

Mel May
Mel Interview 11

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the February 19 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/nyPptIFzzew>. 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

RTH = Russ Hurlburt

JBK = Julian Bass-Krueger

Mel = Mel May

0:00 Mel: Um, okay so I did these beeps yesterday, um, early evening. Um, shall I do the first one?

0:09 RTH: I think so, yes. Is this day 11? Is that where we...?

0:13 Mel: I think so, yeah.

0:15 JBK: Yeah. That's what I have.

0:18 RTH: Beeps from yesterday. I'm ready.

SAMPLE 11.1 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

0:20 Mel: Okay. So the first one went off at 5:05 PM um, and I've written, "I was mid moan in response to some pain, um, a constant throbbing, um, tightness in my hands and fingers. I was mid walk and looking at my phone, but the pain within my hands and fingers was the overwhelming experience, and a negative one at that."

0:20 Russ comments: Antenna jangle: "constant throbbing tightness" is an unusual, almost oxymoronic locution. Webster would say that *throb* means *pulsate* or *vibrate rhythmically*; one wouldn't generally associate throbbing with *constant*. Maybe by *constant* she means *the same for a long time*, but it doesn't seem like that. I will file this jangle away, and it will become amplified across the sample.

0:46 JBK: So it was this negative pain, this throbbing in your, in your fingers and... Uh, so can you describe this pain more?

0:57 Mel: Yeah. Um, the best word I think is, is *tightness*. My hands felt like it was uncomfortable and it was negative, and it was constant. Um, I wouldn't, I was gonna maybe use like sharp, but sharp feels like shortness, but, um, tight is the best sort of thing. Um, and the pain that I was experiencing was definitely just in that area. Like

the, y'know, the rest of my body didn't really hurt or whatever. Um, and it was a, a level of intensity that meant nothing else really came into my awareness.

- 1:45 JBK: Okay. Can you describe the, the area specifically where you felt this.
- 1:50 Mel: Um, I would say there was tightness from, honestly, wrist and above. So the whole hand, and then like through my, like, the webbing and my fingers, it felt, um, most intense, probably.
- 2:06 JBK: You said the webbing?
- 2:08 Mel: Yeah, the, the bits between my fingers.
- 2:12 JBK: Was, um, so most intense in the fingers, in the webbing? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So more than the, the whole hand? [Mel: Yeah.] Could you say like, how much, like, like could you say like 60%, 40% or something like that? Or does that not make sense?
- 2:31 Mel: I don't think so. I can't really remember because it feels, it, it was like the pain is all there and it feels more, um, um, yeah, like it, it would be too hard to separate cuz it was all sort of one thing. But I definitely felt like, y'know, if it was like a heat map, it would be like red, most red there. [laughs]
- 2:50 JBK: Okay. Um, and it's both hands? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, and it's a, a, a tightness, a negative, tight throbbing. Is it more on the, the skin or just the whole thing or the muscles, or, or
- 3:12 Mel: Oh, yeah, good question. No, good question. It, it, um, was skin-y. I've had like, I dunno, I don't think my skin agrees with Australia, so I'm having skin problems. But, um, yeah, when I say tightness, it was like a, um, extremities, like skin-y tight, not, it wasn't so much a muscle pain or anything. It was, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] yeah. Yeah.
- 3:38 JBK: So the skin feeling...
- 3:41 Mel: Taut.
- 3:41 RTH: And, and Julian asked you a little bit ago, and I'd like to follow up a little bit about that. He, he asked you "both hands?" and you said "Yes." [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And I would like to ask: the same in both hands? Identical in both hands?
- 3:51 Mel: Yep. Yep.
- 3:53 RTH: Okay.
- 3:55 JBK: Um, so a, a kind of tight skin-y, like a taut, like the skin being kind of stretched kind of thing? Or how would you describe that?
- 4:04 Mel: Yeah, I feel like that, like the, this, it almost, I mean, this is presuming that you also know what I mean when I say this, but y'know, sort of the feeling you get of when

you've spent way too much time in the sun. So it's, it's, um, your skin feels tight and sort of, um, hot and a bit tingly. Um, but certainly all like a really negative, like, not even close to an enjoyable experience. Um, and, and then a throbbing with that. Um, and it was, yeah, just that was the constant sensation. It wasn't like coming in waves or a particular sharpness, it just felt like that all the time. So when the beep went off, I was literally mid moan [laughs] and like, *oooh!*, in like, pain, um, associated with that.

4:04

Julian comments: Interestingly the comparison to the sunburn really did help me understand this. It's of note that Mel says "presuming that you also know what I mean when I say this"—she acknowledges the core fact that any sensation may be entirely different from one person to the next, even something as physiologically linked as a sunburn or hunger. But before Mel made this comparison, I was struggling to imagine what a tight pain was. And afterwards, I was able to mentally compare it with tight sunburnt feelings I've had.

DES isn't about comparing a participants' experiences with your own. And usually actively avoid this, right? But I think there must be some kind of imaginative/empathetic push and pull to it. Maybe you can't help bringing in your experience or experience of other DES participants, so long as you're always vigilant of how the sample you're looking at *now* may be entirely unique. But to look at each sample in a complete vacuum seems an impossible task to me.

Russ comments:

RE "Interestingly the comparison to the sunburn really did help me understand this."

I disagree with most or perhaps all of what you write in this comment, so I would rewrite this sentence as "Interestingly the comparison to the sunburn really did help me unwarrantedly believe that I understand this."

RE Mel "acknowledges the core fact that any sensation may be entirely different from one person to the next, even something as physiologically linked as a sunburn or hunger."

Mel is right.

RE "And afterwards, I was able to mentally compare it with tight sunburnt feelings I've had."

That's the part about which you have no warrant. Let me give a little lecture on the distinction between validity and fidelity. Validity is essentially a correlation across events or across people—if a test is valid, it is usually the case that people who score high on the test also score high on some criterion. That is, validity is an across-group and/or across-occasion construct. By contrast, fidelity is essentially about the individual person and occasion, regardless of whether that individual / occasion is or is not similar to the group or similar across occasions. It is a *valid* statement to say that Mel's and Julian's sunburn-tightness sensations are probably similar. It is *not* a *faithful* statement to say that Mel's and Julian's sunburn-tightness sensations are probably similar. You have absolutely no warrant to make the fidelity claim, even if the validity correlation is high.

DES aspires to fidelity. If you give up that aspiration, you give up DES. You can feel free to make validity claims about you and Mel, but if you do so, you have abandoned DES. The aim of DES is *not* to make correct statements about Mel's

experience—that would be as much or more a validity aim as a fidelity aim. The aim of DES is to make as high-fidelity statements about Mel as are warranted, and that does *not* include the presumption that your and Mel’s experiences are similar.

To the extent that “afterwards, I was able to mentally compare it with tight sunburnt feelings I’ve had,” you were no longer interested in *Mel’s* experience; you were captured by your presuppositions about *Julian’s* experience.

RE “so long as you’re always vigilant of how the sample you’re looking at *now* may be entirely unique”

You apparently did not do that in this case. If you were genuinely vigilant that the looked-at-*now* sample may be entirely unique, it would offend you “to mentally compare it with tight sunburnt feelings I’ve had,” and you wouldn’t do it.

RE “DES isn’t about comparing a participants’ experiences with your own. And usually actively avoid this, right?”

No. DES *always* actively avoids this.

RE “Maybe you can’t help bringing in your experience or experience of other DES participants.... But to look at each sample in a complete vacuum seems an impossible task to me.”

DES accepts that you and other DES participants have experiences. It does *not* expect you to operate in a complete vacuum (which would be impossible). But it does expect you to work and practice, work and practice at bracketing presuppositions. *To bracket* means to set aside, to wall off, to suspend the influence of. It does *not* mean to ignore or pretend. Here, the bracketing skill would be that you would have developed the proficiency of *not* “mentally compar[ing] it with tight sunburnt feelings I’ve had.”

RE “before Mel made this comparison, I was struggling to imagine what a tight pain was. And afterwards, I was able to mentally compare ...”

DES requires that you cultivate preferring the struggle to its unwarranted resolution, preferring the struggle to the (premature) sense of being able. This is another instance where I recommend you try to recall what it felt like to be able to mentally compare, and then come to recognize that that is likely a sign that a presupposition is in the vicinity, that you have let your guard down, so that *next week* when that feeling arises, you can intercept it and stick with the struggle. The same is true for the feeling of *interestingly*, in “interestingly the comparison to the sunburn....” Whatever that feeling is, it is the enemy of fidelity.

This is another lecture in the series of accepting (actually valuing) ignorance. Mel says her skin is tight, taut, stretched; beyond that, we are ignorant, even after (or especially after) she talks about sunburn. We can file away that she said it was like sunburn, so that if we ever get into a situation where we want to make a validity statement, we can use this as a data point. And we can ask for additional details, as you do in upcoming samples (about throb, constant). But we have to be happy to live within the confines of our own ignorance until we have warrant to extend those confines.

- 4:04 RE “and then a throbbing with that. Um, and it was, yeah, just that was the constant sensation”
Another jangle about throbbing being a constant sensation.
- 4:57 JBK: Mm-hmm. Uh, let me do, uh, look into the throbbing thing before the, the moan thing. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, the throbbing, was that like a, like a, a blood, like a pulse kind of throbbing or just some other kind of, like, how would you describe that?
- 5:16 Mel: Yeah, I feel like that’s a good way to describe it. Um, yeah, when I say throb, I sort of mean, yeah, I would say like a, a blood-y pulse-y sort of feeling. Um, almost that feeling of like, as if you can feel your heartbeat in your hands. So I would say that.
- 5:35 JBK: Ok. So as opposed to just the skin, like the pain kinda quickly coming and going, kind of oscillating.
- 5:42 Mel: Mm-hmm.
- 5:43 JBK: So not that, just more about the
- 5:45 Mel: Yeah. Like, yep. So, um, the throb would be far, yeah, not short, sharp sort of thing, like a long more constant pulse, maybe. But that’s starting to feel a little bit too, um, defined for what it felt like.
- 5:45 Russ comments: JBK asks (5:35) whether it is “oscillating?” and Mel says Yes but then says it’s more constant. I generally understand such “If I ask ‘is it X?’ and she says yes and Y,” she probably means “No. It’s not X” (and she said Yes because she is a nice person). So my antenna continues to jangle.
- 6:07 JBK: Okay. It’s too defined. Cuz, cuz I kind of brought up the blood pulse thing. You, you didn’t mention blood or a pulse.
- 6:15 Mel: Yeah. Yeah but
- 6:16 JBK: Do you mean more meta metaphorically, like a pulse, like it’s pulsating or do you, or more literally, or,
- 6:23 Mel: Um, no, I think a little bit of both. I think– I’m okay with pulsing, cuz I think that that’s just another way to describe the throbbing that I’m saying. So I don’t think you’re putting words in my mouth there. Um,
- 6:35 JBK: Okay.
- 6:35 Mel: Uh, yeah, but the only differ- difference that I would wanna make is that *throb* for me definitely has connotations of like a longer drawn-out thing, whereas pulse maybe feels a bit shorter, but it’s definitely more of the, um, drawn out sort of feeling or sensation.
- 6:58 JBK: Could you say what, what rhythm this kind of thing comes at? Or is that impossible?

7:04 Mel: I don't think I can recall.

7:07 JBK: Okay. [Mel: (inaudible)] Um, Russ?

7:10 RTH: So it, it seems to me that *throb* can have sort of two different meanings. One would be oscillatory and the other would be sort of dull, dull, but not oscillatory.

