

Mel May
Mel Interview 12

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the March 4 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/ViRWMahNNBY>. 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,

RTH = Russ Hurlburt

JBK = Julian Bass-Krueger

Mel = Mel May

0:00 Mel: No, let's get into it and see.

0:03 JBK: Sure. Number, beep number 1.

SAMPLE 12.1 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

0:05 Mel: Okay. So this was at 2:22 yesterday afternoon. And I have written, uh, "I was aware of the weight of my body as I laid on the ground. It feels heavy, relaxed, soft. I'm reading, and the passage is fairly depressing, and I felt that emotion within me before the beep went off. The character's drinking away her depression alone on the, her couch. And I'm sort of embodying that emotion as I read it. In this sense, I would say the two clear elements of my inner experience were the physical weight of my body and the empathy I felt for the character I was reading about. The emotional imaginative state was stronger of the two."

0:49 JBK: Okay. So the emotional imaginative state is stronger of the two. Um, could you, could you describe this state some more? I know you described it somewhat already in terms of the character drinking and this depression. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]. Can you...is there more you could say about it before I try to ask specific questions?

1:09 Mel: Sure. Yeah. Um, it [exhales sharply] was like, uh, just a, a feeling like, um, and so me trying to ex- uh, like sum up, like what did I, uh, [looks at notes] uh, like embodying that emotion and stuff. That's what I was trying to explain of like, rather than.... It wasn't that I could *picture* that scenario of that character or whatever. It was more just like I had the *feeling* that was being described in the book. Like I felt that sense. Um, and that sense was, yeah, like, yeah, sort of depressive and sort of like, almost like a loneliness and um, like whatever. But none of that was related to my actual life. Like that was definitely the result of reading, uh, this passage. Um, but that's sort of what I'm trying to explain of I felt like this deep empathy or embodiment of the character's emotion. That's how I was experiencing what I was consuming, rather than visualizing the scene or anything like that.

2:20 JBK: Okay. So you're not i, imagining the character that, um, or there's no—or is there in some way something to do with this character? Or is it really more about the feeling at this moment?

2:36 Mel: Uh, how do you mean?

2:39 JBK: Like, even if you're not visually picturing the scenario with the character, is there in some way something about the, this character's situation in this experience? Or no?

2:39 Russ comments: The "is there in some way" here and at 2:20 is problematic to my ear. Mel has said clearly that the feeling is about the character's situation, so the answer to the question has to be Yes. But the structure of the question seems to imply that the feeling doesn't count.

Julian comments: I agree that the phrasing of "some way" is bad. That being said, I wouldn't take for granted that the scene with the character is necessarily part of Mel's experience. There are various options. One (which Mel has denied) is that there is some mental image of the character.

Russ comments: Yes, there are various options for how a scene with the character is part of Mel's experience. One (which Mel has denied) is that there is some mental image of the character. A second would be to describe the scene in inner speech. A third would be to conceptualize the scene in unsymbolized thinking. A fourth would be to vicariously feel what the character was feeling. Mel has clearly, unambiguously endorsed that fourth option, but you apparently rule that out. I don't see any reason to rule that out other than an overly narrow presupposition about the way a scene must be experienced.

2:51 Mel: Yeah, I think, well, I just think me reading about the character's situation was sort of like I was soaking in that, um, scene in a feelings way. I guess this feels a bit wish washy, but, um... yeah, I dunno. [her phone dings] Oh, sorry.

3:15 JBK: Mm-hmm. Did this feeling have, um, location?

3:21 Mel: That's an interesting question. I don't think so. No. It, that's, um, yeah, like how, I wanna say it was just like a *state of being* is sort of probably an apt description.

3:33 JBK: Okay. Just a state, but no particular location to pin down.

3:37 Mel: No.

3:38 JBK: And, um,

3:39 RTH: So can I broaden that a little bit? So any, any bodily aspect of this? Or is this, would you say...

3:45 Mel: I don't think so.

