

Mel May
Mel Green Meeting Part 2 Excerpts

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of excerpts from the March 3 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/BP_S4nUVKoU. (The entire interview video is available at <https://youtu.be/HZnDSgymHMk>.) 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

We have excerpted roughly half of the second green meeting and present it both as the video (at https://youtu.be/BP_S4nUVKoU) and this transcript. The uncut video is available at <https://youtu.be/HZnDSgymHMk> (but we do not transcribe the entire video). This is Part 2 of the Mel green meeting, and it starts with sampling day 8.

SNIP

Focusing on sample 8.2

- 5:24 JBK: [RTH is sharing his screen and has now scrolled to sample 8.2.] Another absorbed one.
[Mel: Mm.]
- 5:27 RTH: Or carried along by.
- 5:28 JBK: Carried along.
- 5:30 RTH: This is the, this is the kind of thing that I would call *carried along by*, but I don't remember whether we did anything more about that. We had a long, many long conversations about it. But...
- 5:43 Mel: Many! laughs]
- 5:47 JBK: Yeah, it was this debate about you weren't singling out any one thing from the movie. So the thing where I originally called it *content free*, and then we decided that wasn't true, and then set *non-particularizing* or something like that.
- 6:07 RTH: So are we happy with *Carried along by*?
- 6:09 Mel: Well, my question there is what's the difference between that and when we've said *absorbed by* for previous things. Are you seeing a distinction?

6:19 JBK: To me, it seems the same.

6:28 RTH: The, the distinction for me is that my, in my recollection, is that you have been absorbed by, at a deeper level than this movie. When you were abs, like when you were talking, when you were listening to your grandfather's tape or whatever, you seem more engrossed there. Whereas here, you're watching the movie, you're carried along by the plot of the movie. There's nothing else going on. And there's nothing else particular. But it, but it's not like you're on-the-edge-of-your-seat carried along by, which it seemed like you were more in the, in absorbed by.

7:07 Mel: Mm. Interesting.

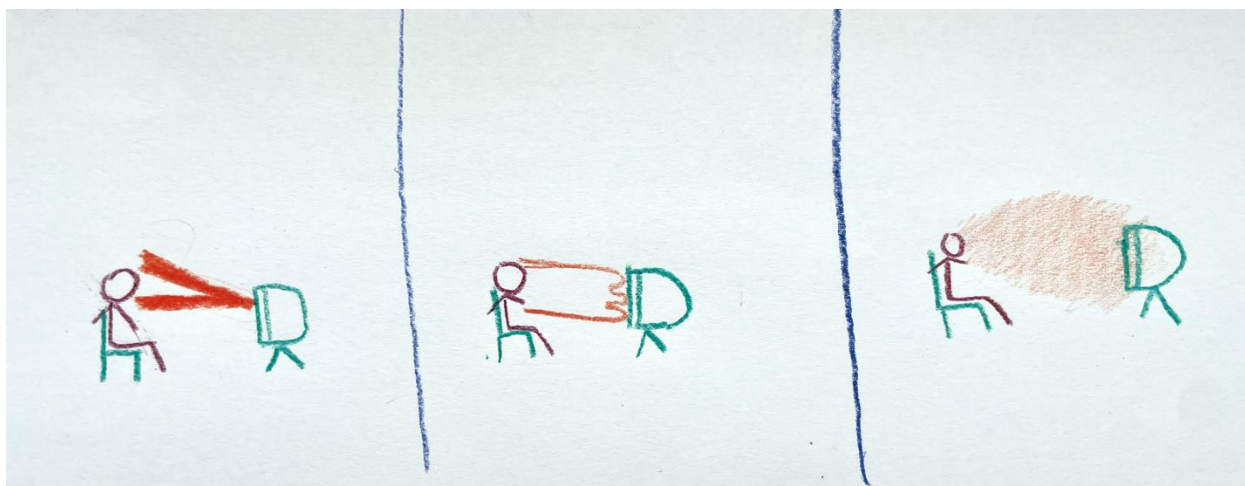
7:08 RTH: So that's the distinction that I would make. I don't, I don't know. And the, and the other thing is that, that in my sampling experience, there's a *lot* of samples where people are watching a movie and they're just carried along by the movie. Like just the, their, their samples read exactly like this. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] *I'm watching the movie, I'm doing whatever it is. I'm, I'm taking in probably whatever the director wanted me to take in. I don't really know what the director wanted me to take in, but the plot's going on. I'm carried along with the plot. I'm listening to what the characters are saying. I'm understanding all that stuff. But nothing in particular.* [Mel: Mm.] That's very common when people are watching a movie. And I call that *carried along by a conver, carried along by a movie*. But I don't generally say carried along by the conversation, although maybe I should, and maybe I *do*, actually. [Mel laughs]

7:08 Julian comments: I wonder if Mel's carried-along-by-a-movie samples are just like those lots of other samples you mention. I mean obviously they're somewhat different. Mel is Mel. The question is how different. I wonder if Mel's are even more non-singling out, non-particularizing, non-Mel-izing, whatever we want to call it. The way she compared them to her autopilot and nothing sample made me wonder.

I made a little drawing to illustrate. The first on the left is someone who's watching a movie and really singling something out. He's noticing the redness of a character's hat. So the red spike indicates attention or absorption or whatever directed at one thing in particular.

In the middle is garden variety carried along by the movie—doing what the director wants, carried along by the plot, all of that. And if asked later what part of the plot could say “oh yeah I didn't write it down, but pretty sure it was the car chase scene”. By the way, the red in my drawing doesn't directly indicate visual attention or whatever. It's more to illustrate how they're taking it in.

The third is potentially Mel. Taking it in. But when asked what's happening at that moment says it's honestly not so important to understand her experience; it's hard to pick apart experiential differences between different samples watching the same movie; it's hard to pick apart experiential differences between this and autopilot vacuuming; or nothing for that matter. It seems like it could be even *less particularizing* than the garden variety carried-alongs you're used to, Russ. Or am I still overthinking it? I'm sure you'll let me know.



Russ comments: Is there an experiential difference between frame 1 (red hat particularization) and frame 2 (carried along by)? I think unequivocally Yes: the frame-1 viewer is particularizing (the red hat); the frame-2 viewer is not particularizing anything.

Is there an experiential difference between frame 2 (garden-variety carried along by) and frame 3 (Mel carried along by)? I don't know. Certainly at some level there is a difference—Mel's bag of neurons is not identical to anyone else's bag of neurons, so Mel's way of navigating through the world is fundamentally unique, so Mel's way of being carried along is fundamentally unique—no question about that. The omniscient being would absolutely know the difference (if any) between Mel's being-carried-along-by and (for example) my (or any other garden-variety person's) being-carried-along-by. The question is whether *Julian* (or any other ignorant [= non-omniscient] mortal) can know the difference between Mel's being-carried-along-by and (for example) my (or any other garden-variety person's being-carried-along-by; I think that is highly doubtful. Knowing that difference would require being more confident about word meanings than I think is reasonable.

So I think DES has to limit itself to describing what it can know with confidence: it can tell the difference between sensory awareness and being-carried-along by. DES has to eschew differences about which there is no clearly directly apprehendable evidence.

BTW, this is, if not identically at least similarly, the difference between DES and microphenomenology. Microphenomenology believes it can discover fine distinction that are too subtle to be directly apprehended by DES. In some cases, that is doubtless correct and valuable; in other cases it is (I think) the reification of presuppositions; I think microphenomenology has no way of reliably distinguishing between the two. So DES stops short of the kind of speculation that Julian and the microphenomenologists dare to do.

7:55 JBK: Yeah. To me I get what you mean about the grandfather being like deeper, deeper absorbed. But I don't know about some other things we've called *absorbed*: conversations or movies or whatever. Like it, it seems like splitting hairs at a certain point, whether it's *absorbed* or *carried along*. [RTH types a green caption: "Carried along by – is there a difference between this and absorbed?"]