7:10 Russ comments: Since the beginning of this sample discussion, Mel has said that the sensation throbs, which Webster defines as *pulsating* or *vibrating rhythmically*. But she has also repeatedly (including in her opening salvo) called it constant; RTH's antennae have continued to jangle. JBK has focused more on the pulsating aspect. Now Russ attempts a *not-about-the-words* questioning to sort this out. He *doesn't* say "Webster defines *throb* as *pulsating*. Is that what you mean?" That would be a question about the words—something like "let's define what you mean by *throb*." Instead, Russ gives voice to the two aspects of Mel's descriptions of her experience that he has heard—his question is something like "should we say that your *experience* is oscillatory or dull"? That is, this is a question about experience, not about the words.

7:26 Mel: I don't know what the word *oscillatory* means.

7:29 RTH: *Oscillatory* means coming and going.

7:32 Mel: Oh.

7:33 RTH: So you could say, th- it's, it's throbbing and then you mean it's coming and then you're going and coming and going and coming and going and coming. Or you could say it's, it's throbbing, which is sort of steady, but not sharp and not.

7:48 Mel: Yeah. Well then maybe, sorry Julian, it feels a bit, a bit, um, different to what I said before. But if I were to pick one of the two there, I'd say the dull, more steady throb, which doesn't feel like pulse at all, [laughs]

8:02 JBK: Okay. Its dull, it's kind of steady.

8:05 Mel: Yeah. Dull, kind of steady, but there's still like a definite *this* [moves her hand in a wave motion] but yeah, it's, yeah. Not a, not a sharp differential.

8:15 JBK: Not a sharp differential, but still like a little bit like [Mel: Yeah.] coming and going? Or it's hard to say?

8:21 Mel: Yeah, I think so.

8:25 JBK: [gestures oscillating] Still. Okay. Um, is that different from the skin kind of tight, tightness thing or?

- 8:35 Mel: Yep. Yep, it is. Um, the two are definitely related, but it's definitely two different things that I can feel, for sure. The throb feels bel- more like below the surface, um, like doesn't feel muscular or anything, but it certainly feels more *within*. Whereas the tautness that I'm talking about feels far more surface-level and very much like, just related to my skin. (I should be sending these descriptions to my dermatologist!) [laughs]
- 9:06 JBK: Maybe! Um, is, is one or the other stronger?
- 9:06 Julian comments: I think using DES description for medical and psychotherapeutic purposes is promising. I hadn't thought about dermatology before, but accurate momentary descriptions of pain sensations and other sensations could potentially help diagnosis and treatment.
- Russ comments: I agree, but it would require a whole new science, based on the accumulation of a large collection of accurate momentary descriptions. Trying to interpret an accurate momentary description against a background of generalized accounts is not likely to be useful.
- 9:14 Mel: I think the tautness of the skin, but again, a little bit hard to separate the two.
- 9:22 JBK: So maybe the tautness, but hard to say. Is there any other... thing about the, the hand sensation besides these two... things?
- 9:33 Mel: I don't think so.
- 9:36 JBK: Okay. So
- 9:38 RTH: Before we move on, can I ask, can I ask a couple of questions? So I asked a little bit about what the skin sensation was the same in both hands and you said yes. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Now I want know about the same thing about the throb. Same in both hands?
- 9:49 Mel: Yep. There didn't, n- n- there was no difference between the hands as far as I can recall, [RTH: Okay.] in terms of the experience.
- 9:56 RTH: And I understood you to say at the outset that you were on your phone. Is that right?
- 10:02 Mel: I need to double check. I remember that I was walking, yeah, my, my phone was in my hands. (Um, yeah, yeah, that's right. I've just reread that.) Yeah. Cuz I could remember I was walking. I was mid walk through the kitchen in my house and my phone was in my hands and my eyes were pointed down at my phone, but I could not tell you what was on my phone and I didn't write it down at the time. Um, so it's fact of the matter, but the experience was that I could feel my hands.
- 10:37 RTH: So I, I, I wasn't actually interested in that part of the experience yet, or maybe at all. But the, but the part that I *was* interested is, is your phone in *both* hands. Uh, and

10:48 Mel: I think it was like this [holds her phone up in both hands], so yeah.

10:51 RTH: So pretty, pretty equally on both hands?

10:53 Mel: Pretty much, yeah.

10:54 JBK: Okay.

10:56 Mel: Yeah, like this.

10:57 RTH: All right. That's what I wanted to know.

11:00 JBK: Um, is the, I'm a bit hesitant about this question, but is the position of your hands on, on the phone, and does that relate to the sensation at all?

11:00 Julian comments: I'm wondering if Mel's fingers being stretched in an uncomfortable way could have contributed to the sensation. But I hedged this question saying I was hesitant because I was thinking of our earlier discussions where, Russ, you said that asking about a physical reality risks distorting experience, contorting it to the physical reality.

11:16 Mel: Um, I think it's... [pause, exhales] What I was gonna say is I think that it's relevant because I can feel the weight of my phone on my hands. Like, y'know, I, my phone is touching my hands and therefore I'm more aware of my hands. Um, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] But yeah, like, I get— No, I was gonna say, I guess compared to if I didn't have my phone there and my hands were just here. But honestly, I think that, no, that's not relevant. Um, okay.

11:16 Julian comments: Mel's answer does initially show the risk of experience being confused with underlying physical realities: "my phone is touching my hands and therefore I'm more aware of my hands." This is a causal theory and may or may not be true. But she eventually revises her answer to "honestly I think that no, that's not relevant." This shows that Mel's skill in being able to revise her answer and dodge a risky line of questioning.

11:16 Russ comments: During this part of the conversation, Mel is holding her phone and hefting it. It appears to me that she may be inferring her beeped experience from her during-the-interview experience rather than recalling the beeped experience, so I would discount any of these details.

11:54 JBK: Yeah.

11:54 Mel: That was not a helpful answer. I apologize.

11:54 Julian comments: Hearing it's not relevant or at least uncertain is as helpful an answer as anything. But I dropped the ball on not responding to this.

Russ comments: I disagree. JBK's 11:00 question is: Does X (behavior) cause Y (experience)? Mel initially says *Yes* but then changes to *No*. In my view, both of those answers are speculations about causation, and therefore *neither* answer is helpful—the *No* is not more helpful than the *Yes*.

The problem is that the 11:00 question is a bad question when judged by the usual DES criterion: it does *not* help Mel to describe her experience. (It does, as it seems to my observation, cause Mel some distress.)

11:58 JBK: Yeah. Um, and you're, you're moaning, you're mid moan. [Mel laughs] Are you experiencing moaning? Like is that in your, in your inner experience at this moment? Or is it just something that's happening—you're moaning, but your attention's really, or what's more present is this feeling in your hands?

11:58 Julian comments: Here I seem to realize that talking about "attention" could bring in confusion. But the other phrasing I use—what's more present—isn't any better. Again, it takes a frame of reference from outside Mel's experience. I should have instead something like if she experiences moaning or if she's mostly just feeling this taut skin sensation in her hands.

Russ comments:

I had no jangles from your question. I thought your apposition of "attention" and "what's more present" was an adequate communication. The recasting in the comment is, in my view, equally good.

12:19 Mel: No, I think it is part of my experience. Cuz I, I, um, it wasn't, although I was moaning in response to the pain I was feeling in my hands, it was, it didn't just feel like a, um, like a autopilot, y'know, when I used that descri-, description, like it didn't just feel like a, um, just a response. It felt like something that I actively decided to do. And then was thinking about sort of doing. So like, I was like mid moan because, I guess, in, in my consciousness at the time I was thinking like, *oh, I'm in pain and this is frustrating*, sort of thing. Not that language or anything, but like, that was the sensation that was happening while I was moaning. So I was, the moan was definitely in my awareness.

12:19 Julian comments: Mel mentions something that could be interpreted as a separate thought about the pain: *oh I'm in pain and this is frustrating*. But would she have mentioned this if my 11:58 questioning was clearer?

Russ comments: I took her *oh, I'm in pain and this is frustrating* as a rhetorical way of describing agency, rather than as a separate meta-experiential thought. But this is the beginning of a discussion of meta-experience, which I find problematic.

13:09 JBK: Okay.

13:09 Mel: It was like a deliberate act.

13:12 JBK: Can you describe how, how it was in your awareness, experience, consciousness, whatever?

- 13:20 Mel: Um, well, just in the way that I, I said, really, I think. Um, that, uh, the pain was, um, to a level that was, uh, so negative and so frustrating that I moaned, and sort of, y'know, without too much forethought, like deliberately decided to moan. Um,
- 13:56 JBK: Was there a, was there this pain in your hands and then a separate kind of awareness of the pain? Or was there nothing separate to the pain itself?
- 14:07 Mel: I'm not exactly sure what you mean.
- 14:11 JBK: Like, um, you said there wasn't a, a thought in those exact words. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But was there the pain and then a separate kind of process or thought, like, *oh, I'm in pain*, or, or, or no.
- 14:31 Mel: Um, I think yes. Um, like I think this *was* a bit meta that I was experiencing the pain and then aware of me experiencing the pain. And then that led to me moaning, like, so yes, I think as opposed to certain times where I, y'know, see—do or like feel and like just what, that's not helpful as well, but whatever. I think this time I was aware of the pain I was experiencing, um, and not in any, um, yeah, like, not in any defined language within my head, but I was at some meta level aware of it and then responded accordingly.
- 14:31 Russ comments: We are 14 minutes into this discussion, which makes RTH skeptical when such fine details being introduced for the first time. There has been too much time, too much opportunity for false memories.
- 15:23 JBK: Okay. And was it like, you were aware and you, and then you moan and right before the beep, it's more just the moaning? Or is it still also this kind of being aware of it?
- 15:39 Mel: As the beep went off? I was mid moan, so the moments before the beep were probably right in that bit where I was... like a very interesting space where I was caught very quickly re-, like caught in the moment of responding to the pain I was feeling and about to moan. That's the exact moment before the beep.
- 16:09 JBK: Okay. Were, were you about to moan or were you mid moan or, or kind of mid about to moan?
- 16:16 Mel: I was moaning when the beep went off. So the moment before the beep would've been just before I started moaning, yeah.
- 16:16 Russ comments: That jangles my antenna that is monitoring whether Mel understands the timing issues that are important to DES. I think we will need to clarify the exact moment that DES is interested in. There is a long and careful discussion of the moment of the beep in the interview between 29:21 and 40:49, and commentary particularly at 32:23 but also at 17:07, 19:06, 22:26, 23:16, 24:22, 25:21.
- 16:24 JBK: Okay. Um, was anything about like the moan, like vocally producing a moan or hearing the moan? Was that in your experience at all?

16:36 Mel: Yeah, I think so.

16:40 JBK: More one or the other? Or hard to say, or you don't know?

16:42 Mel: Um, I, I don't think, hmm, I don't think so much vocally producing the, mm... I dunno. It's it, the reason I'm hesitating is cuz that happens so instantaneously that it's really hard to say.

17:07 JBK: Okay. Between the, the pain in your, your hands and fingers, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] and kind of other stuff that, that could have been there, like the moaning or the kind of aware that you're— of this pain, um, could you say which was more present and or how and how much?

17:07 Russ comments: I think that at 15:39 Mel had distinguished between what was ongoing at the moment of the beep (the moan, also the pain but that wasn't mentioned at 15:39) and what was *before* the beep (the responding to the beep and the about to moan). But JBK's 17:07 question puts the at-the-moment-of-the-beep and the before-the-beep into the same comparative bucket. That contemporizes the meta-experiential stuff.