- 3:46 RTH: ..a mental state rather than a bodily state. Okay.
- 3:47 Mel: Um, I mean, like, I feel like it's kind of interesting that, y'know, I'm, I'm, as I mentioned with the other half of it, like I was laying on the ground and I remember sort of being aware of like the weight of my body and like perhaps that is sort of all part of it, cuz that's sort of similar to the range of emotions that I was probably feeling. But no, like it, there was no tightness in any area or anything like that. No. [RTH: Okay.]
- 4:16 JBK: Okay. I wanna ask a bit more about the, the character, depression, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] loneliness kind of thing before we get into the body heaviness.
- 4:25 Mel: Yep.
- 4:26 JBK: Um, so it's, it's, so I'm tryna get at, um, like it's a loneliness and kind of de, depressiveness or like, or how would you, how would you convey that to me?
- 4:45 Mel: Yeah, I think that's challenging because it feels sort of a little bit hard to label it that accurately, cuz all, like, even when I was writing this description, like the way to describe it best felt just like empathy. And so it was just that feeling which feels, um, like varied. Like it, so trying to like categorize it like that feels like a wee, a little bit too specific beyond that. Like, the picture that was being painted about this character was certainly like, the descriptions were, y'know, very like, depressing and lonely and all that sort of *tone*. And so I feel like I just, there was a, I was oozing this empathy for this character that was within that tone. I'm not sure that answered anything [laughs].
- 5:41 JBK: Um, well, well somewhat. Um, but just that it can be like pinned down in one specific word—I think that that gets at it. Um, and you, you mentioned like the character drinking, drinking away their life, or is that—
- 5:57 Mel: “Drinking away their depression” is sort, is what I wrote, I think.
- 6:01 JBK: Drinking away... is, is that ki—, is something about drinking or something about the situation present in this feeling? Or is that more just context?
- 6:01 Russ comments: I have the same reaction to “is something about drinking” here as I did to “is there in some way” in 2:39: The answer has to *Yes: the feeling is everything about the drinking and the situation, but that seems to be ruled out by the question.*
- 6:15 Mel: Uh, no, I think both. Yeah. Um, I think that the, the context that I'm given in this description, I think is my best attempt to explain that feeling of empathy that I had. Like, so I think that that context is really relevant in, that's the best way I can sort of explain the energy that then I was radiating, or something. Um, so yeah, I dunno. I dunno. It's a very, it's, this is challenging for me because it was a clear state of being / feeling whatever. Um, but to, to try and get more specific than that, I'm, it, it feels a bit hard to grab at.
- 7:07 JBK: Okay.

7:09 RTH: So I, I thought the questions were too broad, which is probably why Mel is having difficulty. So if you ask the question, “is there something about,” well then the answer to that is Yes, there is something about the war in Vietnam and there is something about Christ on the cross, and there is something about Cadillac Escalades that are present, that somehow figure in Mel’s situation. So if you ask something, if you ask, “is there something about,” the answer has gotta be Yes. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] But that’s not what, what Mel was trying to say. I don’t think what Mel was trying to say, I think was, and you could ask you, you could ask something like, “at the moment of this beep is the content, the drinking, the rest of the scene, whatever that scene is about, somehow present to you *directly*? Or is what’s present directly to you the feeling, which is no doubt the re, result of having read about that, but my, my experience at this moment is aimed at me rather than out there at the, the guy?”

8:20 Mel: Hmm. That’s an interesting question too, cuz if I was gonna answer that, I’m not sure of the two options.

8:20 Russ comments: On watching the video, I think we haven’t asked the fundamental question about Mel’s feeling, which is why Mel is having difficulty answering the question posed. We have been conflating “a feeling of empathy” with an “empathetic feeling of depression / loneliness.” Those are two very different things: the first is *I feel myself to be in tune with the other*; the second is *I feel depressed*. Until we sort it out (which we never do in this interview), we will be confused about Mel’s experience.

8:30 RTH: Okay.

8:30 Mel: I think it’s some sort of mix of both.

8:34 JBK: Mm-hmm.

8:36 RTH: Okay.

8:38 JBK: Hmm. I have a question. [laughs], I think this question that I ask will probably, it might have to lead to hypothetical. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But I’m wondering, um, feeling being empathy for a character and that being: if that is different and then how then if you just had that feeling yourself? Um,

8:38 Russ comments: It wouldn’t surprise me if JBK’s question is motivated in part by trying to clarify that distinction between “a feeling of empathy” with an “empathetic feeling of depression / loneliness” (see comment at 8:20). But instead of making that distinction directly, he asks what I would call a “glass” hypothetical question (how would it feel if you have the feeling yourself?), which will take us off the track.

Julian comments: Yes, that distinction is exactly what I was interested in. The hypothetical was the wrong way to do it. I wasn’t sure how though. Or even if there necessarily was a distinction between a feeling of empathy and an empathetic feeling of depression / loneliness. The colloquial understanding of empathy is that you feel *something* of the targeted emotion. For example, if someone is sad and you’re

empathetic, you feel *somewhat* sad. Maybe not to the same extent that they do, but to some degree. The point, however, is to move past colloquial understandings.

When I asked this, I wasn't sure if the distinction between empathy and feeling-it-yourself was arbitrary—a presupposition I didn't want Mel to get tangled up in. But yes, lesson learned that a hypothetical is never the way to go. And note that we talked about this at length while writing the sample descriptions which can be found in the commentary at the end of this transcript.

9:02 Mel: In terms of like whether I was directly experiencing a lonely, depressing scenario?

9:08 JBK: Yes. In terms of, yeah, but that might be hard to answer without a hypothetical.

9:15 Mel: But it's def- it definitely is a little bit hypothetical, but it's an interesting one. Um, it's, yeah, it's, it's hypothetical but I'm gonna answer it for the sake of fun. Um, like I think it is slightly different, but, but marginally so, cuz like yeah, it was interesting when the beep went off...

9:15 Russ comments: Why glass questions are problematic—Yes, glass is fun. We won't know what we will be talking about, but it will be interesting.

9:40 JBK: [inaudible] I dunno if I phrased it in terms of, of *different*, but I don't necessarily need to assume that is it *is* different, but just...