- 7:55 Russ comments: Recall that the purpose of the green meeting is not to decide anything, but to help us get in a position to grasp with fidelity in the upcoming rectification process. So the caption here includes the documentation that we had a question here.
- 8:18 Mel: Yeah. Yeah. Cuz I understand the distinction you're making, Russ, and sort of agree with it. But agree, Julian, I'd like to look at all the ones that we've called *absorbed* and then see, like, hang on, are there, are there enough differences between them that we would be able to come, uh, call some *carried along by*, and some call *absorbed* when they're more engrossed? Engrossed is a great word, Russ, that's really relevant here. Um, cuz I think, yeah, I see a slight difference there, but is it enough of a difference or is it splitting hairs? I'm, I'm hearing what you're both saying.
- 8:57 RTH: So my, my guess is that there is probably a continuum out there. Whether it's worth to try to make it is another story. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Well, this is, it's for sure not: I'm paying attention to some particular aspect. It's not that. I'm not paying attention to the dress that the girl is wearing or the sound that the voice is making or whatever. It's *none* of that. And it's *not* having my own visual image of something. And it's *not* having sensory awareness of it. It's none of that. Whether, whether there is a distinction to be made between *carried along by* and *absorbed*, probably there is; whether it's worth making it, I don't know.
- 9:40 Mel: But then also back to what you were saying about whether you do, describe conversation as *carried along by*, because I'm now more swayed to that of like, I think if I recall correctly, that there are certain examples of me where we've said *absorbed* in conversation that now with this sort of perspective might actually feel more *carried along by* conversation.
- 10:04 RTH: I, I think I agree with that. Exactly. Totally. [JBK: Mm hmm.]
- 10:14 Mel: Because yeah, I think the *absorbed* bits are just like a more engrossed sort of thing. And I think that there's been examples of just purely, *yeah, yeah, I'm in the conversation. I'm here, I'm, y'know*, all of that. But whether it's that step back, just *carried along by*. Interesting.
- 10:33 RTH: My impression of, of some of the conversations is that, that you're more engrossed than you were in this particular part of the movie. [Mel: Mm.] But, but I don't, I'm not a hundred percent sure about that. I'm happy to leave it as convers question marks [Mel: Yep.] and see whether we can figure it out. When, what, the green meeting doesn't necessarily have to solve problems as we go. [Mel: Yep.] It's collecting data that we can come back to there.

SNIP
DES and fMRI?

23:57 Mel: Have you ever done, sorry, this is slight sidebar, but have you ever done any, um, y'know, this is well beyond my knowledge, but like MRIs or brain scans of any people that you've worked with?

24:10 RTH: I have done one fMRI study, and it was a very small study. It was inter, interest, it was an interesting study, I think.

24:20 Mel: Did you learn more?

24:22 RTH: I think... Sorry?

24:26 Mel: Did you learn more with the aiding of, y'know, the scans? Like, did it help you understand anything further or differently?

24:39 RTH: I, I guess the answer to that is No. [JBK laughs]

24:45 Mel: Why?

24:45 RTH: And the, the, the reason, the reason for that is that scans at their, at their current level of sophistication (which may be their as best that they ever get), are always the result of averages across many samples. And, and that, you can't really find out about the details of things when you have to average across many samples, I think. So what I, the, the, the kind of thing that I found, which I thought was interesting was, I, I, I found enough to, to be able to say that inner speaking *on demand* [Mel: Mm-hmm.] lights up a different part of the brain than inner speaking when it naturally occurs. So we had in... The sample, I think had five or six people in it, five or six participants in it, and one or two of them (I forget now the details of it), but one or two of them had sort of naturally occurring inner speaking. And so we were putting these people into the scanner and letting them sit there in the scanner for a while, and then taking 'em out and interviewing 'em and putting 'em back in the scanner. So like, like 10 times into the scanner and back. So a big investment of scanner time and whatever. [Mel: Mmm.] But, but there were, and, *and* during some of those things in the scanner, we were telling them, we want you to engage in inner speech. So when the light comes on, say "elephant," or when the light comes on, say "pencil" or whatever. {Mel: Mmm.]

26:10 The advantage of that is that you can time lock those samples easily enough. That's why people give cues when they're in, when they're in the sample, when they're in the scanner. But this, but the particular person that I have in mind also had sort of a lot of times where the random beeps occurred during inner speaking, real natural, inner, inner speaking. And, uh, and what we *found* was that the brain, the port, portions of the brain that lit up on average while inner speaking, naturally occurring, were different from the portraits of the brain that lit up when you said some, *told* somebody say "pencil" or say "elephant" or whatever.

26:10 Russ comments: RE "during inner speaking, real natural, inner, inner speaking"
That is, we beeped participants in the scanner, then brought them out and engaged them in standard DES interviews. We concluded in some of those interviews

that the participant had been innerly speaking at the moment of the beep. We could then average the brain activity across those inner-speaking samples.

26:50 Mel: That's fascinating.

26:53 RTH: And I think that's a totally important finding, but it doesn't say much about inner experience. It says more about *bad studies* of inner experience.

27:02 JBK: [laughs]

27:03 RTH: Mo most, most, most fMRI studies are on-demand studies. Mm. And what, and, uh, and what this study does is it calls that into question.

27:14 Mel: Wow. That's fascinating.

27:19 RTH: On to day 7?

Focusing on sample 7.1

27:21 Mel: Yes. Sorry, I side-barred. [RTH scrolls to day 7] Gosh! A lot of chat there. [JBK: Mm-hmm.]

27:33 RTH: You can't, you can't complain that we didn't take it seriously. [they laugh] [Mel: No, not at all!]

27:37 JBK: [pause as they read sample 7.1] Words present.

27:47 RTH: I'm buying it. [Mel: Yep.]

28:06 RTH: And then there's something about diffuse inner experience.

28:10 JBK: Yeah.

28:11 RTH: Whatever that is.

28:12 Mel: Yeah. What's that mean?

28:14 RTH: Sorry?

28:15 Mel: What does that mean?

28:19 JBK: The way I understand it is the words are clearly present. "What questions do I have?" [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Or like the kind of semantics of them, or the meaning is like diffuse and not clear. Like, it's not like you have any clear questions or, or your mind is clearly set on any one thing. That's, that's how I understand it. [RTH types in the green caption "Words present, diffuse inner experience?"]

28:58 RTH: So this [highlights the phrase “like it’s metaphorically veiled, foggy, or coming from the other room”] is the portion of the description that we’re writing on. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And to my, my reaction to it *now* (which it seems to me was what was the same as it was then, but it probably isn’t. But, uh) is that we didn’t sort, we were *not able* to sort out the natural attitude description from, from the experience. So there was something about the phrase. So it’s *possible* that that that Julian, what Julian just said was right (which is sort of natural-attitude-y from my point of view) and it’s al, but it’s also possible that from Mel’s point of view, doesn’t, doesn’t really know what she’s talking about here. [Mel: Mm.] *How it could be that a phrase could be clear, but I’m not speaking it or whatever* [Mel: Mm-hmm.] *I just don’t know what to say about that, so I’m gonna say it’s veiled or foggy or something.*

28:58 Russ comments: RE “my reaction to it *now*”
Recall that this is a non-standard green meeting, taking place nearly a year after the sampling, when the green meeting is designed to take place within days of the original sampling.

29:48 Mel: Yeah.

29:49 RTH: And I don’t know how to, how to disentangle that. We *are* working backwards. So we’re, we’re getting to Mel as less and less experienced as a DES participant. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

Focusing on sample 7.2

30:19 RTH: [scrolls to sample 7.2. Pause while they read.] Autopilot.

30:20 JBK: Yep. Autopilot

30:23 RTH: And words without semantic meaning?

30:29 JBK: I guess that almost seems like too much, even.

30:34 RTH: Sorry? [Mel: Yeah.]

30:35 JBK: It seems like a shade above nothing. [Mel: I agree.] So words without no semantic meaning seems like the words are present, but they’re....

30:47 Mel: Like, I, I, that feels more just like a fact of reality other than part of my experience to me. Like we know words are coming out of my thumbs and that’s happening, but I don’t, I don’t think that the words are part of my experience.

31:17 RTH: [RTH types the green caption: “Autopilot; words coming out of thumbs with no semantic meaning.”] Like that?

31:22 JBK: Yeah.