17:33 Mel: Um, the pain itself is definitely the overwhelming experience. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Um, I find it challenging to put percentages on this one because again, it feels all like quite linked, but I would say, um, maybe like 60 to 70% was the pain. And then, um, y'know, the next lot of percent (I'm gonna get really bad at maths), but like the next chunk is me then thinking about, ugh, I'm in pain and this is frustrating. And then the last bit is me moaning. So I would say like maybe 60% is actual pain, and then 25% is me thinking about the pain very quickly though. Like that's not a really, I'm not stewing on that. That's a fast thing that happens, but there is some awareness of me being conscious of me experiencing the pain. And then the other part is the, the moan produced as a result of that, I think.

17:33 Julian comments: This is a very emphatic *I think* at the end. Probably the most salient part of this detailed section is actually this *I think*. Mel's not certain here. Also, she says everything is quite linked so we could be looking at a pain-with-frustrated-moaning rather than isolated components.

Russ comments: I agree, and would add that the *I think* is a particularized emphasis of the subjunctification that has been pretty evident for the last five minutes.

18:51 JBK: Ok. I'm, I'm still not a hundred percent on the timeline. [Mel: Yeah.] So if like, I dunno, is this the reverse? [holds up his pen as a timeline] This is to the right for you, right?

19:01 Mel: No,

19:01 JBK: Right. Left. Oh, no.

19:04 Mel: Anyway. Yeah. Whatever. Yeah.

19:06 JBK: Well, if, if, I guess you could just gesture what makes sense to you. But if there's the, the, the beep at one point and then, um, there's this pain and then kind of like an awareness of a pain, and then the moan. Like, does the awareness of the pain come right before the moan and still continue right until the beep? Or, or how would you, how, how would you describe kind of a timeline of things?

19:06 Russ comments: Julian is apparently noticing the same things that I commented on at 16:16. But his discussion here does not adequately differentiate the required timing issues. There is a long and careful discussion of the moment of the beep in the interview between 29:21 and 40:49, and commentary particularly at 32:23 but also at 16:16, 17:07, 22:26, 23:16, 24:22, 25:21.

19:36 Mel: Yeah, let me think about that. [pause] Um, [pause] it feels like there is a.... Hmm, hang on. [pause] I'm, I'm, I know this is, um, sort of doesn't make sense, but I'm equally split between wanting to say there is clear chronology of experiencing pain, um, like being aware of that, and then moaning. But then the other part of me wants to say, no, it's too hard to split all of that. And actually, if I think about when the beep went off, that all just sort of the moment before the beep, all those things felt like that happened at once. So like, I can't, I'm not actually feeling, I'm finding it difficult to actually pick one of those over the other, even though like, they're two really different things.

20:53 JBK: Okay. So it's hard for you to choose between it being some kind of sequence of, y'know, pain—thought, thought—moan or whatever. And it just happening all at once.

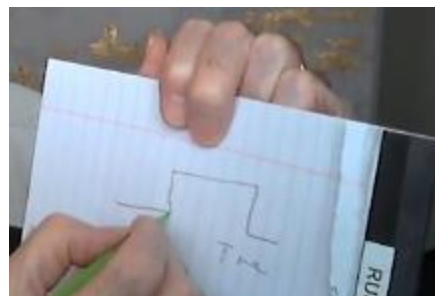
21:05 Mel: Because it's sort of in some strange way feels like both are true, that there is a sequential thing of like the feeling, the throbbing, that and then the moan. But then at the same time, it's all happening at once. So I don't know. And perhaps, y'know, sometimes when I say that it just happens so instantaneously that I find it hard to then break it down to that level. I don't know whether there's some truth in that, that for me, the experience of that is so fast that I can't, um, break it down into a sequence or, y'know, like whether that's the bit that's confusing me, that the sequence happens so quickly that I find it hard or whether there's no sequence at all. And I don't know.

21:05 Julian comments: I mention a sequence of three pain—thought—moan. And Mel mentions another sequence feeling—throbbing—moan. So of what she mentioned, a separate thought about the pain is the least likely.

Russ comments: I think Mel's difficulty may come from either or both/all (a) a lack of being specific about timing; (b) the problematics of meta-awareness; and (c) the long duration of the discussion of this sample.

21:49 JBK: Um, and, and this pain and, and this kind of,

21:54 RTH: So, so before we leave that sequence, cuz I thought that was a line, a good line of questioning and I, I wasn't quite sure about that, that we got to the end of it. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] [RTH draws a square wave on his notebook] So if this is time going that way, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] and this is the beep. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So the beep starts here. So first off, is it your experience that the beep has a fast rise time like this? That there's no beep and then suddenly [indicates a fast movement with his pencil rising along the leading edge of the beep] there's a beep. [Mel: Yep.] As opposed to a sort of a gradual rise [indicates a gentle rising slope]?



22:25 Mel: Yeah. Yeah.

22:26 RTH: Okay. Then assuming that the moment that we're interested in is this moment right there [carefully draws an arrow a half mm to the left of the square wave], one microsecond just before the beep occurs. [Mel: Mm-hmm] That's what we call, call "caught in flight by the beep" or the "last undisturbed moment, just before the beep." Something like that. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] What's our best guess about what's going on right then? Not, and, and what that means is not really caring about what's happening over here [points to the top of the square wave] and not really caring about what's happening over here [points to the left of the square wave], but what's, what's here? [carefully indicates the point just to the left of the leading edge of the schematic beep] And that doesn't mean that this didn't, what's here has to be instantaneous. This could have *started* over here and *lasted* up until here, but still caught in flight. [Mel: Okay.] And something else could have started clear back over here and kept on going. And both of those are caught in flight. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Or something could have started back over here and *ended* and then something *else* began and that got caught in flight. [draws on the notepad throughout]

22:26 Russ comments: Note that Mel has been expressing some difficulty about timing issues, so RTH seeks to clarify timing. His questions, which appear to be aimed backward at 5:05pm yesterday, are actually aimed forward, at clarifying timing issues for *next week's* (or whenever) sampling. That is, RTH accepts that we are too far into the sample 11.1 conversation to be able to reliably discern the timing of the present sample (see the comment at 14:31), but this sequence of questions can use the difficulties of describing the present sample as grist for the iterative-training mill—the difficulties *now* demonstrate that we need to refine the skill of noticing carefully the sequence of experience; that may pay off *later*, when it counts—immediately following some future beep when sequence is relevant.

There is a long and careful discussion of the moment of the beep in the interview between 29:21 and 40:49, and commentary particularly at 32:23 but also at 16:16, 17:07, 19:06, 23:16, 24:22, 25:21.

RE "What's our best guess about what's going on right then?"

Note that asking for a guess is useful for the iterative training and is *not* part of the DES attempt to obtain high-fidelity descriptions. That is, I will *not* take Mel's

answer to this question as part of the description of the present sample. I *will* take Mel's difficulty in answer that question as evidence that we need to do a better job of grasping the moment of the beep.

Q: Didn't you define the moment of the beep ten sampling weeks ago? Isn't this redundant?

A: Yes and No. Our conversation ten weeks ago about the moment of the beep was relevant in the context of Mel's understanding of experience and its apprehension at that time; *now* Mel's understanding of experience and its apprehension have evolved, so we need to clarify the concepts in this new context.

23:16 Mel: Yeah. [pause] Okay. Um, okay. Yeah. Well then if I think more about, um, not getting so caught up on the exact moment before the beep and allowing some like, flexibility with how I describe that, then um, I would say that... there is a sequence. That the pain in, I was experiencing the throbbing; then I was aware of me experiencing the throbbing; and then I sort of very quickly without any, uh, language or like whatever about it then like decided to sort of moan in response; and then I'm moaning and then the beep goes off. That all happens before the beep for sure. Yeah. So [RTH: So..] I feel more comfortable with that description if I'm allowing more time.

23:16 Julian comments: In my 21:05 comment I noted that Mel dropped talking about a separate noticing of the pain. But here she reincludes it. So perhaps it *is* best not to try too hard to excavate this sample but to instead use it as iterative training—for all of us, not just Mel.

Russ comments:

RE Mel's "not getting so caught up on the exact moment before the beep and allowing some like, flexibility with how I describe that"

That sounds like (or at least suggests that) Mel didn't understand my 22:26 time-schematic as I had intended it. I will have to refine what I said. There will be a long and careful discussion of the moment of the beep in the interview between 29:21 and 40:49, and commentary particularly at 32:23 but also at 16:16, 17:07, 19:06, 22:26, 24:22, 25:21.)

24:22 RTH: So is it the case that what gets that, what's occurring, caught in flight by the beep as if the beep or some random dart that gets thrown into your experience [mimes a dart being thrown at the beep schematic, hitting it right where the leading edge of the beep arises], [Mel: Mm-hmm] is what's going on here, basically, two or three things, depending on you, how you count? There is hand surface skin-y stuff, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] and hand deep throbby stuff, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] and moan. And all those three things are going on, caught in flight by the beep.

24:22 Russ comments: Note that this question, too, is iterative training. RTH is *not* really trying to figure out what happened at the 5:05pm yesterday beep—that is water over the dam as far as he is concerned. He is trying to clarify *for future beeps* that we will want to be as careful as we can about whether things are happening simultaneously at the moment of the beep or sequentially.

24:51 Mel: Yeah. And I would also add to that, that, um, sense that feeling of like frustration or whatever that, that made me moan as well in response to that, that feeling is also present.

25:05 JBK: Okay. So those four things.

25:08 Mel: Yeah.

25:09 JBK: Um, and this kind of frustrated, kind of aware of the pain, frustrated the pain, um, is that something separate than the pain itself?

25:21 Mel: Yep. Yep. And that's, um, the sort of bit that I, uh, feel is a bit meta because it's actually me being aware of, um, something that I'm feeling, which, yeah. Um, I know that that is definitely what was happening. Cuz I know what the opposite feels like in, y'know, in previous beeps where we've had, where something's happening and, but that's just happening. This was a distinct part of my awareness was being *aware* of that pain I was experiencing.

25:21 [Julian comments: Russ, you loudly exhale at 25:33, I'm guessing out of frustration that I'm on the wrong track trying to piece together this sample rather than use it as an opportunity for iterative learning.](#)

[Russ comments: I don't hear an exhale at 25:33; I hear an exhale at 25:25. I'm no mind reader, including about RTH's processes, but I agree with your speculation. JBK's question interrupts RTH's attempt to clear up important timing issues. And until we clear that timing up, I will have a hard time understanding what we are talking about. \(Spoiler alert: RTH will return to the attempt to clarify these issues at 29:21.\)](#)

25:55 JBK: Mm-hmm. And it's a kind of, there are no words to it. You've said that before, like no clear words to it. [Mel: Uhn unh (negative)]. Um, but it is a kinda aware of the pain and also frustrated or, or like, how, how, how would you describe that?

26:13 Mel: Yeah, there was definitely an undertone of frustration because I've had these annoying issues with my skin for a couple of months now and no one seems to know what's going on. Um, but it was painful and it was negative and that was annoying me. Like (a) it was hurting me and there was discomfort, but there was also an undertone of like frustration at the discomfort.

26:40 JBK: Yeah. And does this meta thought, feeling, awareness, whatever you want to call it, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] does that have, um, does that have a bodily location that's at all or no?

26:55 Mel: I don't think so.

26:59 JBK: Okay. Um, I'm hesitant about this question, but, um, I'll ask anyways before leaving this, would you call it more of a a, to use it, more of a thought or a feeling or...?

