed toward bug nets or toward edits. But in that analysis, we are considering Kerry's inner speaking as a process; we are *not* considering Kerry's inner experience.

By parallel logic, Mel's concentration is like Kerry's inner speaking—a process that can be deployed but is not itself the main target of Mel's experience.

Julian comments: My confusion may have been in that realm. We talked about absorption, not concentration then so let me go back to those terms. I was confused a) by Mel's describing seemingly very different samples as the same; b) by Mel's not telling us the plot of a movie at a point or topic of conversation; and c) by Mel's saying that if we knew the plot at that point it wouldn't add anything to our understanding of her experience.

So I was wondering if it was possible for Mel to be absorbed but this absorption is itself free from the plot or conversation or whatever is going on around her. Undoubtedly she's processing all of that. But in direct experience, the state of being absorbed is *very* similar from one moment to the next.

So then absorption does become separated from the thing she's absorbed in. Kind of like *concentration* in what you wrote above. It is its own independent thing. You're right that I did turn it into a "process she can deploy." And beyond that, into a state she can be in. So yes, I agree that some sort of over-separating, over meta-izing was at play.

Russ comments: RE "But in direct experience, the state of being absorbed is *very* similar from one moment to the next."

I still think that misses the essential point. I would rewrite that sentence as "But in direct experience, the state of being absorbed does not exist."

Maybe another metaphor would be useful: Imagine the mirror next to the exit from the ladies room. The first woman sees her windblown blond hair; the second woman sees her smudged-from-crying mascara; the third woman sees her fading lipstick; and so on. None of the women see *the mirror*. It would not occur to any of the women to comment something like *Oh! That mirror is similar from one moment to the next!* That would be a true statement, but it would not be relevant to any of the women's experience.

Julian comments: Yes, I agree with that. My phrasing was confusing there. I was still describing the source of my original thinking and confusion. So everything in that paragraphing after "I was wondering" is trying to travel back in time to my original thoughts and confusion. [It doesn't help that originally there was a separate paragraph. I edited it to all be one paragraph.] So yes, the state of being absorbed doesn't apply to direct experience.

28:24 Mel: Yeah. Well, then, flip it on its head again. I think the concentration level is sort of the same the whole time. Whether it's folding laundry, whether it's doing vacuuming, whether it's watching *Saltburn*, whether it's listening to my grandpa, it's, [pause]

28:45 RTH: It *is* the same?

28:46 Mel: Well, sort like... Yes. It's just whether, it's just what's more interesting, though. I don't think the concentration-level changes. It's just what was more interesting and therefore emotive or whatever. But like, there are so many times when I've reported autopilot doing something. Like is, is all, is, is that passive or not? Is the question here, because I think at times we've thought that those sorts of samples are rather passive. But like, I'm not necessarily sure that they are, but maybe they are. And then so is the, is the watching grandpa passive or not? Or is there a difference there in, I don't know.

29:35 JBK: I feel like to me concentration has maybe some connotations I don't see here, because concentration, I think of something very active-like focus. [Mel: Mm.] Like I kind of like absorbed or locked in or some other words we've used or, or maybe concentration stripped of some of these connotations. But yeah, to me it, yeah, what you said about active too, it almost seems like there's no *trying* involved, there's no like just kind of letting it come in rather than you going towards it, y'know?

29:35 Russ comments: This turn awakens in RTH an impression that JBK is too much about the words (a discussion that RTH and JBK have had repeatedly across the Mel

sampling). Yes, Mel has grunted the word “concentration,” and yes, Webster’s “concentration” has the connotations JBK mentions. But that does not mean that Mel’s grunt has followed Webster’s rules. She’s doubtless doing the best she can to tell us about her experience, but the words that she has at her disposal may not rest easily on her experience and may rest in an entirely different way on JBK’s experience (or mine, for that matter).

(BTW, I emphasize that my use of *grunt* is not in the slightest pejorative; I use it to emphasize that there are indeed sounds coming out of Mel’s mouth, and those sounds resemble Webster’s “concentration,” but those sounds do not necessarily align with Webster’s intention.)

(BTW, I emphasize that my use of “she’s doubtless doing the best she can” is not in the slightest pejorative; I say that as a straightforward characterization of what I take to be Mel’s intention. Mel’s task is difficult (perhaps impossible)—describing to Russ and Julian, whose experience is not at all like Mel’s, the characteristics of her experience, which (I think) is fairly unusual in our culture and therefore does not admit of easy description.)

Anyway, it is out of that kind of reaction that RTH’s 30:20 turn arises.

30:18 Mel: Yeah.