31:23 RTH: Or maybe no awareness at all? [He edits caption, inserting “with no awareness,” to read “Autopilot; words coming out of thumbs with no awareness, no semantic meaning.”]

31:27 JBK: Maybe.

31:29 Mel: Yeah.

31:34 JBK: I mean we, we called it *autopilot*, which we usually set for something that was somehow slightly experienced. We also put that between brackets. So it’s kind of hard to tell, but.

31:50 RTH: So maybe what we really should say is nothing. [Inserts “Nothing.” at the beginning of the caption.]

31:53 Mel: Yeah. And then. Yeah, I’m okay with that.

32:06 RTH: [RTH inserts the word “texting” so the caption now reads “Nothing. Autopilot texting; words coming out of thumbs with no awareness, no semantic meaning.”] Like that.

32:07 JBK: And we even discussed this exact thing that I understood it as a nothing. And then you said that was, you said your original, she’s not experiencing anything. Seems categorically too severe. She is not a statue or dead or unconscious or asleep. [laughs]

32:27 Mel: Thank you. [laughs]

32:31 JBK: So like a shade above nothing. Yeah. [laughs] [RTH inserts “A shade of” in the caption, to read “A shade of nothing. Autopilot texting; words coming out of thumbs with no awareness, no semantic meaning.”]

32:35 Mel: So I softened the description. Thank you. She is not a statue [laughs]

32:49 RTH: So the, so this is maybe an, an aside, but the reason that I am, I wanna make sure we write “no semantic meaning” in our green description [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Is that there are a lot of people, probably most people, most psychologists, who think that when words are present, there is a semantic meaning that is present. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] And that’s experiential. And I just don’t think that’s true. And so this is an example of when Mel is meaningfully operating with words, she’s typing, not gibberish, but words that mean something to her at some level and to whoever it is that she’s gonna get. This is skillful word usage, but without any direct experience of it.

33:31 Mel: Yeah. Okay.

33:34 JBK: Could be good to keep track of for that, but

33:37 RTH: Sorry?

33:38 JBK: Could be good to keep track of for those purposes.

33:42 RTH: Yeah.

Focusing on sample 7.3

33:50 [RTH scrolls to sample 7.3, types green caption “Sensory awareness bodily, heavy;”]

34:11 JBK: [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And then the hearing the brother and the mom. But it’s less the main thing. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Chance that we confused context with experience, but it seems like it was present.

34:43 RTH: [appends “hearing slightly” to caption.] We buying that?

34:44 JBK: Yep. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

Focusing on sample 7.4

35:04 RTH: [scrolls to sample 7.4] Well, here’s the target that we were talking about earlier. [Mel: Hmm.] Would *carried along by* the conversation, be just as good as *absorbed* in the conversation?

35:16 Mel: I mean, based what’s written there. It’s, that sounds like a fair thing to say, doesn’t it? This feels like *carried along by*

35:33 RTH: [Highlights “receiving what my sister was saying”] Receiving what my sister was saying. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Sounds like *carried along by*.

35:43 JBK: I think it’s like *carried along*.

36:10 RTH: [Types “carried along by (= absorbed in??) conversation” as the caption.] We buying that?

36:11 JBK: Yep. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

Focusing on sample 7.5

36:26 RTH: [RTH scrolls to sample 7.5; pause; types “Sensory awareness bodily pain” as green caption] Seems pretty straightforward. [Mel: Yep.]

Focusing on sample 7.6

36:37 JBK: [RTH scrolls to sample 7.6; pause] [Mel: Mm-hmm.] The same sensory awareness of pain. [RTH types “Sensory awareness bodily pain”] And then also the moisturizer. Although if it’s more about the action of applying it, that’s sensory awareness or doing, I don’t know.

37:24 RTH: Yeah. I, *doing* is a technical term for me, so I can’t use the doing here.

37:28 JBK: Yeah.

37:30 RTH: But uh. The action. [appends "aware of own action" to green caption] Aware of the action

37:40 Mel: Mm-hmm.

37:45 RTH: That sound reasonable for this.

Improvement across sampling days

37:50 Mel: It's funny, this is day 7 and it already feels like I'm not as good here as later. Like, how many days did we do? 14 or something?

38:00 RTH: [JBK laughs.] Something like that.

38:01 Mel: Yeah. It feels like here is where I'm really starting to feel like, not casting doubt, but like, just that it's, I'm not as good at describing stuff already in 7. That's 7...

38:14 RTH: So I had that re I had that reaction to a, a couple of samples ago and, and this sample here. And I, and I filed a way to myself to say that, that, let's see whether that carry, that's really true. Whether this is a, something about these particular day-7 samples, but, [Mel: Hmm.]

38:33 JBK: Yeah. I wonder about the seeing in the mirror, because if you did experience that, if that was an experience, then that would make this multiple experience, I guess, cuz it's like three different things, which, which isn't so common for you, I think.

38:49 Mel: Yeah. I, I feel like

38:51 JBK: That makes me wonder if you're really like taking in seeing yourself.

38:55 Mel: Correct. I sort of have suspicions that the mirror and the moisturizer part are more facts of life here, rather than things that were truly part of my experience.

39:08 JBK: Yeah.

39:10 Mel: Like I, I think the bodily pain thing is accurate. And then the others I have, I cast a lot of doubt on.

39:16 JBK: By the mirror. I really wonder. Moisturizer. I mean, I could, it's definitely plausible. I mean, DES isn't about what's plausible, but what's actual.

39:27 Mel: Yeah. It just feels

39:28 JBK: Like, like plausible that you're, you can be doing two things, but

- 39:31 Mel: It sort of feels like that is an, it would've actually been an autopilot-y sort of thing. But I've grabbed it, the detail of, oh, well I was doing that, so I must have been experiencing that.
- 39:42 JBK: Maybe.
- 39:45 Mel: But it's just interesting to note like, this is still day 7. Like that's a lot of sampling done! But we're feeling like it didn't, it's not as sharp. That's a lot of hours already done, but it's not there. So it takes a long time, is what I'm saying.
- 40:01 JBK: Right. Also, I was, um, mucking, mucking some of it up.
- 40:08 RTH: I, I think it, I think it's true. It takes a long time.
- 40:10 Mel: Yeah. It's also interesting to see, yeah times where we're Julian, it's like, oh yeah we're all like, oh, our questioning wasn't as good there. Like, so it's on both sides. Where we're like, oh, we weren't as good back then! [JBK laughs]
- 40:21 JBK: [laughs]Yeah.
- 40:22 Mel: Kind of satisfying
- 40:24 RTH: The, the iterative method applies both to the interviewer and to the participant. [Mel: Mmm.] The participant has to learn how to ask answer questions and the interviewers have to learn how to ask 'em. And, and we're all always fighting the, the, uh, natural attitude or whatever. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] On to day 6? [JBK: Yep.] [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

SNIP

Discussing DES

- 43:01 JBK: *Carried along, taking in*, see we even used... taking in
- 43:19 Mel: Yeah. Carried along by conversation. [RTH types green caption: "Carried along by conversation (= taking in = absorbed in??)"] Yeah. So at this point, all your chat is still really about whether the levels of *nothingness*, *carried along by*, whatever it is are even like possible. Like that's the chats we're having here, right?
- 43:47 JBK: Yeah. It was before I, my thinking changed. [Mel laughs] It seems to me like, I was wondering if sometimes you could be so absorbed it just becomes kind of nothingness. [Mel: Mmm.] You're just, you're just in it, but it circles around to being similar. Cuz the way you described it was so different to me. Like they, they haven't experienced it.
- 44:13 RTH: The diff, the difficulty of it is, is really what I've been wrestling with. How to, how to convey that in some informative way? In some instructive way? It goes beyond us. And so if, if I could write a book, how, if I, I've been trying to figure out how to write a book or make a movie or I, I, I think the best that I've been able to do about that is the videos that I've been making. And this process, here, that, that we're in is the best I've

been able to do to, to try to somehow convey how difficult it is. Because Julian and I had substantial battles about this stuff for a long time. [JBK laughs] And, and it's hard to imagine how, how frequently that could take place. And I don't, y'know, it has, it has to, I it has to, you have to have somebody who's, who is highly skilled (as I give myself credit for being) and, but at the same time, patient enough to deal with the, y'know, with people who think they know more than you do and probably don't. And, uh, but that's, but that, that's the human condition in a, in some very important way. And what do you do about that? How does, y'know, that is the heart I think of what, whether DES can ever really be worth doing. Is it possible to convey that somehow? And what do you do about it?