27:12 Mel: The which bit? The frustration?

27:15 JBK: Yeah, the kind of awareness of the pain part and whatever comes with that.

27:22 Mel: Is it more a thought or a feeling? Um, a feeling, I think.

27:32 JBK: Okay. Um, I, yeah, I guess labeling it doesn't matter so much. And you also said, "I think," so [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I mean, I guess to you it's not so important how you label it or, but

27:50 Mel: Yeah, it doesn't feel that, um, I, I don't think there's a giant differential between like a thought and a feeling for me. So I feel like that's, they're quite intrinsically linked, but that's a whole different scenario.

28:08 JBK: Okay. Um, so what I have here is that most present right before the beep is, uh, is this feeling in your hands, this sensation, and there's this skin-y, tight feeling. Um, and then there's this kind of throbbing, throbbing as this kind of dull, it's, it's not quite on the surface and it's maybe a little bit coming and going. Um, and then there's also, um, you're moaning and also you're kind of aware of that you're in pain or you're kind of this, you're, you're frustrated, um, kind of, yeah, aware of this pain. Uh, that's what I have. Yeah, at first I was a bit, um, s- skeptical about this kind of meta-awareness part, cuz I, like, I brought it up first, but, but I think, I think now that talking about it, that it is part of the experience. So I'm, uh, so what do you think about this one, Russ?

29:21 RTH: So I, I agree with all that. I'm still a little bit skeptical about the meta stuff because I don't think we were clear enough from the get-go about the what's *caught in flight by the beep* means. And, and you could say, well, y'know, this 11th day by now, Mel should know what, what *caught in flight* mean *by the beep* means. But, but I think that concept needs considerable refreshment as we, as we go along. Because what, what *caught in flight* meant on day 1 was probably different from what it meant on day 4, which is probably different from what it meant on day 7 as we, as we get better at that.

29:21 Russ comments:
RE "I'm still a little bit skeptical"
That understates his degree of skepticism.

30:00 Mel: Yep.

30:05 RTH: And I would say I'm a little conservative about, about trying to advance... things. I think it's, I think it's probably better in the long run to treat this as a iterative training for some future where we're, where we're gonna be more careful, more knowledgeable, more skillful at differentiating between this and that, this time and that time, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] and not, not try to retroactively s- superimpose that back on this beep.

30:40 Mel: So on that note, um, I feel like I've gotten, I've been trying to get like really cons-, not concise, but um, like particular about like the exact moment before the beep and like,

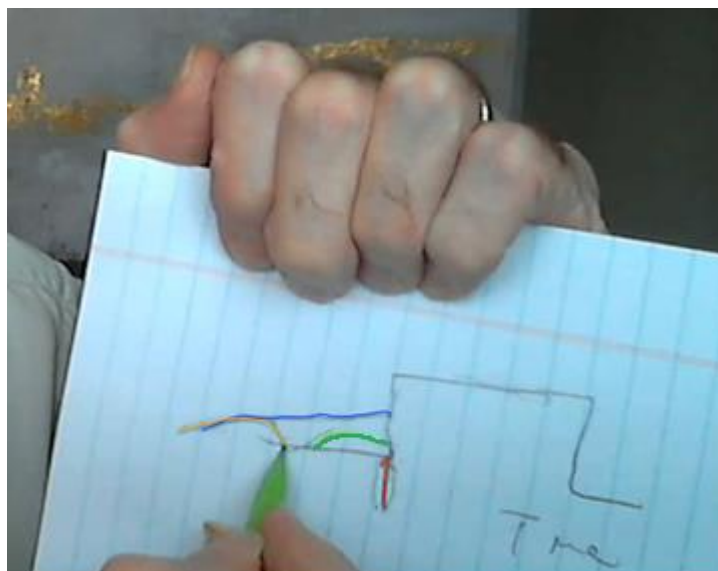
fair enough, I guess we haven't ever described what *moment before the beep* means in terms of how long or whatever. But like to me it was always like the *very short* [laughs] exact moment before the beep. But you are saying like, it can be, I mean, you're gonna probably say it's however I choose to interpret it or something, but like it could be quite a lengthy period of time that I choose to describe. Is that what you're telling me?

30:40 Russ comments: (We are about to have an extended discussion of timing issues in DES. Previous comments about time issues in this interview are at 16:16, 17:07, 19:06, 22:26, 23:16, 24:22, 25:21.)

31:25 RTH: So, so, so Yes and No probably, or No and Yes. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So, so there's only, from my point of view, there's only *one* time period, one, one moment, that I think is, uh, pretty clearly definable. And I call that *the moment of the beep*. And I call that *the moment before the beep*. And I call it *one microsecond before the beep*. And I call that *one millisecond before the beep*. And I call it *the last undisturbed moment before the beep*. All of those things, to *me*, are synonymous. [Mel: Mm.] And they mean this moment exactly right there [holds up schematic sketch and points carefully to the exact rise point of the sketch, the end of the red arrow shown in the 32:23 comment] and no other moment. [Mel: Mm.] The one microsecond the, the, the *last possible time* just before you recognize the ongoingness of the beep. [Mel: Hmm.] Every other time is, I think, sort of loose, and, and you can't do anything better than that.

32:23 So I, I would like us to distinguish between *what is ongoing at this particular moment* and everything else. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But I do think it's sometimes interesting to be able to say "I'm quite confident that I had the, some kind of an experience out here which had *stopped* before I got to here," [points at the orange curve]. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] "and I have some other kind of experience that started quite a while, quite a while, quite a *while* before this, and was still ongoing [Mel: Mm-hmm] when I got to here" [indicates the green curve]. Those, those things I think are discriminable even though we can't really put a time, y'know, *this is one second* or *this is two seconds* or whatever that; I don't think we can do that. [Mel: Yeah.] So then from my point of view, the, I, I would like us to *clearly* distinguish between what is *ongoing* at the moment of what I call *the moment of the beep*, which is right there and it's not here and it's not here, but it's ongoing. And then what, as long as we're clear about that, I'm, I'm happy to have us talk about other kinds of stuff, [Mel: Yeah.] as long as we know the difference between that other kind of stuff and stuff that's caught in flight by the moment of the beep.

32:23 Julian comments: Here is Russ's drawing, which was originally in pencil. I have colorized the lines for future reference. And I will number the paragraphs below to make it easier for Russ to comment.



(1) Some of what Russ has described here is actually new to my understanding of DES. I took *the moment before the beep* to refer to something like the green curve. Or maybe experience that includes the green, blue, and orange curve. In other words, I thought what was meant by *the moment* is whatever eventually gets encompassed in a sample description.

(2) But now I see that *the moment* is a much less ambiguous tool. The moment of the beep is that red arrow at *that exact point* before the rise time of the beep. DES then uses that tool to get specificity about experience. But it doesn't define the scope of a sample from the onset. This temporal scope is defined only by an adherence to specificity.

(3) There's some criticism of DES that *a moment* is too rigid—it doesn't allow for flow of experience, it atomizes it etc. While I never agreed in full, before Russ's presentation here, I did see DES as constrained to moments. I now see that DES isn't really about moments. It uses that physically unambiguous point in time merely as a way to structure and guide questioning to faithfully reveal experience.

(4) Russ, I was also surprised by your drawing of the orange curve. I figured that if only the orange and green were present (discounting the blue for the moment) then DES only asks about the green. The orange is too far back. As we see in Days 14 and 15 of sampling, I'd adapted DES to a new method (dDES) which looks at the moment before the beep and then what comes before that. So the orange and green would be the purview of dDES. Or the blue, orange, and green.

(5) I was surprised to hear that what's essential is pinning down with specificity the red arrow and whatever is ongoing at that moment. And once we're clear about that, it's ok to go a bit backwards, so long as we recognize the limits of what we can know. Here some DES samples could then qualify as dDES samples and vice versa. But I suppose you'd argue that DES is still much more stringent when looking at extended experience.

(6) I was aware of some other instances when DES looks at sequences, But I thought that these were exceptions. For example, in sample 4.4 Jessica had a rapid succession of 7 inner seeings (described in Johanah Kang's 2015 dissertation, p. 141). Since they're so rapid they can be grouped into a DES moment. But again, my thinking

has changed and I see now that the span of a *sample* is different from what's meant by *the moment* in DES. I do think this makes more sense because it avoids having to arbitrarily chunk experience.

Russ comments: I agree with paragraphs (2) and (3).

RE (3) "DES isn't really about moments"

That is correct. DES is not about *moments*, it is about at the moments. DES is not about *momentary* experience. DES is about experience *that is ongoing at* specific moments.

RE paragraph (4):

I think I didn't make myself clear to either Mel or you. The problem is that during an expository interview, there are two different ranges of convenience of talk, which I might call the *descriptive* and the *contextual*.

The *descriptive* range of convenience is the proper interest of DES: our main task is to describe the experience that was ongoing at a specific moment. In the schematic, the specific moment is the red arrow, a precise (or, really, an as-precise-as-possible) point in time that is signaled by the beep. The DES task is to describe any experience that is ongoing at that specific moment; that experience could be schematized by the blue line or the green line. I drew the blue and green lines to illustrate DES is *not* particularly interested in *short* experiences (it does *not* prefer the green line to the blue line); its aim is to describe whatever experiences happen to be ongoing at the moment of the beep (at the red line), regardless of the duration of those experiences. So in the descriptive mode, the proper targets are the green and blue experiences, *not* the orange experiences.

The *contextual* range of convenience is talk that we engage in while undertaking / helping / encouraging Mel accomplish the descriptive aim. For example, "Alice" may say, "I heard mom say 'Dinnertime!' and I smell the spaghetti." The interview will have to try to resolve that temporally ambiguous description: are there two simultaneous experiences (hearing and smelling) or just one (hearing) or just one (smelling). That interview may find it useful to use a figure such as the one shown here, and may well discover that the hearing is like the orange line and the smelling is like the blue line: they started at more-or-less the same time (a while before the beep), the hearing experience ended, and the smelling persisted and is interrupted by the beep. Once that has been established, the talk will focus on the proper descriptive effort, the (blue line) smell.

That is, the interview conversation will likely include both contextual and descriptive talk. That is desirable, if that is the natural way for Mel (or Alice) to proceed. That is, I *don't* want to convey to Mel (or Alice) *don't talk about anything other than the experience ongoing at the moment of the beep*. That would encourage Mel to be trying to follow some set of DES rule, thereby putting Mel into an (unnatural) analytic mode, coerce her into deciding what is or is not the best way to formulate her conversation about experience. I think that is counterproductive. Instead, I want Mel, over the course of our conversations, to come to recognize that I am particularly interested in the green-type and blue-type experiences, but how she tells me about them is her prerogative. The proper interest of DES (the descriptive range of convenience) is only about the spaghetti; the proper way of approaching the

task (for Alice) is to use both orange- and blue-line talk, *and then clarify that at the moment of the beep it was only the blue-line experience that was ongoing.*

That is what I was trying to convey at 32:23 “as long as we’re clear about [the distinction between at-the-moment-of-the-beep and all else], I’m, I’m happy to have us talk about other kinds of stuff, [Mel: Yeah.] as long as we know the difference between that other kind of stuff and stuff that’s caught in flight by the moment of the beep.” That is, I am happy to have descriptive and contextual talk if that is Mel’s (or Alice’s) natural way of exposition, as long as we know the difference between the two kinds of talk. I was *not* intending to say (at 32:23) that the other kinds of stuff were the proper interest of DES.

RE (4) and (5) dDES.