9:47 Mel: Uhuh. Well, yeah. Uh, I think it's quite interesting cuz you're getting into how I experience empathy or like the, the, um, the level of my empathy. But um, yeah, I think it's that it's definitely a, um, a strength to it or whatever that feels like. I sort of have to remind myself that I'm not personally going through a depressive lonely episode. And that was sort of experienced when the beep went off that like, oh, I had this state of being this, this air of, or this tone of all of those elements, loneliness, depressive, whatever. But like, I was just laying in the sunshine in my family home in Australia and had none of those feelings beyond that was the state of being I was in after reading that passage. If that's sort of—

9:47 Russ comments: More about why glass questions are problematic—Now Mel is on a hypothetical roll—it's *quite interesting*—which culminates in the fantasy of having “to remind myself that I'm not personally going through a depressive lonely episode.” I would bet most of the ranch that she never had to remind herself of that, either at the beep or at any other time. I think Mel knows that this reminding myself is meta-fantasy, which is why she starts with the subjunctifying “I *sort of* have to remind myself....”.

10:45 JBK: You're, you're *after* the beep goes off, having to remind yourself that you're, that you're not actually in the situation? Because... at the, the moment right *before* the beep, it sounds like it is just this situation without you reminding yourself that it's not real.

10:45 Russ comments: More about why glass questions are problematic—Now JBK is confusing a fantasy (nonexistent) reminding with an actually existing (that is, JBK has

dropped the *sort of*) reminding that took place after the beep. Now he has to try to discover whether this fantastical-reified-to-actual reminding also took place at the moment of the beep.

11:02 Mel: Yeah. [JBK: Correct me if I'm wrong.] Yeah. Like when before the beep goes off that I'm just in that state. Um, a hundred percent. Yeah.

11:11 JBK: Uh, Russ, do you have questions about this, this state? Before we turn...

11:18 RTH: On? Well, I won't, I, I'm, I'm not sure I understood the last exchange. Are you saying that at the moment of the beep you didn't know that you were reading a book and that, that this was coming from, this feeling was coming from you?

11:33 Mel: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Um, no, no. Just more like as in...

11:37 RTH: Then, then I'm happy.

11:38 Mel: ...the, at the moment of the beep you have, yeah, this feeling or emotional sensation that, y'know, has aspects of loneliness and depression or like, y'know, whatever. Um, and I experienced that in a, um, uh, I experienced that to a level that is so-, is, is a little overwhelming in the sense that then, y'know, when you gotta write it down or you take yourself out of that moment after the beep or whatever, you like, have to almost remind yourself that actually your life's fine and you're not depressed and lonely. If that sort of makes sense.

11:38 Russ comments: More about why glass questions are problematic—We are still (3.5 minutes later) trying to climb out of the fantasy / hypothetical hole. At best, we have wasted 3.5 valuable minutes. Worse, we may have communicated to Mel that we are interested in her fantasies about experience.

12:24 JBK: Actually, I have some more questions actually that are occurring to me. Um, but depression, I could think a lot of things, there could be lots of things I'm not even thinking about. Could be more of a sadness, or could be more of just a emptiness or hopelessness or feeling of like lack of self-worth or just like, I think depression can mean maybe a lot of different things. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]. So, so I'm, I'm curious to you, or maybe even depression is not the word, or maybe it is more about the loneliness or more about some other mix. But I'm, I'm just curious about your, your experience specifically.

12:24 Julian comments: An attempt to apply the not-about-the-words. Acknowledging that depression/depressing isn't just one thing—especially according to DES research. Giving some possibilities but hopefully not implying one is preferred. Then acknowledging 'depression' may not even be on the right track. Then at the end trying to turn it around back to Mel's experience, instead of making it seem like I'm trying to find the perfect word.

Mel does find the other words I brought in fitting, like hopelessness or sadness. I don't take this as a ringing endorsement though. Interestingly the word she mostly uses is lonely/loneliness. The words I brought in were DSM-y and loneliness is not, to

my knowledge, a DSM criteria for depression and maybe not the first thing people would think of. But I do think this descriptor is the most apt for accessing Mel's experience here, even if it contains other dimensions that can't be neatly categorized.

Russ comments:

RE your first paragraph: Excellent.

RE your second paragraph: I wish to emphasize something that is perhaps implied in what you wrote but perhaps goes beyond it: that the not-about-the-words admonition has *two* targets. The first target is helping Mel use better words (your comment has described that well).

The second target is helping *Julian* realize that *he* doesn't (or at least might not) know what *he* is talking about, and this is a good example. Julian, following Mel's lead, has used "depression," but (it turns out) Julian's use of *depression* is not what Mel intended. Julian's usage is technical (DSM-y); Mel's usage is colloquial (loneliness). The technical meaning of "depression" came from Julian, not from Mel. *Julian* is on the wrong track.