45:57 JBK: If it's a method that can live beyond you and your particular way of doing it? [RTH: Right.] And be transmitted or for just

Can DES exist without Russ?

46:05 RTH: Right. And which is, which is part, which is part of the deal. I think it, I think it *is* possible that DES *cannot possibly* live beyond me. That is, there's something fundamentally Hurlburt-ian about the, about the method. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I don't, I don't think that's true, but I don't know that I have, I don't know that I'm capable of untangling that. [Mel: Mm.] And I don't know what to do about that. It's, that seems like sort of the fundamental thing to try to figure out. And I've been working at trying to figure it out for a long time. [Mel: Mm.] And, uh, but I don't know what to say about it other than the wrestling match is interesting.

46:55 Mel: Well, yeah. And so do you feel like the best that you have come up with thus far is exactly these different videos and journeys that you're putting up on the website now? That show very transparently, different experiences and whatever, and people working it out along the way and that sort of stuff?

47:16 RTH: That is *absolutely* the best that I've been able to do so far. [Mel: Yeah.] Whether it's good enough or not, that's another question. I don't know the answer to that.

47:24 Mel: Yeah. But that's the best that you've come up with.

47:26 RTH: So that is the, that is the best that I've been able to do. [Mel: Mm.] And, but I would, but I would say that at every step of doing it, it's, *there's gotta be something better than this*.

47:35 Mel: Yeah, I know. Yeah.

47:39 RTH: But I've been, I've been putting, y'know, the, the commentary that, that we've been having and the, the argument, if you wanna call 'em that, discussions, debates, whatever, [Mel: Hmm.] that Julian and I mostly have been having through, through this, I, I think are fundamentally important to the process.

48:00 Mel: Mmm. Yeah, I agree.

48:03 RTH: And, and so I've, I've, y'know, obviously been putting *my* energy into it. Julian's been putting *his* energy into it, and Mel has been putting her energy in. So it's, it's the best, it's the best that I've, I've been able to do. And the irony, the irony of it is, I don't know whether it has any value at all, really. It may very well have personal value to me, or to Julian, or to Mel, and maybe not beyond that. In which case, well, maybe that was good enough.

48:40 Mel: You don't believe that though, actually! You do believe that it has value beyond yourself.

49:04 RTH: [long pause] If you're asking a St. Peter question, [JBK laughs], like if I were at the, at the door, at the door and St. Peter says, "y'know, this is, you gotta answer this question one way or the other, and, and that you give the correct answer is the key to the up, up or down here." I think, I think that it has value other than beyond me, or beyond us. But I'm, I would be eager to find out what St. Peter thinks about that! [Mel and JBK laugh] I mean, I don't, I, I would give, that was the best answer that I can give you. But I don't, I don't have any reason to believe that, that I would end up with the harps rather than with the coals. [they laugh]

49:59 Mel: That was a very *Russ* response to that! [JBK laughs] You have such, um, respect for the truth. [laughs]

50:08 JBK: Yeah.

50:10 RTH: It's an interesting process.

50:12 Mel: Your words carry weight and you respect the weights, they, the weight they carry.

50:20 RTH: Onward. Mm-hmm

50:23 JBK: I have a question about your patience. If you, [Mel laughs] if, if you're a patient person, if you've been that way, or is, does it come out of doing DES? Cuz y'know, a lot of the questions, y'know, you're gonna ask the chair thing if they're experiencing the chair. Like, I don't know if I would've the patience to deal with my [laughs] shenanigans during the Mel interviewing. So is that a learned thing?

50:51 RTH: So I, I don't think I can answer the question whether it's a learned thing, because I've been doing it for so long. So it's, y'know, it's, it's, it is part of me for as long as I can remember. Let's put it that way.

51:04 I do think it comes... I don't... [pause] I don't see myself as *patient*. I see myself as trying to get it right. [JBK: I mean patient [inaudible, but RTH continues] Whatever it is. It's, and I, that's a characterological deal, I guess, prob probably for me for a long time. I'm, I'm interested in trying to get it right. And that *requires* patience, it seems to me. But it's not because, it's not because I'm a patient person. It's because I'm interested in trying to do it right the right way. And if, and if you try to do it the right way, you end up *having to be* patient. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So it's more of the result than the cause. [JBK: Yeah.]

- 51:55 *And, and I think the whole thing is so complicated that I, I, I, I'm not just saying, y'know, I don't know whether I'm on the right track or not. I, if St. Peter were to have asked, "do you think that you've been on the right track for the whole time?" I would've had to have, say, I don't know the answer to that question.*
- 52:18 JBK: I may be a bit more optimistic than you, but
- 52:20 Mel: [laughs] Yes, I think so too. I think we all are. And, but, but we've had this discussion with Russ before that... And I think this is part of you or, or, um, not being able to untangle yourself from the work at points and things like that, that you do this thing, Russ, where you like, not diminish yourself, but you, um, it's, it's like you... it's a very Australian trait actually. You sort of like over-humble yourself, [laughs] like, y'know, you go, oh, well, I'm not quite sure. Whereas everyone else is more sure than you, that it's really meaningful. Like it's a, it's a really interesting trait that you have about your work.
- 53:09 RTH: [pause] I, I think I know what you're talking about. [JBK laughs]
- 53:11 Mel: Yeah. But I also, I think maybe that's, y'know, maybe actually when I have bodies of work in terms of documentaries I've made and stuff, I'm perhaps in like that, y'know, where maybe when it's just your own work, you are a bit more like, *yeah, I'm pretty sure it's good, or I'm pretty sure it's important.* But, uh, yeah, I'm just trying my best, whereas everyone else can watch it more objectively or whatever, y'know, maybe we often just are not our harshest critic, but there's some *thing* there.
- 53:44 RTH: Yeah. I don't, I don't think, I don't think there's any evidence, I don't think there's any *hard* evidence that the method will outlive the method, the method, as I see it, will outlive me. I don't think there's any evidence about that.

Inner experience and truth

- 53:44 Julian comments: I wonder if experience has its own pull towards truth. Yes, Russ has certain ways of doing DES that are particular to him. But he's also been guided throughout his career consistently by moments of inner experience themselves. Paying attention to *that* guides the search. So if certain Russ-ian ways of doing it are lost, in the long run inner experience will pull its own study in a certain direction.
- That's assuming this general kind of research continues. And I'd also expect researchers to get on the wrong track and stumble around in the dark for a bit before getting things right. This is being hopeful that reality has a certain pull that in the long run can outweigh the proclivities, egos, and drives of individual researchers. I'm not at all sure of this.
- Russ comments: RE "But he's also been guided throughout his career consistently by moments of inner experience themselves."
- I think that is fundamentally not true. I would say: "But he's also been guided throughout his career consistently by *trying to say something genuinely true, important, and personal about individual people.*" That interest in true-important-personal-about-individuals has *led me* to an interest in moments of inner experience.

I'm *not* interested in conscientiousness or any other personality variable because fundamentally personality statements are *not* characterizations of individuals—they are external inferences and/or external comparisons of individuals to norm groups. I'm *not* interested in neuroscience statements about brain-region-activation because those are all averages across individuals. I'm *not* interested in cognitive theories because those are putative statements about all people. I'm not interested in physical characteristics (height, cardiac output at rest, location) because, while important, they are not personal. *What is left* (for me) is an interest in moments of inner experience.

Said another way: In this study I would like to apprehend, and then say, something genuinely, importantly, personally true *about Mel*. I do *not* wish to provide some generality about some class that Mel belongs to—women, documentary artists, Australians, whatever. What is the genuinely true/important/personal-est thing that I could say about Mel? There may be other ways of answering that question, but for me the answer is: I should describe how *Mel*, as an individual, constructs / apprehends / experiences the world that she creates and occupies, happily limiting myself to what I can be confident about and avoiding my own speculations and proclivities. (And then the same with Kerry, on Kerry's own terms, *not* whether Kerry is the same or different from Mel, etc.)