We will talk more about dDES on sampling days 14 and 15. Here I will simply say that the DES manner of speaking about the orange curve is a naturally contextual way of distinguishing a previous event (something that has started and ended before the beep) from an ongoing event (something that is ongoing at the moment of the beep). I think dDES tries to particularize the previous event in a way that is impossible because it cannot adequately define the previous moment. The moment of the beep (red arrow) is the only moment that can be (mostly) unambiguously identified.

RE (5) “what’s essential is pinning down with specificity the red arrow and whatever is ongoing at that moment. And once we’re clear about that, it’s ok to go a bit backwards, so long as we recognize the limits of what we can know.”

That does *not* convey the DES procedure. The first sentence of that is the DES procedure. DES does *not* go back to the limits of what we can know. The second sentence could be rewritten to say: “And once we’re clear about that, it’s ok to recognize that that beeped experience might have begun (probably did begin) somewhat before the moment of the beep and we can describe some temporal characteristics of that experience, so long as we recognize the limits of what we can know.” For example, Alice might be able to say that the spaghetti-smell experience had been strengthening across time.

RE (6)

The moment of the beep is not a clock-time in reality; the beep is an electrical signal that gets amplified into pressure waves in the air which gets transformed into mechanical movement in the ear which gets transformed into chemical movements in synapses and neurons which eventually get experienced as a beep which eventually gets processed as an *I should grasp what is ongoing* skilled response. There is substantial between-person and within-person variability in how long that transduction of electrical-signal-to-apprehended-beep takes. There is also substantial between-person and within-person variability in what counts as an experience. Furthermore, the beep-recognition and experience-definition processes are not necessarily independent. DES does not hide those variabilities / dependencies; it accepts them as limitations on the method.

It is pretty arbitrary whether to call Kang’s (2015) Jessica sample 4.4 as one experience with seven rapidly succeeding images or seven very short successive experiences, each with one image. The point Kang was making is that the bursts of imagery (as at sample 4.4) was quite different from other of Jessica’s sampling days

where she had no imagery at all, and that it was worth speculating that such dramatic differences in beeped experiences might be related to Jessica's type I bipolar disorder diagnosis.

Julian Comments: RE (4) and (5)

Ok, your clarification comports with my original understanding of DES: DES does not specifically look into the orange.

DES doesn't, on the other hand, ask Mel or Alice or whomever to omit any mention of orange. But it doesn't delve into the orange with the specificity that it reserves for the blue or green, or whatever is ongoing at the moment of the beep.

- 33:40 Mel: Mm-hmm. [pause] Yep. Because I think that's, yeah, that's exactly the principle that I've been working on. It's when we start to go like, um, sequentially like, did this happen? whatever, then that's where I'm like, well then you're asking me to feed into this because at that exact time, like that's all that's happening and I don't know, like whatever. So that's sort of what I'm referring to of if we then try and unpack, say if there's three things that I'm sort of identified that are happening at the time of the beep, like that's instantaneous at that point. But did the throbbing feel experienced before the meta, before the whatever? Well then yeah, I, if I unpack going like that probably. So that's in line with what you're saying?
- 34:21 RTH: Yes. And, and I would say that we have, and have a right to have, less and less confidence [Mel: Mm-hmm] the farther we get away from caught in flight by the moment of the beep. [Mel: Yep.] Because it's very difficult for us to, to, so, so if we get into sequence this happened and then this happened and then this happened, [Mel: Yeah.] it's very difficult to figure out whether that's a, y'know, microseconds apart or *millennia* apart.
- 34:50 Mel: Yeah.
- 34:52 RTH: And, uh, we can try. And, and and, and sometimes, so if, so, so if at the moment of the beep you could say, "Look! What my experience at the moment of the beep was an ongoing sequence. There was A and B and C and D and, and I felt this ongoing sequence going on [Mel: Mm-hmm] at the moment of the beep," I would find that of, of interest, even if you, if, if you can say, this happened so fast, I couldn't tell you whether it was A or B or C or D, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] but I can be *quite* confident about saying that I was somewhere in that sequence and it happened, but it dadadadada, something like that. That would be all right with me, [Mel: Mm-hmm] as long as, as long as we are cle- carefully distinguishing *as best we can* between what is caught in flight and what's, what's not.
- 35:43 Mel: Mm. Yep.
- 35:46 RTH: The *hard* part, what I, the, the part that makes life difficult, I guess is that *before the beep* doesn't have any precise meaning. [Mel: Yeah.] Y'know, the, the dinosaurs were extinct *before the beep*, and Trump was elected *before the beep*, and the sun came up this morning *before the beep*, and I dropped my pencil *before the beep*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Y'know, all those things share the same language. And so, and so they're

confusing unless you spend, un- unless you really work at try, trying to figure it out. But there is, there is *one* moment that is, that does not have that inherent ambiguity in it. And that's the, what I call *the moment of the beep* [Mel: Um hmm.] or *the last undisturbed moment before the beep*, or *the microsecond before the beep*.

- 35:46 Russ comments: All those locutions have advantages and disadvantages; the single best (least bad) one, in my opinion, is *the moment of the beep*.
- 36:43 Mel: Mm-hmm, Yep. Yeah. And that just remains the challenge that of like, yes, it's very easy for me at the time to identify like, *oh shoot, the beeps just gone off. Ah! What was happening right before that?* Like that, that is still hard. [laughs] [JBK: Um hmm.]
- 37:07 RTH: Well, I'm, I'm, I I'm happy that it's still hard in the sense that I don't want us to just gloss over it and say, well, y'know, it seems like it ought be easy. I'll just tell him it's easy.
- 37:17 Mel: Yeah.
- 37:18 RTH: I, I think, I think our task is to do the best we can, which *includes* being honest about how, where the difficulties are, how confident that we are that we're overcoming those difficulties *or not*, and...
- 37:34 Mel: Yeah. Yeah, it's a, it's a, it's a very weird skill [laughs] to [JBK laughs] try and maneu- Like it's, I'm getting a bit obsessed with trying to do it, but it's, it is a very challenging skill to do, because by nature being, so just living your life and then being *ah the beep goes off!* It, it still remains a challenge to work out what was happening there when you were just consumed in your life. [laughs]
- 38:04 RTH: So how confident are you about, about this particular beep, that you felt a skin-y tightness in the web-y of your, of your fingers, and that that was ongoing? That, if there, if there were an alternate universe that had no beep in [Mel: Mm-hmm.] but that, but was time-locked with this u- with, with this universe—so at the moment that this beep occurred in this universe, in this alternate universe, would you be feeling the tightness in your hand? How confident...?
- 38:33 Mel: A hundred percent. Yeah, yeah, definitely, definitely.
- 38:36 RTH: So that's, so that's the other side of the coin from what you were just saying. You were saying it was all d-, very difficult, but now you're saying it's a hundred percent easy! And the, and so [Mel laughs] the, the question is we have to differentiate between what is what we can *do* and then what we *can't* do. And what we *can* do is some things, and then the other things get to be difficult. [Mel: Yeah.] But the object is to know the difference.
- 39:01 Mel: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's helpful. I feel like, um, when we, yeah, we re-go-over things like this, um, it's just helpful in that being more confident in, I dunno, y'know, sometimes it can feel like you start to drown in ambiguity of it all again. So it's kind of helpful just to go through things and even though like everything you've said is in line

with what I've been doing or, y'know, um, everything you've said from the start or whatever, it can just be sort of reassuring, I suppose.

39:37 RTH: I, I think it is it, I agree that it's reassuring, and, but I also think that it's *required*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And, and, and y'know, I said a little [inaudible] like, well, "y'know, it's the 11th day, you should have learned it by now!" I, but I don't, I, *to my core*, I don't believe that's true. I'm, I think we *have to* recalibrate that. [Mel: Mmm.] We have to re- refine that. And, and that, I think, is one of the fundamental things that makes DES different from anything else. Because most psychological science or whatever gives you some instruction at the beginning and says, y'know, in capital letters in the instructions, y'know, "PAY ATTENTION ONLY TO THE MOMENT OF THE BEEP" as if people knew what the fuck that meant, which they don't. And uh, and even if they did, it would change to some degree or it would require... it, i, it's sort of like, y'know, sharpening a knife: you have to sharpen a knife every now and then. [Mel: Yeah.] And, uh, [Mel: Yeah.] it was sharp. It was sharp all the way along, but you, *still*, you have to sharpen it! And because it, that that's the way life is, or the way things are, or whatever.

40:49 RTH: So, shall we go on to number 2?

40:50 Mel: Yes. Sorry. We've spent a long time on that first one! Um,

40:54 RTH: So I don't, I don't, I don't have any, um, there's no room for apology for, for... And I think we *have to* do it. I think that's, it is the nature of the beast.

41:05 Mel: Well, it's also a little more satisfying than just giving you nothing [laughs] every third beep. So that's interesting. Okay.

SAMPLE 11.2 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

41:15 Mel: [continues] Um, the second beep went off at 5:53 PM and I've written, um, "I was mid saying 'Coco' out loud, (which is the name of my dog), um, as I walked towards my dog. Um, beyond that, nothing stood out. I was walking, I saw my dog, I spoke to the dog. Um, that's about it."

41:37 RTH: So all of those things could be behavioral descriptions with no experience at all. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And some of them could have some or *all* of 'em could have some experiential attributes.

41:52 Mel: Mm-hmm. The, um, uh, I was aware of the fact that I... No, there, there was, um, *seeing* my dog was definitely in my awareness, and then *calling out* to my dog was in my awareness. Um, not in a meta sense, but just like, yeah, I was definitely, uh, consumed by that. Um, yeah, the by, by physically calling out to her or audibly. Um, and then I... But I would say beyond that, like not a whole, not a whole lot was, uh, super present in my awareness. Like, y'know, I was in the act of walking or whatever, but I wasn't particularly aware of like my limbs or the temperature or anything like that. It was really the only sort of thing in my awareness was seeing my dog and calling out to my dog.

43:07 RTH: And was there any particular aspect of this, of the dog that you're seeing? Or,

43:14 Mel: Um, in [pause] how do you mean?

43:20 RTH: Well, noticing the black spots or the [Mel: No.] panting or the whatever.

43:27 Mel: No, nothing specific like that. I would say *dog as whole*. [laughs]

43:31 RTH: Okay. So I'm seeing, I'm seeing the dog and I'm saying "Coco."

43:35 Mel: Yep.

43:37 RTH: And is it Coco with C-O-C-O or C-O-C-O-A?

43:41 Mel: No, C-O-C-O.

43:43 RTH: Okay. And, and is there anything in my experience about that, other than that I'm doing it?

43:54 Mel: Um, I guess that... there's, yeah, there is, because I, I, what I was thinking about then is like, um, it's like a, a greeting sort of thing. Like I'm not just yelling that with no attachment to it, I suppose. Like, I just walked in the door and I'm sayi- tha- I'm greeting my dog and sort o...f Mm. I feel like these descriptions are getting slippery now. Um,

43:54 Julian comments: I think this is relevant. Saying it as a greeting could be experientially different from saying it as a response to a question, or an admonishment. It's not Coco had peed on the rug and so a frustrated: Coco. It's not a robotic identification of an object as if Mel's labelling out loud everything she sees: "key" "door" "rug" "Coco".

I don't think we should read *too* much into it. Mel didn't describe excitedly greeting Coco. She didn't describe coming back from a week-long trip and joyously yelling "Coco!" But I could still see how this being a greeting is experientially relevant.

Russ comments: I agree.