Keeping both the help-Mel and the weaken-Julian intentions alive for as long as possible is the heart of DES. If all goes well, across the interview (or iteratively across several interviews) Mel will become better and better able to say what she means and Julian will become better and better at hearing what Mel means, and the necessity for clarification will have evaporated.

13:06 Mel: Yeah. Um, my experience specifically would be, yeah, again, like I go back to what I said before where I'm, I would find it hard to, um, be more specific because it just feels like a, an a, a state that encompasses a little bit of all of those things that you said, like every word that you used, I would say, yeah, there was an element of that. There was an element of that. So I would, it's more of like this fuzzy Venn diagram or something as opposed to being able to label it too acutely like that, I think. And perhaps that's because like this is just my feelings from reading a passage in a book. Like I'm not actually genuinely feeling all those elements beyond the book making me feel that.

14:00 JBK: Yeah. I mean, I'm a bit skeptical if it was like each of the actual words I said, but I, I do see that it, it is this kind of inchoate or a thing that's hard to categorize into the words we have. So I think I'm at my limits of, um, getting more specifics on it. So I'm curious for Russ to take it away. But, but I actually could ask about the intensity, I guess, because it seems like you mentioned a few times it was quite strong [Mel: Mm-hmm.] was, was it strong at this moment or

14:00 Russ comments: I stumble at the word *inchoate*. Mel's experience, I think, was entirely clear and well formed—there was nothing about Mel's experience that was inchoate, if by inchoate we mean with Webster "being only partly in existence or operation : INCIPIENT; especially : imperfectly formed or formulated : FORMLESS, INCOHERENT." I think Mel's experience was the opposite of inchoate. Mel's experience didn't fit neatly into worded categories, but that is a failure of the word categories, not the inchoate-ness of her experience.

Julian comments: I do agree to that. I did actually never ask if it was one feeling, one feeling with different aspects, or a mix of multiple feelings. That could have been a follow-up. Even without that line of questioning, I do interpret this as a feeling that is clear to Mel but still hard to put into words and categories.

14:35 Mel: Also, thank you. *Intensity* is the word I've been looking for this whole time, [laughs] saying *levels* and things. Um, intensity. Um, I would say the intensity was, uh, just to a point where it, it was the, the, the, the key aspect of my, uh, awareness at that time or my experience at that time was absolutely majority this emotional state. Um, and so *that* is true. Was it, um, an intensity of like these depressive-like feelings that made me feel really personally depressed and horrible? No, but it was like that, that emotional state was clearly my number-one experience. So like, um, intensity, it's like still somewhat subdued if that's not too much of an oxymoron, but it's the clear, main part of my experience. I don't think that's that clear.

15:41 JBK: No, that, that, that made sense. Um, do you have, do you have other questions, Russ?

15:48 RTH: No, I'm happy with that portion.

15:48 Russ comments: We are leaving the discussion of depression / loneliness without distinguishing between "a feeling of empathy" and an "empathetic feeling of depression / loneliness" (see the comment at 8:20). There is a long discussion of this at the end of this transcript (see "[DISCUSSION OF THE DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE 12.1: Part 1. Discussion of "empathetic"](#)").

15:49 JBK: Okay. Um, so for the bodily sensation, this heavy, relaxed... heavy relaxedness. Could you describe that that a bit more?

16:02 Mel: Um, yeah, I was laying on the ground outside, um, and yeah, my body felt heavy. Um, I, I didn't necessarily notice the, y'know, like the, the temperature or the breeze or anything like that. I just remember feeling like, yeah, I guess what I would described as a state of- uh, describe as a state of relaxation, sort of that my body felt heavy to the ground, not in a unpleasant or tired way, just in a relaxed way.

16:42 JBK: Mm-hmm. Is it any specific part of your body?

16:49 Mel: Um, I don't think so. I'd say like the, the whole thing. (Sorry, can I pause and put this, there's a really bright sun coming through right behind me.) [she gets up and puts down a window shade]

16:57 JBK: Sure. Yeah.

17:03 Mel: There you go.

17:05 RTH: I've been trying to figure out what that was!

17:06 Mel: Actually. Sorry.

17:07 RTH: It looked, looked like a, a UFO was sitting, sitting on your shoulder there.

17:11 JBK: Aussie sun coming up. It's not any specific part. It is, is it kind of more where your body meets the ground or more just throughout the body or on top of that?

17:24 Mel: Oh, yeah, that's a good question. Um, probably where my body meets the ground, but getting a bit close to the limits of my memory.

17:34 JBK: Okay. Um, so this heavy relaxed. Is r-... hmm. Is it just physical or is, is part of it, is there kind of a mental relaxation part to it or no?

17:55 Mel: No, I don't think so because this wa-, because the, the emot- emotional mental part of it was definitely consumed by the depressive, lonely, empathetic state that I was taking on to do with that character. So, no,

17:55 *Comment: There is a glitch in RTH's computer, causing the interview to be interrupted and then resumed. We will set in gray conversation about the computer issues.*

18:13 RTH: And I, I think maybe it was my system, I, something is happening, which I can't figure out exactly what it is. That it's switching me from my podcasting microphone to my, my—

18:26 Mel: Uh... Computer.