The *result* of all that is a consistent interest in pristine inner experience, which, because experience fluctuates, necessitates an interest experience-at-moments, and the consequence of all that is DES.

RE "I wonder if experience has its own pull towards truth"

I think the pull is at least as importantly in the other direction: *truth* has its own pull towards *experience*.

- 53:56 Mel: Hmm.
- 54:00 RTH: Well, and I don't, y'know, and, and what, what I guess I think is I haven't, I haven't gotten to the place where I've seen a bunch of people or enough people who I, who I've thought were really good at it. [Mel: Hmm.]
- 54:12 JBK: Hmm.
- 54:13 RTH: And that's, y'know, that's quite likely my personal failing. But I don't, but the fact that, but that's just the way it is.
- 54:26 Mel: Or just that it's really, really, excuse my language, but fucking hard! [RTH: Right.] So I think [JBK: hmm.] that's the challenge. And again, why we're all here of like, is there, how is the best way, what's the best way to get everyone to have these discussions that we're having about all of these? Is there a better way? Is DES the best way? What's the best way to educate people about DES? If so, like, it's that bit of like, what is the best way to just get people to then reflecting on the stuff that this leads us to reflect on?
- 54:55 RTH: Right. [Mel: Yeah.] That's the challenge.
- 55:01 Mel: Correct.

55:03 JBK: I finally started editing a video about [laughs] DES today, so [Mel: Cool.] we can see if that leads to anything. [Mel: Amazing.] I started with Kerry just, well, we haven't finished this analysis and Kerry's a bit easier, I think, to introduce people to [laughs] and [Mel: Yeah, I agree.] But anyways, onwards?

55:24 RTH: Onwards.

SNIP

Focusing on sample 4.1

1:02:04 Mel: This is autopilot.

1:02:08 JBK: [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I'm fine with the vibe as a code. [laughs]

1:02:17 Mel: Yeah. Like what do you do there?

1:02:26 JBK: It's like a feeling that's for like, less, less strong. Like, you don't wanna call it a feeling. Is that just a light feeling, or is it worth talking about vibes, or states, or whatever?

1:02:42 Mel: [laughs] Some of the language that has come out to describe some of my stuff. Jesus! [JBK laughs]

1:02:50 RTH: So from, from my point of view, this sample is a dilemma between, is Mel actually experiencing a lightly positive happy state? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Or is she *in* lightly positive, happy state and experiencing nothing?

1:03:20 Mel: Mm. I don't know.

1:03:23 RTH: And I don't think, I don't think we were competent to make that distinction on day 4. [Mel: Yeah.] And I don't think we're competent to make that distinction now, because we only had one ch you only got one chance, basically. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] [RTH types a green caption: "Vibe??? Nothing??? [we were not competent]"]

1:04:10 Mel: Yeah. I mean, that's just a really challenging thing to try and [dog hops on her] Oh, hello. Um, a challenging thing to work out in general, cuz like the distinction is, uh, like I understand the distinction, but I'm not sure if you could ever really work that out anyway. Like, that's hard.

1:04:36 RTH: So I agree with that. What, what I think I, what I think *can* be worked out is how definitive you wanna be about it. [Mel: Yeah.] I think we can, we can become, we can, we can *get* to a position where we could say, *yeah, I was happy, but I wasn't particularly aimed at being happy. But I wasn't also aimed at not being happy. There was, there's something positively happy vibe-y, whatever, maybe. Whether that's an experience or maybe not, I don't know.* I think that is as good a description as you can get, which is a *lot* different from saying *Mel was in a positive, happy vibe state.*

1:04:36 Russ comments: The distinction RTH is making here is between fidelity and validity. The realm of fidelity is about shades of grey (or color)—maybe a little or this or maybe a little of that. The realm of validity is about *Yes or No*, either/or.

1:05:23 Mel: Mm.

1:05:25 RTH: Because I think that, well, it's a natural attitude thing. I think. [JBK: Mm.] It's, it's too definitive without being clear enough and distinguishing between what's experienced and what is a fact of the universe.

1:05:47 JBK: Yeah.

1:05:51 RTH: Onward? Hmm. I think there's gonna be more of it. [JBK laughs] [RTH scrolls to sample 4.2]

Focusing on sample 4.2

1:05:56 JBK: Mm-hmm. Another *nothing* one. *Nothing, autopilot*. [inaudible] [RTH types green caption: "Nothing = autopilot"]

1:06:08 Mel: Because in these early beeps, yeah. We're, I mean, it's 4. It's still not that early. But yeah, we're just trying to establish, wait, is this something I, is the nothingness a real phenomenon that I experience? And then we've worked out how to perhaps all articulate and understand it better. But it's like, here we're just even trying to work out if that's, it's like, wait a second, what's happening?

1:06:33 RTH: Well, that's why in my, in my head, *nothing* always involves *or nearly nothing*. I just don't think that's possible to, and the philosophers, the philosophers use the example of money, and they can say, "well, y'know, if you've got a penny, then you can't say you've got *no* money." [JBK laughs] And I can say, You can.... Yeah. You're right about that. You can't, can't say you got no money. But in the real world, it doesn't matter! If all you got's a penny, you're in trouble. [JBK laughs]

1:07:12 RTH: The real-world distinction between nothing and only a penny is not.... [scrolls away]

SNIP

Bracketing the natural attitude

1:09:07 Mel: Hmm.

1:09:08 JBK: [RTH copies and pastes the green caption from sample 4.4 in sample 4.5.] Copy / paste. [laughs] But this was interesting that here *you* were talking. [Mel: Mm.] You still described it as being the same. [Mel: Mm.] This was the first time that came up, I think.

1:09:25 Mel: Yep. And

1:09:27 JBK: It surprised me.

1:09:28 Mel: And I agree. It is interesting.

1:09:38 RTH: It is interesting. And the, and it comes, it's the interesting, it... It is in its own way, a uh, it brings a focus on the natural attitude, I guess I would say. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Cuz the natural attitude says, *if I'm talking, I've gotta know what I'm talking about*. And that is not experientially true. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I can be talking and saying intelligibly what it is that I mean to say, and that those words can be rolling out and I don't have to know. I can, I can greet them in the same way as I would greet the words that somebody else was speaking to me, even though they're coming outta my own mouth.

1:10:26 Mel: Which is fascinating. It does sound sort of impossible.

1:10:32 RTH: It only sounds impossible in the natural attitude. [Mel: Yeah.] When you, when you recognize that the, that the Mel is however many billions of neurons (I don't know the number) with however many trillions (I don't know that number either) of, of, uh, synapses, there's not *one* word processor in there. It's, there's a very complex word processor. And she can, she can be spitting out words in a lot of different ways.

1:11:08 Mel: Yeah. It's sort of crazy. Like, it's, it's mind blowing. So I understand Julian, why you're here like, Wait!?! What!?!

1:11:15 JBK: [laughs] [laughs]

1:11:16 RTH: It's crazy from the natural attitude.

1:11:18 Mel: Yeah.

Focusing on sample 5.1

1:11:31 JBK: [RTH scrolls a long way, passing a lot of conversation] See, we had to talk about it. [Mel laughs]

1:11:36 RTH: We had to talk about something.

1:11:39 JBK: [laughs] All right.

1:11:45 RTH: So that was day 4. We might make it to the end here!

1:11:50 JBK: Wait, did we skip day 5?

1:11:52 RTH: Did we?

1:11:54 JBK: Did we do this tote bag sample? I don't remember doing that.

1:11:59 Mel: No. We've skipped day 5.

1:12:00 RTH: No, we didn't do it. So we probably skipped day 5.

1:12:03 JBK: Okay. [RTH scrolls to sample 5.1. They pause to read]

1:12:15 Mel: Just so many facts that don't need to be there.

1:12:20 RTH: Sorry.

1:12:21 Mel: It's just interesting seeing the, like descriptions or like, the way that I was doing DES back in here, because there's like so many facts of life that I am just like, these don't matter. Like all of them. That's context. Okay. Who cares? Like, [JBK laughs] what it is here is just that I was carried along by a photo of my tote bag.