44:28 RTH: So let me ask a... Is, is this utterance a one-word deal: "Coco." Or is it the, that the beep catches me at "Coco" and I have said, "Hi Coco" or "Hello Coco," or,

44:42 Mel: Uh, no, this was one-word utterance. Yeah. It was just "Coco." And I was just thinking in my head then whether like there was any precursor in my brain before that "Coco" came out loud of things like that. But no, it was more instantaneous than that. It was just like, see dog say "Coco."

44:59 RTH: Okay. So this, I think, is what we have called *autopilot*. Is that right? Are that

45:04 Mel: Yeah, I think so. That's sort, I think what my descriptions were getting out of just like walking, see, saw-dog-spoke-to-dog.

45:14 RTH: Okay. Without any particular...

45:19 Mel: ...forethought or anything.

45:21 RTH: Right. Okay. Then I think I'm good.

45:29 JBK: I'm good as well. Yeah. Number 3?!

SAMPLE 11.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

45:35 Mel: Um, yep. So this went off at 6:58 and I've written, um, "I was" ... Oh yeah, I've written, um, yeah, "I don't really remember. I was mid-conversation with my sister, her friend, and my dad. Um, and I was listening and talking." So... I, I feel like— I don't, I don't like this, um, description because I feel like I was very, there was actually sort of so much going on that once the beep went off and I was sort of overstimulated that then, like, when I had to write down what was happening in the moment before the beep, I was really like, struggled to be able to articulate that beyond like, well, I was in a conversation. Do y'know?

46:33 JBK: Was it that the beep went off and you weren't confident about your ability to *tell* what was going on? [Mel: Yeah.] Or it was that you weren't able to *articulate* what was going on? Like, was it more like, *oh, I don't know*? Or more like, *oh, I don't know how to describe this*?

46:55 Mel: No. No, I think it was, *I don't know*. I don't think it was, *I don't know how to describe this*. I think it was, I, *I don't know*. [JBK: Okay.] Um, cuz there's so much happening that I think this sort of in a way goes back to what I was saying earlier, that sometimes it's very challenging when you are really consumed in life, [laughs] to then, then the beep goes off and it's like, *oh, what was happening*? And I'm like, *oh my gosh, I have no idea*. Because there was, *I don't know*.

47:30 RTH: So can I ask is, are the words, "I don't know" what you wrote down? Are they in, I wrote, did you write down? I

47:37 Mel: Wrote, I wrote, "Don't really remember."

47:40 JBK: Okay.

47:41 Mel: This is the exact, I'll read you exactly what I wrote, "Don't really remember. Was mid conversation with my sister, her friend, and dad. Listening, talking. Not much beyond." That's exactly what I wrote. Thanks.

47:55 JBK: Sounds to me like, um, we should take that seriously that you, you wrote, you don't remember. So to move to the next one? [Mel: Yeah.] What do you say?

47:55 Russ comments: I agree that we should take seriously that Mel wrote and said "I don't remember." But I don't think that means that we should take that in a narrow literal

sense. I think that is too severe (the upcoming is an it's-not-the-words commentary). "I don't remember" (like all phrases) should not be taken as having only its one literal meaning (that I can't recall anything about the event). I take "I don't remember" as a grunt / gesture something in the ballpark of there's a difficulty here; exactly where in that ballpark remains to be determined. That is, "I don't remember" is a grunt that means (or at least may mean) that we have work to do. What that work is will have to be determined. There was quite a bit of description in her opening salvo; I'd like to see how much of that is accessible now.

It is, of course, possible that "I don't remember" means literally "I don't remember." We have no warrant to rule that out, but the literal meaning has no claim to primacy.

So I think we will have to work at discerning how much she can say about this sample, while maintaining the skepticism that perhaps she doesn't remember anything.

Another important consideration is the possibility for iterative training. Even if we can't figure out what was happening at the 6:58 moment, we may acquire some skills that will allow us *on future sampling days* to be more descriptive about similar samples.

48:05 RTH: So, but before we do that, can I ask a couple of questions about this? [Mel: Sure.] So I forget exactly what you, what, what you said in your description, but it, it seems to me that there's sort of two possibilities of "I don't remember." One, one of 'em—which was the one that I think you talked about—was, there's so many things going on, I just couldn't, couldn't coalesce anything to, to say this is what it was. But *another* thing about "I don't remember" is that there's just *nothing* going on. And I don't, I don't remember.

48:05 Julian comments: There are other options too. Maybe there was just one thing going on. Possibly being snapped out of it by the beep makes it hard to remember. Still, I think, Russ, your question here is more an opening to help Mel describe. Rather than a need to catalog every possible option.

Russ comments: I agree, but would say that the judgment about a question should come not from the words that are used but from whether it results in Mel describing (or trying to describe) her experience.

48:35 Mel: And I'm not sure which of those is true. So I think a big part of it is that there's so much external stimulus that I get a bit overwhelmed by then trying to work out what was happening, um, in my *inner* experience. Um, so I think that's definitely true, of that muddies the water for me, trying to work out what was happening just *internally*. Um, but then also like... maybe not a lot internally because I was so absorbed in all of that, that there's not- nothing obvious like the pain in my hands to grab at. So I think like a mix of all of that is true.

48:35 Russ comments: Mel put some specific inflection on *inner* and on *internally*. RTH will have to work through where that inflection came from.

Julian comments: Russ, you later at 58:30 say you see “no reason to conclude that there was nothing going on”. I don’t see reason to *conclude* this either. I don’t see it as the most likely option. But I still think that given Mel initially grunted that she couldn’t remember, I think we should leave this sample as open as possible and that includes the possibility of nothing. I’ll mark some places in the following discussion why I think that.

Here Mel is given two main options: a) a lot going on b) nothing going on. She says she’s not sure which. It could mean the two options weren’t adequate for her. Or she thinks that *internal* experience has to preclude the *external* so I think your next turn is a necessary one.

Russ comments:

RE “Mel initially grunted that she couldn’t remember”

Exercise for the reader (my answer is at the end of the transcript)

Mel’s opening salvo is at 45:35. What, in five words or less, is the main thrust of that salvo?

RE “Mel is given two main options: a) a lot going on b) nothing going on”

I don’t think that is true. (This is in the not-about-the-words series.) The main message RTH transmits to Mel is the invitation to tell him more about her experience. He says: “I have a couple of questions,” “I forget what you said,” “it seems to me,” “sort of two possibilities,” “I think you talked about”; I think that series of explicit equivocations is far more important than what you call the “two main options.” RTH’s two options were not intended to be adequate—they were intended as a door-opening gesture after JBK had suggested (at 47:55) closing the door.

49:19 RTH: So, um, about what, what I think of as inner experience. Inner experience does not necessarily have to be *inner*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So if I’m hearing a conversation, I would call that *inner experience*. If that’s what, if the conversation is what’s present to me, I would still call that *inner experience*, even though it’s *out there*. [Mel: Yeah.] And the reason that I, the *reason* that I call that *inner experience* is that your bag of bones, whatever, is choosing to be paying attention to *that conversation* as opposed to the pain in your hands, or the temperature in the room, or the feeling on your backside or what, what any of the welter of other kinds of experiences. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So I think it, I don’t, I don’t differentiate between inner and outer in that way. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So the, my the, the question is, or a question is, does it seem at this particular moment that you are absorbed (?) in the conversation? And, or does it seem like there’s just noth-, I don’t, I’m not, I am *not* absorbed in the conversation. Those guys are chattering away and I don’t give a shit about it. Those would seem to be sort of two different kinds of things.

49:19 Russ comments: RTH does not give a very complete account of what he calls inner experience. *Inner experience* as DES defines it is whatever is directly apprehended, what is before the footlights of consciousness at the moment of the beep. If I am noticing the gold of the sunset, I call that *inner experience* even though the sunset is decidedly *out there*. What makes the sunset *inner* experience is that at that moment, out of the welter of things that could be appearing before the footlights of my consciousness, I have, for whatever reason, and through whatever inner processes,

made the sunset the center of my apprehending. (See Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2007, p. 15.)

Julian comments: I fully agree with the need to step back and clarify that *inner experience* could still be about what's *out there*. But then you give Mel a very limited choice. Now I know that in all your *a* or *b* choices, there's the implicit—or *c*, or $\emptyset$ or any combination or you don't know. *Still* the choices you give are too restrictive for my taste. They are a) I am absorbed, this is experiential b) there's nothing, I don't give a shit about the conversation.

I still think there's at least the possibility of *I'm absorbed, so absorbed that I might just be taking in sensory information, maybe even deeply attuned to it, but whatever needs to happen in my brain to turn this into experience just isn't switched on here*. I think there's not a chance in hell that Mel would choose option b) because it comes with not giving a shit about what her dad, sister, and friend are saying. And I see no indication based on Mel's other samples that she would ever agree to not giving a shit about her friends and family, or even what they're saying at one particular time. So we've equated nothingness with not giving a shit. I think the nothingness possibility is scrapped after this. It doesn't matter what other questions you ask after.

Russ comments:

RE "I think there's not a chance in hell that Mel would choose option b) because it comes with not giving a shit about what her dad, sister, and friend are saying. And I see no indication based on Mel's other samples that she would ever agree to not giving a shit about her friends and family, or even what they're saying at one particular time."

I agree my question is not well crafted, but I think your commentary about it is far off the mark. First, lots of DES beeps occur when participants are not paying attention to something a loved one is saying. That has nothing whatsoever to do with caring or not caring about the loved one. Second, Mel herself has been close to this phenomenon, as in sample 10.2 when she heard her mom say something from down the hall—mom's words were clearly available but Mel was not paying attention to them or attaching meaning to them. Third, Mel has had samples where she is not attending even to *her own* verbal content, as in sample 7.2 where she is texting words that are skillfully coming out of her thumbs, but this is happening "on autopilot" with no experienced sense of the words, content, or the action. She had no directly apprehended experience.

RE "I think the nothingness possibility is scrapped after this. It doesn't matter what other questions you ask after."

I disagree with your conclusion, but more importantly, remember that the overall aim of this conversation is iterative training, not figuring out what was happening in this particular sample.

RE "Now I know that in all your *a* or *b* choices, there's the implicit—or *c*, or $\emptyset$ or any combination or you don't know. *Still* the choices you give are too restrictive for my taste."

(This is in the *not-about-the-words* theme). If it is true (and I think it is) that Mel understands that when I say *a* or *b* then I also mean *c*, or $\emptyset$ or any combination or you don't know, then it is not possible for the choices *a* and *b* to be too restrictive. Regardless of what words are used in *a* or *b*, Mel will understand me to be saying: *I'm groping around in the dark here, trying to help us articulate your experience. I don't prefer a or b or any other option, other than to hear what your experience is.*

50:28 Mel: Yeah, they do. Yeah. I think, I think definitely absorbed in the conversation then, for sure. And I think that that's probably true of times when I feel like this. And maybe what I've been trying to describe is, yeah, those times when I feel a bit frazzled or like, oh, I don't remember it's cuz I'm in absorbed in the thing that I am doing and there's nothing more beyond that. But sometimes to me that feels like too much of an ex-, of, of a description of the thing, y'know, the, the activity or that action or the behavioral thing or whatever that I'm doing. But if that is the case, then generally yeah, it's cuz I'm just completely absorbed in that, and that's entirely where my focus is and there's nothing meta about it and there's nothing, whatever. But that's definitely the focus of my inner experience of like, yeah, I'm, I was absorbed in that conversation and that's all there is to that. It's not that that conversation was happening around me, but I was off with the fairies or anything. Like, no, quite the opposite. [RTH: Okay.] But I find that a bit challenging sometimes, maybe to describe.