30:20 RTH: So it, it could be, Julian, that you and I concentrate, but Mel doesn’t! [JBK laughs] And, and uh, and therefore it would make sense for us to be trying to lean on Mel and say, *come on Mel, tell us that you were concentrating here!* And Mel was resisting and saying, *well, y’know, my grandfather and vacuum are pretty much the same thing.* [Mel: Mmm.] [JBK laughs] Which might be very different for Julian and Russ, [Mel: Mmm.] but might be very much the same for Mel. Then that’s the, that’s the interesting thing about the exercise is to.

31:06 Mel: Because I think I agree with that. I don’t think they feel any different to me. It’s just that one thing was more interesting than the other. So like it’s sort of like locked in more on paper or something. But in terms of, I feel like it’s that all the, exactly the... I’m not locking, I’m not actively locking in more to listen to grandpa or I’m not, y’know, to your point, Julian like it, I think that just *is*. And then like beep goes off and I’m *Wow!* The, the content that I was bringing this baseline to at that point was so emotive and powerful that then. But I’m not actively concentrating more on that any more than the vacuuming. The vacuuming is just not lighting me up, because it’s boring. Like the stimulus is not entertaining me or doing something to me in the same way that *Saltburn* does, or that and whatever, maybe.

32:07 JBK: [laughs].

32:08 RTH: So, and at the beginning of that, I thought you were gonna say something like: I am taking in either my grandfather or vacuuming or whatever. And *then* when I have to describe this to you guys, the grandfather’s story is a more interesting story. And so I can tell, I can say more interesting things about my grandfather than I can about the vacuuming. In which case the, the *experience* would be pretty much exactly the same and the *telling of it* would be very different.

- 32:52 Mel: Yeah. I maybe agree with that. I don't know.
- 32:55 RTH: But the *other* possibility is when you said, when (that was what you said at the beginning to my ear) at the end, you said something about, well the grandfather, I was more *lit up* by the grandfather than I was by the vacuuming. Well if that *lighting up* was part of the moment of the beep, then that somehow we should be describing that, even though it's passively occurring to me, I am being lit up more by my grandfather than I'm with the vacuum. It's still part of my experience at the moment of the beep.
- 33:31 Mel: I think it's that distinction that I'm just finding impossible though, in terms of it's objectively still the same thing from my end of like, y'know, okay. I think back to that beep in particular or whatever. Here I am locked in watching grandpa speak, and I'm absorbed by it, carried by it, blah, blah, blah. That, yeah, true, that does feel more locked in then vacuuming feels slightly more passive. But it's chicken and egg here of like, is that a different experiential Some I'm, I'm something different is happening? Or like to mine that's just, that's just more interest. That's a more interesting thing that is stimulating me at that time. And does that, is that experience any differently other than it's just more interesting? Like I don't, I, I don't necessarily think so. I don't think that there's like this distinction to be made even though they feel different. But I think it feels different because it's purely based on the external stimulus. It's not a helpful answer.
- 34:45 RTH: Well, as I said at the beginning today, I don't, I don't think I... The goal shouldn't be to try to answer the question today. The goal today should be to try to get us into a position to *maybe* be able to say something better about it next time. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Which is a big difference I think. And uh, so it seems to me that what we're seeing in the absorbed category is we're *wondering whether it makes sense*. [pause] [Mel: Hmm.] Something like that. [Mel: Yeah.]
- 34:45 Russ comments: RTH here expresses the philosophy of the rectification: we have sampled for 13 days; then we reviewed all those 65 samples; now we have taken a whack at describing a phenomenon that seemed to emerge from those 65 samples; *next time* we will attempt to apply that whack to all 65 samples and see if we can improve / refine / replace the phenomenon description so that it rests lightly on the phenomenon. We will see that unfold in the rectification meeting.
- 35:45 RTH: (continues) And is there a better way to say that other than intensity level? That was my word. Concentration. [pause] Absorbed.
- 36:04 JBK: Absorption level.
- 36:22 RTH: [types on the screen for all to see "Does intensity level make sense? Concentration? Absorbtion level"] So, something like that. [laughs at his misspelling of *absorption*]
- 36:22 Russ comments: Russ eventually writes as the heading of a column in the rectification spreadsheet: "High intensity level, High concentration, High absorption level."

36:31 RTH: (continues) As, as, a, this, as a, an aside in, in, in the private world of Hurlburt: on days when I can't sp (usually I'm a very good speller) on days when I can't spell, I think it's, I think there's something interesting going on. [Mel: Ooh!] [JBK: Mm-hmm.] But I interrupted Mel, I think.

Is the rectification process applied to Mel different from DES's usual rectification?