18:27 JBK: —Yeah, it said the error was on your end.

18:32 Mel: [laughs] Julian just absolutely pointing fingers. Yeah, it specifically...

18:36 JBK: [laughs] It's true.

18:38 RTH: Well, I, I had a zoom meeting earlier and I had a, I had a similar issue and I don't know what the, what the deal is, so it wouldn't surprise me if, if it, if it kicked me out and then, then, but then I got back, and we, and we, we didn't really check to see whether I was, whether the system was still alive, probably still was.

18:57 (continues) I did have one more question about what we were talking about there though, [Mel: Yep.] and that when you originally des-... Two more questions, actually. When you originally described this [Mel: Um hmm.] bodily experience, you used words that were sort of a long way away from *heavy*, but I can't remember what they were. *Soft*, maybe?

19:16 Mel: [laughs] You're actually right, cuz there's such an oxymoron. The words I used were "heavy, relaxed, and soft" [laughs].

19:24 RTH: Okay. And, and so can you tell me more about what the *soft* accessed?

19:24 *Russ comments: (in the not-about-words stream) This is an example of RTH trying to ask about experience without asking about the words themselves. He has to use words, of course, to indicate the area of his interest, and Mel has to use words to*

respond. But his question is *not* “What did you mean by ‘soft’?” but rather “What [experiential aspect] did *soft* access?” Whether that question hit its mark will be determined by its result: If Mel’s reply is an attempt to describe her experience, then it did. If it as attempt to define the word, then it didn’t.

19:29 Mel: Yeah. I, I think this the, um, the *heavy* was to do with like, felt weighted to the ground. Um, and then *relaxed* and *soft* are probably trying to describe the same thing of, um, y’know, there was no, like, my body didn’t feel tense. Um, so *soft*, I sort of mean in that sense of like kind of malleable and, and then placid, I guess. Um, uh, I guess ultimately I’m trying to expl- um, describe the physical sensation of a relaxed body. Yeah. [RTH: Okay.]

19:29 Julian comments: Mel contorts her face here indicating [I guess] that she doesn’t think her description does justice to the experience. I think her description is very clear, though, and helpful for understanding the experience. So I’m making a mental note that face contortions can indicate difficulty of any kind. In a previous transcript they indicated that Mel was really struggling to answer a bad question. Here they show her struggling to answer a good question and giving a very clear and descriptive answer.

Russ comments: I agree, and the conclusion can be generalized to subjunctification of any kind (not just face contortions) and across most people. Here’s an excerpt from the abstract of Cody Kaneshiro’s master’s thesis (2022):

We found that participants in very-first-sample interviews used frequent subjunctifiers that suggested that phenomena were not apprehended, whereas in their very-last-sample interviews they used subjunctifiers that suggested that they had apprehended phenomena adequately but their descriptions were falling short of describing those phenomena in high fidelity.

19:29 Comment: There is a glitch in RTH’s computer, which he stops and restarts, causing the interview to be interrupted and then resumed.

20:10 JBK: All right. So we on number 2 for now. Yep.

20:13 RTH: Well, I was asking, I, I was asking when I crapped out there, the, the, is it reasonable to ask about which emphasis was on, how much of the emphasis was on the [Mel: Yep.] feelings and how much was on the body?

20:27 Mel: Um, it definitely was majority the feelings. Uh, I would say some sort of like 70—30 scenario, percentagewise.

20:37 RTH: Okay. So substantially more about the feelings than the body. Got it.

At the end of this transcript, there is an illuminating set of discussions of DES issues arising from writing a description of this sample. See [DISCUSSION OF THE DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE 12.1:](#)
[Part 1. "Empathetically"](#) and
[Part 2. Discussion of other aspects](#)

SAMPLE 12.2 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 20:43 Mel: Cool. Number 2. Um, this went off at 2:30 PM and I have written "A real state of nothingness. Not aware of anything to do with my physical body nor, um, no thoughts, no particular feelings. I was laying on the ground and that's about it. My eyes were open looking up at the ceiling, but I wasn't taking anything in." Uh, that doesn't make sense, but I've written, "I wasn't taking anything in my sight. I could also use the word 'tranquil' to describe this sort of state of nothingness."
- 21:21 RTH: So you're inside looking up, [Mel: Yep.] laying down, looking up and nothing, your eyeballs are aimed at the ceiling [Mel: Yeah.] but you're not really seeing it. Is that the,
- 21:35 Mel: Uh, yeah, like that's where they're looking, but it's not really doing much beyond that.
- 21:48 RTH: Okay. And I'm gathering that there's nothing to be said, so I'm happy to say there's nothing in this beep.
- 21:57 Mel: Yeah.
- 22:02 RTH: Julian?
- 22:02 JBK: I, I'm happy with that as, as well, pretty much. Uh, I'm wondering, you did mention kind of tranquility, but is that just, just as in the absence of something rather than a, like a feeling that's present?
- 22:18 Mel: Yeah, I think that that's probably a fair assessment. Yeah. The absence of something as opposed to an overwhelming sense of tranquility. Yeah.
- 22:30 JBK: Okay. Then, then I'm, I'm good for this one too.
- 22:35 Mel: Okay. So the next one was 3:20 PM and I've written...
- 22:42 RTH: Hang on, hang on, hang on just a minute before we get down there. So it looks to me like in my, in my audio tracings that my audio is softer than everybody else's audio. Is there a way that, do I have a control over that? Um,
- 22:54 Mel: It doesn't look softer on mine.