51:42 RTH: And challenging to describe may be, *may be* because of the difficulty of the terminology of inner experience, I suppo-

51:50 Mel: Yeah, I think so. I think that has been gnawing away at me a little bit in the last, especially getting back into it in the last two weeks, um, that inner experience t- I- Actually as we've gone on too, sorry to go on another tangent, but as we've gone on, I've been better, I think, at trying to expand my, um, understanding or, um, whatever of that term in terms of initially when we started, I would view inner experience as what I thought was happening inside my head. And I'd be talking about like inner monologue or lack thereof. And then that's expanded to like feelings, or physical sensations, or then exactly like a, um, a focused attention is probably a, a description that I like. And sort of what you were saying there of like, well, I was entirely absorbed in a conversation. That is very different to how I interpreted inner experience on day 1, I would say it. It's an expanded definition.

53:00 RTH: So this is, this is another one of the knife-sharpening conversations I guess that we're having here, which is a necessary and important thing to have, to have. So I would be happy to call it, I would actually prefer to call it *experience* rather than *inner experience* because of the problems that we're talking about here. [Mel: Yeah.] But the problem with *experience* is: *experience* refers to, y'know, my, my experience of spending a sabbatical leave in Maastricht or whatever, and that's not inner, that's not *experience* as what we're talking about here. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But the, but so you gotta, you can't just call it *experience* and assume that people know what you're talking about, either. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] You could call it before-the-footlights-of-consciousness experience, which is sort of better than either one of those two in a way. But, but (A), it's awkward; and (B) it presumes that you know what consciousness is. So I, I don't think there is a term [Mel: Mm.] for it. And yet I do think that we, that

we can learn to understand what we *mean* by it, even if we don't have a good word for it. [Mel: Mm.] The, and right now the clo-, the closer, closer one seems like whatever it is that's before the footlights of your consciousness counts as what I call *inner experience*.

54:21 And what I'm gathering here is that before the footlights of my consciousness is this conversation. I haven't shined this conversation off. (Or I've shined it on, whatever that expression is.) I haven't withdrawn from the conversation. [Mel: Nnnh]. I don't mean it in a meta way, that I'm analyzing the conversation. And I don't even mean it in a, I know that it's my sister that's talking rather than my father at this particular moment. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And yet I am absorbed in the conversation. And, but there's nothing on nothing beyond that.

54:56 Mel: Yeah. Yep. I do think, um, another way that I've tried to think about it lately, which might sound silly to you, but I've found it a little bit helpful, is just that, uh, thing of, well, y'know, you're not me. So like you just see my blob of body and have no idea beyond my blob of body being here, what the blob of body is experiencing. [laughs] So in super layman's terms, like, y'know, if I look at my sister sitting over there, I got no idea what's going on apart from the fact that her blob of body is sitting there. So just that sort of concept has been helpful for me to take it out of my head and broaden that like inner experience sort of thing of, Yeah. Okay. Well you guys can only see my blob of body, but what was happening inside my blob of body at that time. [laughs]

54:56 Russ comments: That's a beautiful description of the aim of DES.

55:51 RTH: So I think, I think that's exactly right, because inside your blob of body, you, you *could have* been looking at your sister's hair and saying, y'know, "I like, I like what you did with her hair." Or "I don't like what you did with her hair," or whatever. But no-, noticing the color of it or whatever. There's, and, and that that would be true of absolutely every other feature on her body. And that all that's visual. [Mel: Hmm.] And you could have been somehow attending to the sound of her voice or his voice or the airplane flying overhead or the, or what, whatever.

56:22 Mel: Yeah.

56:23 RTH: Or all, all of those things that which—which I call the *welter*—all of those things doesn't matter to me at this particular moment. I'm absorbed in the conversation, tracking along in the conversation. Nothing else is ongoing. But that doesn't mean that's *nothing* is ongoing. It means that nothing *else* is going on other than [inaudible].

56:49 JBK: I have a different, I have a different take on this beep. Um, which is just the possibility of it also being nothing. Cuz I, I would take seriously that you didn't remember, you wrote "I don't remember." Or, or that even It could be, yeah, it could be both. Y'know, you're, you're absorbed, but also, uh, absorbed kind of nothingness. Um, yes, I mean, I would, I wouldn't pin down this beep. To me it's similar in some ways to the, the sampling day you were watching *Saltburn*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And a lot of the beeps you were absorbed in the movie, and then one of them you're just like, *I don't remember, I don't remember this one*. And we speculated that maybe you were so absorbed in the movie [Mel: Mm-hmm.] that you can't remember or so absorbed that

they're, I dunno, that experience— Maybe, maybe it was nothing. Maybe it just, like, we don't know about the subconscious or whatever, but maybe experience moved to the subconscious or something. Or, or we don't know. And, and for that one, we, we didn't really probe further. So I would, I would also take seriously the possibility here that we, like you don't know, or we don't, none of us know.

58:15 RTH: So it could be that you've misunderstood this conversation, Julian, because I haven't for the last 10 minutes, haven't been trying to figure out what's going on in this beep *at all*. This conversation from my point of view is about *next week*, not about *yesterday's* beep.

58:15 Russ comments: RTH, while watching the video three days after the interview, thinks that the "*at all*" of his comment is too extreme. He now thinks that it would be fairer to say that he was not *primarily* aimed at *yesterday's* beep.

58:30 JBK: Mm. But if we, I feel like there are times when we pinned down to, um, an absorbed kind of experience, where it was a little pinned down. And if it's training for next week, I'd, I'd rather have it like not pinned down, like as open as it could have been this or that or nothing or, or all of it. Or, y'know, I'd rather not pin it down.

58:30 Russ comments: To the extent that the conversation was about clarifying the present sample, I see no reason to conclude that there was nothing going on. Mel said, in her opening description, "there was actually sort of so much going on that once the beep went off and I was sort of overstimulated that then, like, when I had to write down what was happening in the moment before the beep, I was really like, struggled to be able to articulate that beyond like, well, I was in a conversation." That seems a long way from *nothing*.

But the more important part of this discussion was the clarification that *inner experience* can include taking in of externally ongoing events, part of the iterative training.

Julian comments: I added comments at 48:35 and 49:19 about this. I don't see *nothing* as the most likely possibility. But I still don't want to see it ruled out. Or ruled out in a more even-handed way.

I think the clarification that *inner experience* can include what's going on *out there* was essential. But I also think we're trying to work against the assumption that external behavior always involves inner experience of it. Writing an email or talking doesn't necessarily mean there's experience of it. Even *overstimulated* could refer to some kind of processing going on outside them footlights. So I don't think we paid adequate care to this assumption.

58:54 RTH: So I, (A) I don't think I pinned it down. (B) I think the object is to clarify the distinctions and...

59:06 JBK: Um,

59:07 RTH: ...and, and it's not good enough to just say, well, it could be this could be that. And it is, I think we have to define exactly what we mean by *this* and exactly what we mean by *that*, so that *next time* we might be better, *might be* better.

59:26 JBK: Well, Mel, was your, how did your impression of kind of your experience the moment before this beep, how did, how did it kind of change over like while we were talking about it, or if it changed at all?

59:26 Russ comments: I don't think Mel is in a position to answer that question, which would be akin to asking a person with false memory when the alteration occurred. *Julian*, if he wished, could examine the interview to discover when *he* thinks an answer demonstrated that Mel's experience had morphed (or not morphed) across the interview, as a reason for his own increasing skepticism. For example, I observed, in my 58:30 comment, that Mel's original description was consonant with her later descriptions, so I didn't see any particularly need to increase skepticism. But I don't think we can or should ask *Mel* to engage in such a task. It's not her job, and it would require that she has maintained a running understanding of what she thought and when she thought it. I doubt that that is true. So I think this question will either be confusing or an invitation to confabulate, neither of which is desirable.

Julian comments: I've asked this type of question a few times by now. Even though I know your position that DES interviewees aren't the be-all-end-all experts on whether experience descriptions or written sample descriptions are accurate.

Maybe I thought that interviewees could give *some* perspective even if it's not unquestionable. I know that sometimes you've sent interviewees the final DES samples and asked if they seem accurate. I don't know if you've stopped doing this.

Sometimes I feel uncomfortable talking about what we think is in Mel's experience without asking her perspective. But this might be a kind of pseudo-ethical hang-up rather than a real concern. In many fields of research—psychology but also sociology, anthropology etc.—there's an increased emphasis on giving voice to subjects/participants/co-researchers. You're not supposed to go in as a distant observer imposing your framework. You're supposed to include their perspective as much as possible. Ethics can be performative and mostly concerned with avoiding criticism. But I don't want to discount the notion of 'giving voice' because all these fields are somewhat different. Let's look more specifically about what it means in DES.

DES is *all about* hearing another perspective in the sense that we want to hear about Mel's experience at specific moments. It's *not* about her perspective in the sense of making Mel the unquestionable authority about her experience. If she thinks we got a sample description wrong, she doesn't have the final word. And as you mentioned, my original question overstepped the purview of DES, asking things that are impossible to answer in terms of memory demands.

You wrote before [Day 10 at 54:30] that DES is flipped from traditional psychology in terms of skepticism. Traditionally skeptical means "I don't believe you but I'm not going to tell you." In DES it means, I don't believe you, I'll say why, and we'll discuss it to learn from it.

But I think there's more to be said about the flipped ethics of DES. They're also flipped in the sense of "giving voice" to participants and hearing their perspective. Yes we want to hear their perspective. But we're going to be honest about what their

perspective is. We're not going to assume they have the same expertise that we do. We're not going to assume they can answer all the questions we can answer.

To return to the anthropology example for a minute, my impression of where "giving voice" could go wrong would be going into another culture and then asking questions that it's an anthropologist's job to answer. Say you want to study the Sepik Crocodile Festival in Papua New Guinea. It probably would *not* be a good idea to simply ask questions like "What does this tradition mean to you? What importance do these customs have in your identity?" People in those cultures may or may not be thinking in terms of tradition or customs or identity. An anthropologist might have something to say about this from looking at and comparing other cultures. But they can't assume these categories apply in people's experience. I think most fruitful would be observing behavior and also trying to find out as best as possible what different people's experience is during this festival and in the time around it [side note, you've mentioned a couple times in passing that cross-cultural DES studies would be interesting (for example in *Passion for Specificity*, Chapter X pp. 127-128; Chapter XII p. 139) , and I agree].

So I think DES is all about hearing another perspective. But it does not try to flatten differences in perspectives. Mel knows things we don't. We know things she doesn't—about the method or about different cognitive biases. We don't need to pretend we or all know the same stuff. And we don't need to ask questions that are our job.

At its worst, "hearing another perspective" can be manipulative. *I'm going to give you a question you can't answer. So in your non-answer I'll be able to piece out the answer I want to hear. Or I'm going to ask you a question and you know what answer I want so you'll give it to me.* I think at worst I was manipulative when I've asked Mel: between Russ's version and my version, which one do you like better? Specifically on Day 9 (8:18), I asked Mel to choose between Russ's description emphasizing feeling a wide stance and my description emphasizing feeling weight in her feet.

There's the possibility that in this current sample I was somewhat manipulative. That may be part of it but I think the main thing is the pseudo-ethical hangup—well, we're talking about Mel, we should get her perspective. So to wrap up what I've been trying to think through about the ethics of DES:

- Be honest about skepticism
- Be honest about differences in perspective and differences in knowledge

Russ comments:

RE "sometimes you've sent interviewees the final DES samples and asked if they seem accurate. I don't know if you've stopped doing this."