36:54 Mel: Oh no, I'm, I'm just wondering is, is this unusual in your studies? [laughs]

37:04 RTH: What we're going through right now?

37:07 Mel: Yup.

37:07 RTH: Yes.

37:09 Mel: Interesting.

37:11 RTH: It is generally the case, as I illustrated with the Kerry example—that that was why I went back to the Kerry example—that that was easier for us to say, well this was a visualization and this was a visualization without any edges to it. And that was a whatever. There seemed to be a bunch of different characteristics that we could, that we could say. And yet *here* that doesn't seem so obvious. [Mel: Hmm.] And whether that is a failure of the method or a characteristic of Mel, I don't really know the answer to that. And, but that's, that *is* what's interesting. And it, and it *is* in some way in my head, related to the fact that I can't spell. [they laugh] It's the, the words, *the words are failing me* is what that means to me. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] The word, the words are failing me all the way down. [Mel: Yeah.]

38:26 So it seems like it might be worthwhile for us to try to bring *this* factor [highlights the "Does intensity level make sense? Concentration? Absorbition level" text] into focus on each individual sample. [Mel: Yeah.] In the same way as we would try to bring this factor, this factor, this one here, [highlights the "Not singling out, Not Editorializing, Not creating anything extra, Not particularizing, Not figure-izing, Not Mel-izing" text] into, into focus to each individual sample. And when we *do* that, we might learn something about both of those factors or, or not. [Mel: Hmm.] And that is what makes the rectification, that, that's the heart of the rectification meeting the rectification. A lot of people when we, when when I tell 'em I do a rectification meeting, they see that as well, I'm, you're trying to get, you're trying to get a communal agreement between raters, or something like that. They see it as a rater-reliability exercise. It is *not* a rater-reliability exercise. It's a let's take in, let, let's take the occasion for places where we might disagree about things as a way of illuminating a, a phenomenon. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] And uh, and that's backwards from rater reliability.

39:48 In the, in the world of, in the world of validity, studies rater reliability is a bad thing, [he corrects himself] rater *unreliability* is a bad thing. But for *us*, rater unreliability might be a useful point of view, might provide us a.... Like right now, right now we are, we are saying, well, y'know, when we talk about Mel's grandfather, the chances are good that Julian's recollection of that beep is different from Mel's and is different from mine. And it seems like we're talking about the same thing, but we're

not. But when in our, in our own private world, we have to go back and encounter that and rate it or something, when we start rating 'em in different ways, then it will then it will, *might* make apparent to us why Julian thinks the way he does or Mel thinks the way she does, or I think the way I do. That's the goal of it.

41:03 So: Julian, you who were more granularizing or whatever at the outset than... [JBK: Particularizing.] [they laugh] does, it, does, would it satisfy you if we had two things to rate (and also sensory awareness and whatever), but in this, in this bargain, in this arena that we rate these two things [uses the mouse to circle the two sets of texts on the screen] something like "not singling out," whatever, and "absorption," and on the possibility that if we did that we might learn something about these phenomena.

41:45 JBK: I think so. And by rate you mean scale or do you just mean like approach it as a question and discuss it?

41:55 RTH: What I meant, what I meant was rate in the same sense as we rated wherever that went, we rated Kerry's

42:07 Mel: Like the spreadsheet.

42:08 RTH: the spreadsheet. So I'll make a spreadsheet and, but I'll just have two columns in this, in this regard anyway, two columns and we'll rate 'em one zero and .5 and zero. This was, this was an example, this sample sample 2.1 was a one on this, that dimension and a zero on this dimension or something. And we'll see whether we agree about that. And in those places where we don't agree, then maybe we'll learn something about the phenomenon.

42:39 JBK: So an absorbed, okay. Yeah, that,

42:42 RTH: So my question is, should I make two columns, one like this and one like this and we'll rate 'em.

42:42 Russ comments: Those are the two columns that appear in the rectification spreadsheet: "Not singling out, Not Editorializing, Not creating anything extra, Not particularizing, Not figure-izing, Not Mel-izing"; and "High intensity level, High concentration, High absorption level." See the rectification meeting for how those are discussed.

42:50 JBK: I think that makes sense. Yeah.