22:58 JBK: Doesn't look to me.

22:58 RTH: And didn't sound...

23:00 JBK: It looked, yeah.

23:01 RTH: So it sounds, sounds all right to you guys?

23:03 JBK: I also normalize them afterwards, so I try to bring the levels around the same. [Mel: Oh, nice.]

23:08 RTH: Okay.

SAMPLE 12.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

23:10 Mel: Uh, the next one is 3:20 PM and I've written, "I was rummaging in a packet of Easter eggs and I felt them in my hands, but the noise the plastic packet made was the main part of my awareness. It was loud in an otherwise quiet room. Um, it was sort of a crunchy sound. Beyond that, I'd described this as fairly nothing, um, hearing the result of the action I was doing, but I wasn't really thinking about anything or looking at anything either. I was sort of staring blankly as I sifted through the Easter eggs with my left hand."

23:10 Russ comments: This description ("the noise the plastic packet made was the main part of my awareness. It was loud in an otherwise quiet room. Um, it was sort of a crunchy sound.") is a very specific and quite detailed characterization of a sensory awareness. There is little room for doubt, to my ear, that sensory awareness is the main experiential aspect.

23:49 JBK: Okay. So you're opening these Easter eggs and it's fairly nothing except for this noise. [RTH: Mm-hmm.] And, and you are, the noise isn't just something that's occurring, it's actually in your direct experience at this moment? Or, or is it kind of just something that's...

23:49 Russ comments: JBK has reversed the emphasis: Mel said it was noise, other than that, nothing. JBK says it was nothing, other than that, noise. That puts something of a barrier or uphill gradient against describing a sensory aspect, when I think it desirable to be either even handed or to provide a slightly downhill gradient for sensory awareness (because people, including Mel in the past, are reluctant to describe sensory aspects).

Julian comments: I was fully attuned to sensory awareness being the most likely option. I'm also wise to Mel's using nothing to mean nothing-*except-for*. For example with absorption. That's why I rush over fairly nothing and stress *except for this noise*. I still did want to rule out full autopilot-whatever though, before I get into it.

24:08 Mel: No, I think it was in my direct experience because the room was quiet and it sort of was a, an interesting noise, so it stood out. Um, so it was definitely part of my

awareness. It wasn't like a secondary thing. Um, so yeah, I was inside, um, and sort of like looking sort of, y'know, off to my right or whatever, and my left hand was up in the cupboard rummaging through this plastic packet of chocolate Easter eggs. Um,

24:37 JBK: So through a plastic packet and it's this crunchy sound. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Are you noticing anything specific about this crunchiness or this, the sound?

24:52 Mel: Mm, I don't, I don't know.

25:04 JBK: So, um, is it that you're really focused on the sound and, and it's really grabbing your attention? Or is this beep, or is it your experience fairly absent and maybe there's a little bit of some sound in there, or which one?

25:04 Russ comments: This question also pushes against sensory awareness, by making the choice between an exaggerated extreme ("really focused on") and mostly nothing ("experience fairly absent"). Her original description was that sensory awareness was clearly apprehended main aspect, but she wasn't "really focused" on it. But because of JBK's alternatives, to deny the hyper focus, she will have to overly downplay sensory awareness.

25:21 Mel: Mm. That's actually probably a good, a good description, that, um, this is like fairly nothingness, but that, that sound is registering and, and that's about it.

25:37 JBK: So the sound is registering—crunchy plastic, like, uh, okay. Um, and you mentioned something about looking at some point, but it doesn't seem, or is the, is the looking directly experienced, you think? Or you're not sure?

25:55 Mel: No, I don't think it is. So that's sort of, I was just trying to say that like it's *not* sort of experienced, in that my, I was looking in a completely different direction and sort of at nothing in particular, and it wasn't really part of my awareness is the only reason I sort of mentioned that.

26:18 JBK: The crunchy plastic-y wrap-y Easter egg thing is there, but it's, it, it is in your experience, but it's not like it's grabbing your attention in a very strong way. Um, so that's what I have for this moment. Uh, Russ, any other questions?

26:18 Russ comments: I disagree with this assessment. I think the crunchy sound *did* grab her attention in a very strong way.

26:40 RTH: So, um, the first salvo, when you described this, I took the sound to be fairly central in your experience, because you said something like, I'm, "I hear the crunchy sound" [Mel: Mm-hmm.] and you described the crunchy sound. And then you said something like, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] and beyond that it was sort of nothing. But then as the result of the discussion, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] we have sort of elevated the nothingness and made that more important [Mel: Mm-hmm.] than it seemed like it was at the beginning. And so I'm wondering what happened here.