1:12:42 JBK: You like the tote bag.

1:12:45 Mel: Ugh, my dog is having a freakout. [Mel gets up to attend to her dog.]

1:12:48 RTH: So the question would be is *admiring* and *carried along by* the same thing.

1:12:56 JBK: Didn't say that's, that's true. Didn't you say *taking in* for like, the picture before, since it was static?

1:13:05 Mel: [dog barks] Shh! Stop.

1:13:06 JBK: [inaudible] Coco! [laughs]

1:13:09 Mel: So many dogs. Oh yeah. Coco, you've heard about this dog.

1:13:12 JBK: Yeah. Famous [laughs] It's cute.

1:13:18 RTH: So I think we've agreed that *carried along by* and *taking in* are more or less the same thing when applied to an unfolding situation or a static situation. And the question is whether this admiring is something that is more than just *taking in*.

1:13:35 JBK: Yeah. I wonder if there's a,

1:13:40 Mel: Yeah, I would want to see the description a little bit more again, to know how, um, accurate "admiring" is. Like if there is enough to warrant it being something more than just *carried along by*.

1:14:03 JBK: Like, is it in the realms of feelings? Like thinking it's nice, but that seems much too strong. Is it in the realm of sensory awareness? Like, but that seems too detailed. So,

1:14:19 Mel: But, and also I'm conscious of whether admiring is just the vocabulary I've used to, [JBK: Yeah.] y'know, like I'm, I'm looking at the picture, but I've used the word "admiring," but is there like admiring as part of the experience? Or am I, y'know, have I just used a word as opposed to I'm looking at the picture of the type bag.

1:14:43 RTH: That's what makes life totally interesting. And word, words don't have (almost, almost no words probably have, have absolute meanings) and "admiring" is one of those words that's ambiguous.

1:15:03 Mel: Mm.

1:15:09 RTH: My guess, my guess is that we weren't capable at this, at this time to distinguish between those things.

1:15:21 Mel: I agree. I agree. I think that's the best we can do here. Yeah.

SNIP

Focusing on sample 3.5

1:32:39 Mel: [RTH has scrolled to sample 3.5] Again, that's the same thing.

1:33:02 RTH: So what are we gonna say about this? *Nothing?*

1:33:05 Mel: Yeah. I, I think this is nothing / autopilot again, is it?

1:33:08 RTH: So we tried to make a distinction here,

1:33:20 JBK: Russ, is it premature to talk about this, but sometimes I think I've seen when you do the, the coding with the spreadsheet, you have like numbers for nothingness, like 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and then you put stuff somewhere along the continuum. Is that, or is it too early to talk about that process?

1:33:44 RTH: So I think I, I think we could do that. I don't, I can't remember ever doing it actually. I might very well have done it, but I don't actually remember doing it. If I, if I thought, what I would say is: if I thought it was possibly productive to see whether we could distinguish between shades of nothingness, then I would have no objection to having us rate 'em on a, on a scale of one to five or whatever. Personally, I don't think it's productive, and I think that exercise would be more frustration than it's worth. But [JBK laughs], but it, it's a democratic operation in a way. And, uh,

1:33:44 Julian comments: I'm talking about the rectification for another of Russ's DES participants, Sadie, which you can find here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmgzUj-gj7U&t=169s&ab_channel=RussHurlburt
There's a 5 point scale for nothingness. This is different from Mel's nothingness though. For Sadie, the continuum ranges from differentiated thought with clear content, to more diffuse thought, to pure nothingness. My idea of a continuum for Mel was from deep absorption to pure nothingness. We will continue to debate if this kind of a continuum is useful for understanding Mel's experience.

1:34:28 Mel: No, I, I I tend to agree. I think it'd be more frustration than it's worth.

1:34:33 JBK: Yeah.

1:34:33 RTH: I, I just think it's not possible. That there, y'know, we could, we could rate 1 to, we could rate 1 to 5, but there is absolutely no reason to believe that Mel's 4 is gonna be the same as my 4 is gonna be the same as Julian's 4.

1:34:46 Mel: Yeah.

1:34:47 JBK: Yeah. And,

1:34:47 RTH: And I, dressing it up with numbers, it's still a big... So this is slightly more than nothing.

1:35:02 JBK: Mm. Autopilot. [RTH types green caption: "Slightly more than nothing = autopilot"]

1:35:10 Mel: Mm-hmm.

1:35:12 RTH: [the typing was originally in bold] Didn't really mean to shout here! [Mel and Julian laugh]

1:35:17 RTH: So that's day three.

1:35:19 JBK: Mm-hmm.

SNIP

1:35:43 RTH: So it does, it does this, this is relevant to the previous conversation we have. This *was* a very complicated set of interactions that we had going on here. And, uh, in the sense that this is the, this is the first time that Julian and I sampled together, I think. Is that right Julian? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] [JBK: Yeah] Mel was, Mel was a guinea pig for that. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] [JBK: Mm-hmm.] So there was a lot of shit going on here, [JBK laughs] trying to, trying to figure out who was doing, who, who, what people meant that how to and how to mean it, and how to say it and how not to say it or whatever. There, there was a lot of stuff going on.

1:36:28 Mel: A hundred percent. Yeah. You got a particularly challenging case to kick you off, Julian. [JBK laughs] My shades of nothingness.

1:36:36 JBK: [laughs] So did, Russ, am I the only person you've done DES with who hasn't learned it from you directly? I mean, I read your books and stuff.

1:36:47 RTH: I, we've had, we had one graduate student, I don't remember whether we actually ever wrote this up, but we had a, we had a graduate student who came into the lab and we gave her some instructions, some things to read, and then had her do what she thought was DES interviews on the way in, so [Mel: Mm-hmm.] before she had any personal interactions with us.

1:37:13 JBK: [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

- 1:37:14 RTH: I don't remember actually what, whether we ever made what we ever made of that. But you, you were more invested in it than she, than anybody else, I guess for sure, More invested in the study of inner experience. Mel doesn't know all of that story probably, but, uh, Julian had sent me stuff that he had done and I'd been critical of it, and [JBK laughs] thought he would go away, but he didn't. [JBK laughs] [Mel laughs]
- 1:37:50 Mel: So Yeah.
- 1:37:51 JBK: Withstand the criticism. [laughs]
- 1:37:54 RTH: So we, there, there was a fair amount of history before. And then, then I then... Did, did you sample, Julian?
- 1:38:07 JBK: I did.
- 1:38:07 RTH: Did you become a subject?
- 1:38:09 JBK: Oh, no. I'm potentially curious, but I don't know. I feel like maybe you could learn more by looking at other people instead of inward. [laughs] Yeah.

Russ's teaching of DES

- 1:38:25 Mel: What are the, sorry, this is a sidebar, but, um, your students, Russ, like, are they, what are the courses that they take that are DES-related.
- 1:38:36 RTH: There aren't any.
- 1:38:38 Mel: Well, so, but how do they learn this?
- 1:38:43 RTH: From the kind of things that we're doing right here. Julian. Julian is what my student.. What we're doing with Julian is what, what we would do with my students. When I have a lab, then, then there would be more, more group interviews and more conversation back and forth. Like, this is what I thought, this is what I thought. But it's all trial and error.
- 1:39:10 Mel: But as in that they get the opportunity to do that as part of their psychology bachelor studies that University of Nevada. Like what, how, what's the...?
- 1:39:22 RTH: So that's a, that's it's a very complicated thing. And, uh, so they're in a PhD program. I almost all, I think probably all of my students are in a PhD program in clinical psychology. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And they get, uh, standard training in clinical psychology, but not from me. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And then their dissertation work or their master's thesis work or their research work is with me [Mel: Mm-hmm.]
- 1:39:48 RTH: And, and I am very critical of the work, of what they're learning in their clinical psychology world. [Mel: Yep.] And so that is a, something of a difficult thing for, for them. And, and y'know, I'm, so, I'm a lone ranger in the department, so I don't have a... I used to, I used to have an, another faculty member [as a research colleague], but

he went on to become the Provost of the university. And so he doesn't do this kind of work with me anymore. But we used to have a, we used to have a joint, joint operation, let's put it that way.

1:40:33 Mel: Yeah. Interesting.