I used to send samples and ask for accuracy ratings, but I have found that participants give 10/10 ratings all the time, even to sample descriptions that I know to be badly crafted. So I stopped asking. Depending on my time and energy and the interests of the participant, I sometimes have participants engaged in all aspects of the procedure, from reviewing the samples to writing the overviews, and so on, to (as with Mel) inviting participants to become a joint interviewer. But all that is time and energy intensive.

RE “But this might be a kind of pseudo-ethical hang-up rather than a real concern. In many fields of research—psychology but also sociology, anthropology etc.— there’s an increased emphasis on giving voice to subjects/participants/co-researchers”

I think psychology has been on the wrong track for quite a while, and it is largely due to their it’s-too-much--about-the-words mistakes. For example, for the most part, modern psychological research refers to “participants” in a performative way. In most studies, a human “participant” is no more a participant than is a rat in a maze. To call human subjects “participants” is a fairly recent development—the 4th edition of the *APA Publication Manual* (1994) required, for the first time, the term “participants”:

The third of the [*APA Publication Manual*, 4th ed.] “Guidelines to Reduce Bias in Language” states, “Acknowledge participation” and begins “Write about the people in your study in a way that acknowledges their participation. Replace the impersonal term *subjects* with a more descriptive term when possible – *participants, individuals ...*” (What group favored this change? Were college students writing in *en masse* saying “Don’t call us subjects any more; we participate!”) (Roediger, 2011, n.p.)

That is about the words—how to write—rather than about *actually having people participate*. That requirement is particularly galling to me, because APA requires that I call Mel a “participant” (which she obviously is) but which puts her in the same category as a college freshman who shows up to take a required questionnaire (which she obviously is *not*); furthermore, plain language suggests calling Mel a “subject” because her experience is the subject of our investigation.

That’s a bit discursive, but the point is that there is a lot of pseudo-ethics in psychology, which I think should be resisted.

RE “I’m going to give you a question you can’t answer. So in your non-answer I’ll be able to piece out the answer I want to hear. Or I’m going to ask you a question and you know what answer I want so you’ll give it to me.”

Fritz Perls (including, I think, in his book *Gestalt Therapy Now*, but I’m not really sure) used to say that a question mark is often a hook designed to pull you in, rather than a request for information. That is, most (or at least many) questions are under-the-table manipulations. It’s a practice to be avoided.

RE “the ethics of DES”

I don’t have a list of ethics, but I would include: be honest about what you don’t know; especially be wary of what you think you know—it’s almost always wrong; understand the constraints on the current endeavor and submit to them.

59:37 Mel: No, I, I thought I personally took it to be, um, like that I took the conversation into speaking more generally and broadly. Um, when I, especially when I was starting to talk about, like me being a blob. [laughs] That’s when I sort of had stopped talking about this beep in, in particular and was just trying to explain in general how I am, uh, approaching DES at the moment and approaching trying to articulate samples and stuff like that. I was talking broadly then. And I find it helpful to do that, and I have done that a bit today, so I apologize. But of, um, yeah, of getting reassurance that I’m on the right path. And so when I’m talking about, well, hang on, my, um, definition, if you like, of *inner experience* has, um, expanded and evolved over the weeks and sort

of sharing that, I find that then helpful to make sure that that is aligned with yours. And therefore, because then it makes me feel like, okay, well then when I describe this next week or whatever, it's in line with your understanding of the same thing. So yeah, I'd taken this more broadly now and just wanna make sure, yeah, that there's like clarity or that we're all on the same, just reduce ambiguity as much as possible with this. Yeah.

59:37 Julian comments: and Mel does answer more generally about her approach to DES and less about how her understanding of this particular sample changed. So it's good that she did focus more on the iterative training aspect of it.

59:37 Russ comments:
RE "I apologize.... My definition, if you like, of *inner experience* has expanded and evolved over the weeks and sort of sharing that, I find that then helpful to make sure that that is aligned with yours."

There are two fundamentally important skills of DES: cleaving to the moment of the beep and cleaving to experience. By *cleaving* I mean (with Webster) "adhering firmly and closely or loyally and unwaveringly." The *iterative* process of DES refers to the improvement of those cleavings across time. All that has been on display in this interview. So there is no apology necessary—the adjustment of those skills is a necessary part of the DES process.

1:01:16 JBK: All right. Okay. Um,

1:01:20 RTH: Well, it's 12 minutes after the hour.

1:01:23 Mel: Yeah, sorry, Julian.

1:01:25 RTH: Makes it late for Julian, early for... Should we call it a day or do one more?

1:01:31 JBK: I, I don't mind. I am, my energy level's fine. So it's, it's up to you two.

1:01:36 Mel: I, I'm, I'm fine, but I'm aware that it's late for you, Julian, so it's absolutely your call.

1:01:42 JBK: Um, then I say we do another.

1:01:44 RTH: Number 4.

SAMPLE 11.4 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

1:01:46 Mel: Okay. Um, oh, this went off, uh, two minutes after the beep prior, so it's 7:00 PM and I have written these exact words: "I was mid typing the above. I was sort of paused thinking about what I wanted to write. I could hear conversation around me, but not the actual words. I was very focused on trying to think about the previous beep experience."

1:02:13 RTH: So I'm, I'm gonna leave this up to you. Sometimes it's just too confusing to have a beep that's about another beep. [Mel: Yeah, that's (inaudible).] The first beep itself

was confusing enough to overlay it. And so if there's a, if you think this is more confusing than it's worth, let's go into the next beep.

1:02:29 Mel: Yes. It feels very like *Inception*. [Mel and JBK laugh]

1:02:33 RTH: Let's go into the next one.

SAMPLE 11.5 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

1:02:34 Mel: Okay, fabulous. Because things have changed, yeah. Um, so this one went off at 7:50 PM and I have written, "I was mid-editing on my laptop. I was watching and listening to vision of my grandpa talking. I was really taking it in. Um, nothing else is in my awareness as I focus on this intently in order to craft the story that I'm telling."

1:03:01 RTH: So is it your grandpa that you're editing? [Mel: Yeah.] Okay. And, and so tell me, tell me again what's in your experience? Cuz I sort of confused about that. I had those as two separate deals.

1:03:13 Mel: Um, I was, uh, looking at my laptop, which was playing vision of my grandpa talking, um, and that I was completely absorbed in that. So, uh, that is what was in my experience of watching and listening to him as I was, um. For wider context, I was in the editing process, so listening for bits that I wanted to use or whatever. But so in the exact moment before the beep, I was just watching and listening to him on my laptop.

1:03:52 RTH: And so at the moment of the beep, does, would you say my experience is absorbing or receiving what's on the screen? Or does it seem like I'm looking for a place to quit or a place to stop so that I'm in the editing mode?

1:04:11 Mel: No, I'd say the first one. Yeah. Uh, very much absorbed in what is being played out. It wasn't looking for a pause yet. I was, it's like I, I know exactly what it felt like in terms of, um, okay. It was like really deep listening. Cuz I was sort of almost looking for meaning in what he was saying. So rather than like looking for a place to get out, it was like *really listening* [with a very strong bodily emphasis on *really*] to what he was saying, um, in the hope that something, y'know, hit and made me feel something.

1:04:55 RTH: And, and does the *really*-ness of the listening, is that part of your experience? Or is your experience of the, uh, my, what's before the footlights of my consciousness is my grandpa speaking and what he's saying and whatever. With, with, with or without a meta, I'm deeply doing this.

1:05:18 Mel: No, no meta level. There was no, um, no meta thing. But there was, um, when I say *really*, I think, I mean, um, to the extent of which I am *absorbed* in this. So it's like a, an intensity of watching and listening. Like there is *no chance* that anything else is part of my awareness, cuz I'm so locked into watching and listening to this.

1:05:18 Julian comments: In my original sample description I described Mel as being absorbed in seeing and listening to her grandpa. Russ, you added a good deal of intensifiers into the description (my highlighting here)—"**completely, deeply, totally** absorbed". I was

originally surprised. I missed that this was so different. Honestly I might have just understood it as absorbed type of experience and then just zoned out a bit. I see now that we should describe something of the intensity.

1:05:44 RTH: Okay.

1:05:45 Mel: It's a *really* focused attention, I guess.

1:05:50 RTH: And, and is that attention different from the one from a couple of beeps ago where, where there was a conversation going on?

1:05:57 Mel: Yeah, I think so. [RTH: (inaudible)] And I think that that's relevant in that this feels like way easier to describe because I'm like, *oh! there's no doubt in my mind* that this is *exactly* what I was focused on. And in the other one it's like, oh yeah, I was in the conversation, but oh, was I like listening to dad or think like, I dunno, I was just in the conversation. This is much easier to be more—it was more tunnel vision or something.

1:06:23 RTH: Okay.

1:06:25 Mel: (And the lights moving.) [changes the lighting]

1:06:27 RTH: Then. I think I'm good.

1:06:30 JBK: Um, were you, so you were watching and listening. Was it something, anything specific about what he was saying or doing? or no?

1:06:42 Mel: I didn't write that down. Um, uh, I don't feel like I was [exhales] um like hung up on any particular word or whatever. I was just like locked in, like the, (I dunno) act of receiving, um, yeah.

1:07:06 JBK: Was it, was it more on the watching? More on the listening? Impossible to separate? Hard to say?

1:07:16 Mel: Yeah. I, I would say it just felt equal.

1:07:20 JBK: Okay. Um, I'm, yeah, I'm good on this too.

1:07:30 RTH: Me too. So when are we gonna do this again?

1:07:35 Mel: Uh,

1:07:36 RTH: Or, are, I guess I should say, *are* we gonna do this again? And then if so, when?

1:07:40 Mel: Abs- well, absolutely from my end. Um, don't wanna make all that progress clarifying things today to not do it again! [laughs]

1:07:48 RTH: That's right! I'm with you! Um, I wasn't, I wasn't, I was *not* trying to talk us out of it by any means. But, but I, um, the, the method is free, free people coming together to do what they wanna do with, without a sense of obligation.

1:08:03 Mel: So same time next week works for me. If that works for everyone.

1:08:09 JBK: Fine for me.

1:08:10 RTH: That would be Monday, the 26th at one o'clock.

1:08:14 JBK: 10:00 PM for me. Eight for you, Mel.

1:08:21 Mel: Yeah. [RTH: Works for me.] Is that, is that still fine for you, Julian? And I'm very conscious of it being late.

1:08:26 JBK: No. Yeah, it's fine. [Mel: Fine.] That's good.

1:08:29 RTH: All right. Sounds good to me.

1:08:30 JBK: Alright. Uh, yeah, let's just stay on, just like a couple minutes after, or maybe a couple seconds after I pause the recording.

Exercise for the reader (Russ's answer)

Mel's opening salvo is at 45:35. What, in five words or less, is the main thrust of that salvo?

I think: *too much going on; struggling*. (This is part of the not-about-the-words series.) Yes, "Mel initially grunted that she couldn't remember," but she tried to take that back as soon as the words left her mouth ("I don't, I don't like this, um, description because I feel like I was very, there was actually sort of so much going on"). So I don't see any reason to give special prominence to the words "I couldn't remember." I'm happy to be (as always) open to alternative interpretations, but not especially because she used the words "couldn't remember."

Julian's comment: *Conversing but couldn't articulate how*

I wrote those five words before reading your reply, but this next part comes after reading your reply.

Yes, relistening there was more than *I don't remember*. There was the conversation. There was a lot going on and overstimulation. And Mel also talked about not being able to articulate experience—which is somewhat different from just not being able to remember.