- 27:14 Mel: Um, I've, I'm not sure is probably the best answer. Um, cuz I think that maybe both are true. Like maybe it's like a 50—50 sort of thing of like, I'm experiencing this sort of state of nothingness apart from this crunchy sound. Like I'm doing an action, but that's not even really registering in my awareness. But the sound certainly is registering. Um, how much, uh, at what intensity compared to like the general state of nothingness. Like, y'know, maybe you're sort of a 50—50. Um, yeah.
- 28:02 RTH: Okay. So I, I, the, the line of questioning, I thought, elevated the nothingness and demoted the sensory-awareness aspect. And I was *worried* about that because I think people are very often will say about the sensory a, aspect, *well, y'know, it's nothing I was just, I was paying attention that was, but it was, it was sort of nothing* [Mel: Mmm.] when it was actually sort of present. So I think the sort of the downhill way about sensory awareness is that people generally diminish that.
- 28:39 JBK: That's a good point, yeah.
- 28:40 RTH: Yeah. And, and I thought, I thought Julian's question maybe contributed to that.
- 28:46 Mel: Yeah. And that's interesting to note for myself, cuz I think I, uh, um, do the same thing from a description point of view, of like just naturally downplay sensory awareness. And that's something I'm actually trying to get better at as well. So that's interesting to note. [JBK: Yeah.] Um...
- 29:05 JBK: Yeah, I was, I think I was aware of that but didn't address it well enough. I kind of wanted to find out like if the sensory aspect was like, how much it was grabbing your experience at that moment. But yeah, just, yeah, I wasn't aware that, y'know, that you could downplay it like, or not even take it seriously in a way—like *oh yeah, just the crunchy sound. It doesn't matter*. But yeah, if, if the crunchy sound was really there, then...
- 29:05 Russ comments: In their 2009 paper on sensory awareness, Hurlburt, Heavey, and Bensaheb wrote (about a sample from Ephraim, p. 237):

Here we observe that descriptions of sensory awareness are frequently accompanied (at least at the outset) with embarrassment or sheepishness. It is not our aim to explain this embarrassment, although we will permit ourselves this speculation: Sensory awareness is a direct access to what looks good, what feels good, what attracts Ephraim, what repels him, in a very elemental, basic, sensual way. Sensual interests are intensely personal, by their very nature exceedingly private. To reveal one's basic sensuality is to stand naked before the observer, and sheepishness is a natural response. Some would say that Ephraim's sheepishness may come from having been 'caught' in a childish act (playing with his food), but we think the sheepishness is more elemental, arising from the experience, not the act: the sheepishness (in Ephraim and others) comes from the recognition and admission that the sensations themselves are fun/attractive/alluring, regardless of whether they are acted upon. We emphasize that this is speculation; it is in accord with our frequent casual observations but requires further study.

Other DES participants aren't embarrassed, but they think it is not the interest of the investigators. As a result, I think it wise that DES interviewers be ready to provide a bit of extra acceptance / encouragement of sensory-awareness description.

29:39 Mel: Then yeah, I think that's, that's like more on me than you, to be honest. I think that's still a part where I'm, I need to just get better at trying to accurately know.

29:54 JBK: It's definitely on me, too, though. [laughs]

29:57 RTH: What, what I would, what I would say is that if somebody (at which I think Mel did) described in fair detail the sensory aspect [JBK: Yeah.] (I think she said it was crunchy, and worked, worked, worked at describing what that experience was like) then I think it's, it's fair to say, well, the chances are *good* that was in her experience. She's, she's trying to tell us about something.

30:19 JBK: Yeah. I mean, I'm not denying that it was in your experience. [Mel: Yeah, yeah, yeah.] That, that wasn't [inaudible]

30:23 RTH: I, I it's a matter of degree. And I'm, I'm guessing it's stronger in her experience than maybe Julian gave her credit for.

30:32 Mel: Cool. Uh, next one. Ummm

30:35 RTH: Number 4?

SAMPLE 12.4 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

30:38 Mel: 3:42 PM I've written, uh, "I'm listening as my sister said, 'there are still tickets available on the website'. (That's a direct quote). Um, and I'm looking at her attentively, taking in her words. We're sitting outside and I can feel the warmth of the sun on my legs. It feels a little tingly on my skin in an enjoyable way."

31:07 RTH: And does that mean that at the moment of this beep you are both feeling warm, tingly and trying to understand what your sister's saying?

31:07 Russ comments: Note that RTH's "*trying to understand*" is off the mark. We will see if that warps the conversation.

31:15 Mel: Correct, yeah, they were two aspects of my experience.

31:20 RTH: And is one of 'em stronger than the other? Or maybe that question doesn't make sense. Uh, they could be, that could be a hundred percent for both.

31:29 Mel: Hmm. Yeah, true. Um, yeah. Yeah. I, I dunno if I think about that question too hard, I'd probably go insane. Yeah. [laughs].