1:40:35 RTH: But, but I, I have not, I have not taught courses on descriptive experience sampling. [Mel: Umm.] I teach statistics. There's some irony there. But, uh,

1:40:55 Mel: Correct.

1:40:57 RTH: I don't know whether I've told you that story, but, uh, I, when I, when I started this work back in the day in 19... 50, 50 years ago, anybody who was interested in something like consciousness was well out in the fringe of psychology [Mel: Umm.] and, and thought to be a soft, soft-minded person. And, and I, being in, having been trained as an engineer, they, the pe the university here, the department here wanted me to teach graduate-level statistics, [JBK laughs], which I said, okay, I'll do that. And I, I hated it because this, nobody, none of my students knew anything coming in that I thought was valuable. And it wasn't just that they were coming from UNLV, they were coming from around the country and they had not, had not mastered sophomore-level statistics. And I was supposed to be trying to teach 'em graduate level statistics. And that was a dilemma, which I thought was my fault, but, but I eventually decided it wasn't.

1:42:00 And so I said to the department, basically, "let me not teach this anymore. Let me teach *undergraduate* statistics for a while and see whether there's possible to teach something in a way that people can remember it a year later." And, and out of that, I developed what I thought was a better way of teaching / learning under learning statistics. And I eventually wrote a book about it and which is now a textbook in its sixth edition. And so I, but the, but the, when I, when I went to sell the book to the publisher in the first, in the first place, I told the editor, I told the editor my primary interest, I'm, I think this is a good way to teach it, but my primary interest is, is because I want to be thought of as not soft-minded by the psychology world. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So if I, I published statistics textbook author, then they can't say, well, he just doesn't, he's afraid of statistics or whatever. [Mel laughs] And she said, "I never had somebody try to sell me a book by telling me it wasn't their primary interest." [Mel and JBK laugh] But she, she signed it. But at any rate, I teach, I teach statistics, and, uh, use that as a way of paying the bills, basically, of being productive member of the department.

1:43:14 Mel: So fascinating.

1:43:17 JBK: But it's crazy that, um, I don't know, they don't give you a seminar on DES and consciousness. [Mel: Yeah!]

1:43:24 RTH: Like I could the, I, I, I could. But I never have. And, and I, and sometimes I criticize myself for that. I don't want to teach a course in consciousness science, cuz I've never, I've never considered myself a consciousness scientist. I still don't consider myself a consciousness scientist. [Mel: Why?] The, the, the world of consciousness science, I

think, is far too theoretical. Consciousness scientists think they can do without DES and I don't think that's possible. I don't think, I don't see how it is possible to be a consciousness scientist without at least trying to describe what people, people's consciousness, direct directly experience stuff is. But consciousness doesn't think that's important.

1:44:16 JBK: Not even just not DES just no method. Right. Like most of them just are like, well, I always think in words [laughs]

1:44:16 Julian comments: Well, I guess that's a method. Russ calls it "armchair introspection" and has extensively talked about it including its problems (for example, p. 54 of his 2006 book with Christopher Heavey, *Exploring Inner Experience*).

1:44:26 RTH: Exactly. So I'm, so to teach a course in consciousness science, I would have to teach a lot of stuff that I think is just flat bullshit.

1:44:36 Mel: Right.

1:44:36 RTH: And that, and that's hard for me. And so it's easier for me to teach statistics. [JBK laughs] But arguably I should have taken that on more aggressively across my career, taught more, forced myself to teach why I thought consciousness science was on the wrong track, whatever. But I didn't.

1:45:02 Mel: Yeah. It's just so fascinating that there's no way to be able to teach what we've been doing as some sort of yeah, seminar. Exactly.

1:45:12 RTH: I I, I shouldn't say I never did it. I, I actually did it once or a couple times actually. And I had, I had students sample and then talk amongst themselves and, well, not amongst our ourselves, but it was basically, it was basically this kind of stuff with a few more people around him and at the undergraduate level.

1:45:34 Mel: At undergraduate level. Interesting. And was it worthwhile?

1:45:41 RTH: I didn't do it again. So I guess I didn't think it was. [JBK laughs] I guess I didn't think it was of total value.

1:45:50 JBK: They taught some DES where I went to university, well, I did an exchange semester in Ljubljana Slovenia, and they taught DES, but they were [laughs], they were all kind of practitioners of this other method, microphenomenology, which there was kind of a big debate, y'know, between the two camps. But it, it wasn't, it wasn't actually DES the way they taught it. But we did sample each other and do the beeps and talk about that.

1:45:50 Julian comments: I did really enjoy this class and thought it was well done. Except that the DES was not real DES. I had read more about it than those teaching the class, so sometimes gave corrections or insight. We were put in pairs to beep and interview each other.

I at least got some more experience DES-ing. I interviewed a guy who had a lot of sensory awareness. Though looking back at the samples I think there are huge problems with confusing context and experience. We didn't have much guidance for the DES-ing so I was going off my own knowledge. I can't say how the other pairs of DES-ers did.

There was also a day where there was a beep (maybe a gong?) during a class and one student volunteered to talk about her experience during this beep while the prof interviewed. The interview would have made Russ die and then turn over in his grave. I wasn't great at interviewing then, but even I knew there was a bunch wrong with it. I mostly held my tongue because I didn't want to develop a reputation as too much of a know-it-all.

We also did some micro-phenomenology interviews in class. And we compared methods. Even though the profs had their preferences, they made a decent attempt of weighing pros and cons of each.

I did like it because out of all the classes I took in university, it was maybe the most empirical—go out and do some kind of research. The problem is that actually learning DES takes a huge amount of time, effort, and guidance. It's too much for one class, beyond just giving a taste. I think serious study of experience ultimately deserves its own research track.

1:46:28 RTH: What the best way, what the best way to have proceeded, I don't, I don't know the answer to that. I, I have done what I have done.

1:46:37 JBK: But you landed in a Booker-prize-winning novel! [laughs]

1:46:37 Russ comments: JBK refers to the 2023 novel *The wren, the wren* by Ann Enright; the first four pages are a description my DES work.

1:46:42 RTH: Not, not everybody can say that! That's right. That's

1:46:45 JBK: True. Yeah.

1:46:47 RTH: I don't, I, I don't think that novel actually won the Booker prize. I think the, [JBK: Oh really?] I think the, one of her previous novels won the Booker prize.

1:46:55 JBK: Oh, okay.

1:46:57 RTH: But I don't think this one

1:46:59 Mel: Close enough!

1:46:59 RTH: People were probably scared off by that [laughs] open opening part. [JBK laughs] You read the reviews, they say, "I liked the whole book except the first part!"

DES and microphenomenology

- 1:47:09 Mel: She lost me in the first four pages! [laughs] Something about nothingness or something. Wait, what was that other word that you said before, Julian? Mi, microphenology”
- 1:47:19 JBK: Microphenomenology.
- 1:47:20 Mel: What’s that?
- 1:47:21 JBK: It’s another method by looking at consciousness, but it’s not as rigorous. There are no beeps. And you can ask about someone’s experience of like 10 years ago. Like, it could be like, oh, when you solved that math problem 10 years ago, what was going on in your mind? And then people make up stuff. [laughs]
- 1:47:43 Mel: How on earth could I remember that? I don’t know!
- 1:47:45 JBK: [laughs]Yeah.
- 1:47:48 RTH: Well, in their, in their defense, they’ve got some methods, some method behind it. But, but what I would, what I would say is when, when Julian asks, asks questions, which would say, “well, if I knew about the movie, would I know more about your experience?” That’s the issue that drives microphen, microphenomenology. So their goal is to try to figure out what there is that goes beyond Mel’s direct experience that might *contribute to* her direct experience [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And they think they can make, they think they can make it do it. And, and, and the answer to your question about how they, how they can do it, Mel, is they have, they have them relive it. So it happened 10, the event happened 10 years ago, but now we want you to bring that back into mind and we’ll, and experience it again. And then we’ll, we’ll bring it back to mine and experience it again; and bring it back in mine and experience it again. I have argued that it’s, there’s no experiencing again involved [Mel: Um hmm.] and, uh, but, but that doesn’t mean that there, that there isn’t something important that they could learn in that regard. And I have never said, I don’t think, that, that there is nothing of value of microphenomenology, but I don’t think they don’t, I don’t think they do what they say they do. It might be valuable. [Mel: Hmm.]
- 1:49:11 But it is, that, that kind of thing is a dilemma to me. Is, is it, would it be better for me to criticize people, which I have done with microphenomenology? Or would it be better for me just to go straight ahead and try to do DES as best I can do it? [Mel: Yeah.] And I don’t know, I don’t, I have chosen the latter, but I don’t know that that was the best thing to, best way to do it.
- 1:49:11 Russ comments: My critique of microphenomenology (there called “Petitmengin’s interview method” or PIM) is in Hurlburt, R. T. & Akhter, S. A. (2006). The Descriptive Experience Sampling method. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 5, 271-301.
In a nutshell, microphenomenology holds that it is possible to bring things that are just outside direct experience (pre-reflective phenomena) into consciousness, and in so doing can discover important and heretofore unknown aspects of consciousness. It does that by “re-enacting” events—returning again and again to an experience; those repetitions allow the uncovering of pre-reflective aspects.
Microphenomenology: Bring what is not experienced into experience.