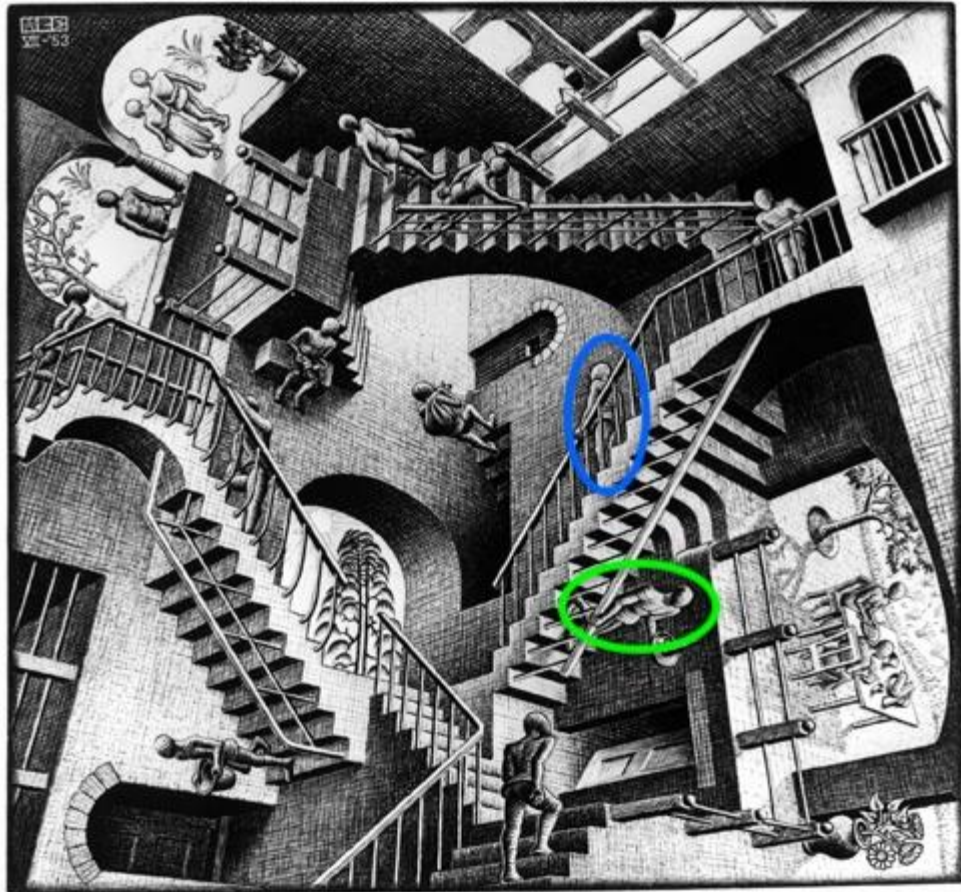
42:53 Mel: Yeah. I think that, I think that makes enough sense for now, doesn't it? And then....

42:59 RTH: And then sensory awareness and we can break that down as to bodily or pressure or whatever. I can figure that out. [Mel: Yeah.]

43:13 JBK: But there are a lot of different kinds, huh.

- 43:16 RTH: And feelings and unsymbolized thinking are gonna be part of the big five, 5FP, that we'd rate all the time anyway. And then words, words present.
- 43:29 So I think I, I think that's what I, that the conversation that we had is that we have just been having is the conversation that I thought we needed to have before I could build a spreadsheet. [Mel: Yeah.] Now I think I'm pretty probably capable of building a spreadsheet that everybody would agree is an at sort of an adequate spreadsheet. People might do it a little bit different, breaking down sensory awareness and bodily, or whatever, but, [Mel: Yeah.] but that probably isn't gonna, wouldn't matter much. But this one mattered sort of a lot to me, so I didn't make the spreadsheet yet.
- 44:01 Mel: Yeah. And I think that's good. Cuz as I said at the top, that's what kept coming back to me too. It's the *not* particularizing, *not* Mel-izing, *not* [gestures] that feels potent. So I'm, I like where we've landed for now.
- 44:16 JBK: Yeah. This is kind of, I'm always kind of, my mind gets a bit jumbled dealing with your experience now. [laughs]
- 44:16 Russ comments: Good! JBK's mind *has to* become jumbled—he has to battle deeply ingrained presuppositions—to grasp Mel's experience, which is doubtless very different from his own.
- 44:25 Mel: Yeah! No doubt!
- 44:26 JBK: Coming back in a circle. Like I started with some of your very absorbed samples wondering, like, there's something that seemed kind of nothing to me, and I wondered if it was maybe in that kind of a nothing example. And then with Russ, we went through this whole process where I had this hangups about content and this or that that I had to break away from, which was useful. But now I'm kind of back seeing that there are similarities between really autopilot stuff and really absorbed stuff. But also...