DES: Bring what was actually directly experienced into memory.

Julian comments: Pre-reflective is a loose term and I've seen it used in a lot of ways.
Ex:

—*Something that's in experience but not remembered before the interview.* In this case you could say the same of much of DES experience. Participants often know they don't have this type of experience before going through the beeping (like unsymbolized thinking, for many).

—*Experience that is slight, nebulous, diffuse, hard to pin down.* Stuff like Mel feeling a slight breeze on her leg could be called pre-reflective. Pre-reflective is the 2% of experience that DES often says—well maybe that's in there but it's pretty far down in the weeds. Micro-phenomenology amplifies this so there are risks.

—*Stuff that is outside of direct experience but contributes to consciousness somehow.* This is what you're talking about, Russ. It's what DES tries really hard to avoid. And there are dangers. Researcher theories could get in the way of experience. For example, there's some research coming out of micro-phenomenology that all feelings are felt in the body [for instance Vásquez-Rosati's 2017 paper: Body awareness to recognize feelings]. DES research doesn't agree.

- 1:49:33 JBK: I suppose it should, I can bring this up now. I wanted to ask you, Russ, at the end, but maybe interesting to you too, Mel, but I'm, I'm doing some more DES sampling these days with a friend I studied with in Slovenia, or in my studies, and she did microphen, but she's been interested in both methods. She's very open-minded, and she reached out to me and wanted to do DES sampling. Um, she might use it in her research. But yeah, I was pretty impromptu, but we worked out the beeper thing with her phone and we did one day and we're planning to do it again. But yeah, I'm, I'm wondering, is it a good idea for me to do it solo or, or do you always do it with a co-investigator, Russ? And then, yeah, maybe even if you or one of your students or Mel or someone is interested in it, co-investigate.
- 1:50:36 RTH: So I think co investigation is usually a good idea. I don't always do co investigation. I would say 90% of the time I probably do. But most of the time I'm doing it with a student. And part of the, part of the value is training of the student.
- 1:50:50 JBK: Mm-hmm. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]
- 1:50:51 RTH: But also part of the value is keeping me honest. [Mel: Mmm.] So it's,
- 1:50:56 JBK: So it's possible...
- 1:50:57 RTH: We can have, we can have conversations that I, where I say, this is what I think, and, and the *best outcome* of that is for somebody else to say, *no, I don't think that's right*. And then we can have a conversation like, like, like we have had here.
- 1:51:14 JBK: Like I say, it's, it is very difficult with her, cuz she's done a lot of microphen stuff, [Mel: Hmm.] and a very, like what you were saying about microphen, looks for the very slight, or on the edge things, we call it pre reflective things. So everything that in DES

we might say, *well, we don't really know if that's there or not*. So, y'know, let's leave that for now. But yeah, it's, it's, it's a challenge. It's very, very difficult for me.

1:51:42 RTH: That would, that would be a challenging situation. [Mel: Interesting.]

1:51:47 JBK: So she's, she's resistant to using the in-ear beeper, and I've said some reasons why it's important, why you think it's important. But she thinks it's distracting her from, y'know, too distracting. So in our next session, I've said, well maybe let's do half with it in the ear and half without, and then we can see and compare. So that's, that's how I'm going about it. But yeah, how would you approach that if someone just really doesn't want to do the thing in the ear and says, why can't just set an alarm and have it play through my phone?

1:52:32 RTH: Well, I don't how, how I would handle this differently, but I would, what I would notice is that *almost everybody thinks they don't have to do it right*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] [JBK: Mm-hmm.] They want people, people think that they can get away with something else and it doesn't really matter. And how the fuck would they know?!? [JBK laughs] But, but, but even it, y'know, when I, when I talk about DES to, to people around the world or whatever, the most people, most people are say, well, this would be a *faster way to do it, more streamlined way to do it*. And hardly anybody says, *well, how can we do it even better than that?* [Mel: Hmm.] And that, I just, I don't understand that. Maybe, maybe if DES were a totally established method and we decided, we decided this was as good as it can be done, *then* it would be time to come along and say, well, we can dismantle this and say, well, we can take away this piece of it and we can take away that piece of it and we can still end up with something good. [Mel: Hmm.] But you can't, that isn't the, that isn't the mindset. The mindset is, I just wanna do something easier first. And that's gonna, that'll, that'll be good enough. I just don't think it's true.

1:53:52 So shall we press on here and get the...

1:53:52 Julian comments: The issue is my friend is not just concerned about being faster, easier, more streamlined. She thinks doing it without the earpiece will let her better access her experience. She thinks the earpiece adds to a barrier between herself and the world. She told me after the first sampling day that the earpiece bothered and distracted her. I tried to turn it to the individual samples and ask if the earpiece interfered at that moment. In none of the samples were the earpiece or thoughts about it in her direct experience.

I came up with the half *with* earpiece, half *without* thinking: a) to take her concerns seriously; b) to see if going sample by sample could help compare; and c) because Russ came to the conclusion of the necessity of the earpiece but I thought making my own comparisons could help my own understanding. I worry that risks of this could be we each try to reify our theories—on her side that the earpiece doesn't matter; on my side that it matters.

Russ comments: I think Julian's procedure is good, from the perspective that everything in DES is iterative. I've had quite a few people quibble in a variety of ways about the method, and I generally encourage them to do it my way, and the generally don't do it, anyway. But in nearly all of those cases, their failure to wear the earphone

makes something about the process problematic in a way that even they can see. Usually it has to do with timing: they have difficulty answering questions such as *Exactly when in that series did the beep occur?* Then I can point out why such distinctions are important, and why it might be easier to answer such questions if they wore the earphone.

But I happily accept that the DES process, in all its details, doesn't work for everyone.

1:53:54 JBK: Let's go on. Yeah. [Mel: Okay.][RTH scrolls to sample 2.1]

Focusing on sample 2.1

1:54:16 JBK: It seems a bit different than autopilot. There's some kind of like beginnings of the thought process and, uh, it's, it was more than we were able to articulate in some other examples. But then again, it's the very early days, so it's hard to tell. [Mel: Umm.]

1:54:39 RTH: So that's the dilemma. And, and I would say in this, you might find this valuable, Julian: that the, if the, if the choice is between saying that *we know what's going on here* and saying that *we don't know what's going on here*, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] *almost always* it's better to say, *I don't know what's going on here*. [Mel: Mm.] I think that, I think that's might be generally true *because* if we say there's nothing, we don't, we don't really know what's going on here, and then we sample again, we can have the possibility of discovering what's there. But if we say at the outset, *I know what's going on here and that, and this is what it is*, I think that pollutes the upcoming discussion. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And, and so in my recollection of this sample is, uh, that I would be saying, I don't know what's, I don't, I don't know what Mel's trying to say here.

1:55:47 Mel: Yeah, okay. It's like some sort of nothingness and that's about all we've got.

1:55:54 RTH: Right. And I would say living in the, don't know, people don't do that very well. People, people in general have a hard time with it. [JBK: Mm-hmm.]