Julian comments: "Full circle" is the wrong metaphor. It's more like I start as the green guy in Escher's *Relativity* and end up as the blue:



45:03 RTH: But when, when we go through sample by sample, it *may be* that Julian is compelled to say, *this is not doing it for me*, or that Mel is saying, says the same thing or whatever. Or that we as a group will come to understand we have missed something that isn't in these two phenomena. So the goal is *not* really even as, as general as to try to figure out what these phenomenon are, but it's [JBK: Mm-hmm.] We're, we're trying to dis our, our task (as I think it is, anyway!), is to figure out how can we say something about Mel's experience that is faithful to Mel's experience and, and put in English that the rest of us can understand.

45:55 Mel: Yeah. [JBK: Mm hmm.] Yeah.

46:00 RTH: And it doesn't, the object is that, that it, it can't exaggerate things according to Russ's proclivities, or Mel's proclivities, or Julian's proclivities. We're trying to keep all that stuff [JBK: Yeah.] The whole, the whole exercise is that, that's the whole exercise actually: I'm trying to describe ex, experience without favoritism. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

46:35 JBK: No editorializing.

- 46:37 Mel: I feel a little less, I feel a little less dead inside by no longer describing things as *nothing*! And now describing them as not particularizing. [laughs] That feels slightly better.
- 46:58 RTH: [pause] So without, without meaning to take a stand on this (and maybe I, maybe I wrote this in an email to you, Mel) the Buddhist aim is the clear, clear lake. The clear lake that reflects whatever it is that is there to be seen.
- 47:19 RTH: And that is a not singling out, not editorializing, not creating or whatever. And I'm not saying that you've reached some kind of higher level of whatever, because I'm not in a, in a position to make that judgment. Y'know, if Jesus Christ were here, I probably would think he was crazy or something. I don't know. I, I don't, I don't, I don't feel like I have the ability to make judgments about that. But I *do* feel like it, I'm in a position to maybe make some reassurances, or some, what's some *de-negativization* is I think is the way, the way I would see it.
- 47:59 Mel: Thank you.
- 48:02 RTH: So I'll make a spreadsheet and send it to y'all, and then shall we meet again and actually do the, the rectification, which is what was on the calendar for today, but we didn't do?
- 48:12 Mel: Yep. Yep.

They compare calendars

- 48:16 RTH: And when shall we do that
- 48:20 JBK: Same time next week?
- 48:29 RTH: That would be the 17th.
- 48:33 Mel: That works for me.
- 48:34 RTH: Works for me.
- 48:38 Mel: Alright. Okay.
- 48:44 RTH: And
- 48:45 JBK: Does Daylight Savings time hit for anybody else between then?
- 48:48 Mel: No,
- 48:49 RTH: Sorry, I missed, I didn't hear you.
- 48:53 JBK: It was a daylight-savings question.

48:56 Mel: No, we're in the clear.

48:58 RTH: I think we're daylight savings out in our country and Mel's in...

49:03 Mel: Um, and I'm finally back in America in like two weeks, by the way. But it'll probably be just as we stop doing these weekly meetings!

49:14 RTH: And, and, and I would, if it's not apparent, I would, I'm gonna make a spreadsheet, but if somebody's got a better idea of what ought to be on the spreadsheet than I make, then we can add a column or whatever.

49:31 Mel: Yep. I appreciate that.

49:38 RTH: It's an interesting process.

49:40 Mel: It's challenging.

49:42 RTH: It's totally challenging.

49:44 Mel: Cuz you're right, it, it was much easier to look at Kerry and do that and it just, the categories sort of make themselves very apparent. And I agree, looking at this, you're like, oh God, how do you split this up? Or whatever.

50:02 RTH: I, I think the, I think the inner, inner experiences, what, what I *really* think about it is that it, it's, it's far more difficult that people give it credit. And sometimes it's easier, sometimes it seems easier, as with Kerry. But y'know, I've, I've sampled with some, uh, synesthetes [Mel: Mm-hmm. Oh Yeah.] They were very difficult for me because I'm not a synesthete. And, uh, so for me to try to get my head around that, that is what's interesting.

50:37 Mel: I totally like the first person that described that to someone, must have been like, what?

50:46 RTH: I haven't, I haven't yet written down, written that down. It's in Cody Kaneshiro's dissertation, but we haven't yet published it. It's on our agenda, hopefully sooner rather than later.

50:58 Mel: That's very cool.

51:01 RTH: All right. So sounds good to me. Anybody think, have anything else that we should be doing today?

51:07 Mel: I don't think so.

51:10 RTH: Then I will make a spreadsheet, send it to y'all and you all will then send it back to me so that then I can make the, the spreadsheet that compares the two. So I'll need to have that back a day or two before next Monday or sooner. [JBK: Alright.]

51:30 Mel: Awesome. Thank you very much.

51:32 RTH: Good. Alrighty.

51:34 Mel: See you next week.