- 31:39 RTH: Okay. So let's start with the, with the warmth tingly. Tell, tell me a little bit more about that.
- 31:45 Mel: Um, yeah, so I'm, I was laying half in the shade, half in the sun, so my legs were in the sun and I'd been there for a while. So, um, it was a lovely summer day in Australia, so I could feel, yeah, the warmth on my legs and, um, it made, it just made, made me aware of my legs, I guess, when you... ([leans forward] Oh God, this sun is really.. Sorry!) Um, so yeah, like that, that awareness in your legs specifically because the sun is heating them up. So I'm aware of my legs as opposed to like, I'm not really feeling my arms *per se*. Um, and yeah, that sensation feels sort of like tingly and, um, nice and warm and, and, um, tingly in like a, a skin-deep level, too, not like a muscular level, y'know.
- 32:44 RTH: Okay. Then I'm happy with that portion.
- 32:47 JBK: Great. Is there, I might've just like missed this, but was it any specific part of the legs or just overall?
- 32:53 Mel: Uh, it was like the whole portion of my legs that was in the sun, which was majority of my leg, I would say like up to, just above my knee.
- 33:05 JBK: Wait, so from, so like from feet to above knee?
- 33:08 Mel: Uh, yeah, sorry, I, yeah, I've done that in a weird way, but yes, [laughs] from just above the knee down.
- 33:14 JBK: Okay. Then I'm good on that.
- 33:21 RTH: And then your sister is telling you that there's still tickets available. And is there more to say about that experience?
- 33:28 Mel: Um, not other than like, y'know, that I'm engaged in conversation and I'm, um, uh, uh, the moment before the beep went off, she's the one speaking and I am, um, *listening*, and listening attentively and not, um, distracted thinking about, y'know, any other element of like, *okay, well, should we buy tickets* or whatever. I'm just looking at her and listening to the exact words that she said, which were, "there are still tickets on the website," and I'm like sort of blinkers on, just focused on hearing that and taking in that information. And, um, yeah, I would, I would just say not distracted. Like I'm just doing the act of listening, so I'm just inputting that phrase.
- 34:21 RTH: And so would you say that this is that I'm, I'm aware of the focused-ness of this, or is it just I'm listening to her, I'm under, I'm listening to her with comprehension and, and there's nothing else going on?
- 34:21 [Julian comments: Another example of how meta phrasing can creep in even without meta presuppositions.](#)

Russ comments: Mel used four locutions in her 33:28 turn that might be meta: “listening to the exact words that she said,” “focused on hearing that,” “I’m just doing the act of listening,” and “I’m just inputting that phrase.” So even though I suspected that she did not intend a meta experience, it would have been irresponsible not to inquire about it. Part of the art of DES is to be sensitive to the possibility of meta-awareness when the participant provides warrant for such interest, but not for the interviewer to impose a meta framework. That is, had Mel *not* used meta-ambiguous language, then it would have been risky to have inquired about it.

34:35 Mel: No, the, the, the first bit, I think whatever you said of like, no, there’s no like meta thing, I’m just absorbed in listening, but I’m not like aware of myself listening at the time. I’m just after-the-fact describing it that way.

34:51 RTH: Okay. And, and we’ve, we’ve had samples of, if I’m recalling correctly, where, where there has been sort of like a, even without a meta-awareness of particular [Mel: Mm-hmm.] absorption. And is this like that or is this like I’m, I’m hearing her, she’s telling me about the tickets, I’m processing that, I’m hearing with understanding.

35:09 Mel: I’m not sure I understand the distinction again, though. Sorry. Go again.

35:18 RTH: My recollection of some previous samples is that you have had some samples where people have been speaking and you seem to be describing that [Mel: Mm-hmm.] that you were *tunneled in* on that, sort of actively excluding everything else, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] or something. I don’t know, exactly. And I wanna know whether this is *like that* or whether this is, I’m, she’s talking, I’m hearing, I’m not hearing anything else, so I’ve, I’ve in that, in that respect, tunneled in, but I’m not, I’m not exaggeratedly focused or...

35:54 Mel: Yeah, like hyper-focused or something. Um, no, no. I would say that the, the first description is true, um, like beyond the fact, uh, aside from the fact that I can feel that tingling sensation on my legs. But otherwise, I would describe this as like a hyper-focused. I think that’s so often the case when I’m engaged in conversation. (Sorry, I’m gonna move this again, [moves her computer’s position] we’re really battling some Australian sun here.) [laughs]

35:34 Russ comments: There have been many samples where Mel described herself as being absorbed in conversation (2.6, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 6.2, 7.4, 11.3). Looking back while watching the video, I suspect that the particular sample that RTH had in mind in his 35:18 question was sample 11.3, where Mel had been absorbed in conversation with her dad, sister, and her sister’s friend. Then in a later sample that day (11.5, where Mel was editing a video of her grandpa), Mel had said that she was much more absorbed in the video editing than she had been in the 11.3 conversation. RTH’s question would have been better if he had referenced that sample directly.

The questions he would like to explore are whether when Mel uses “absorbed” here and elsewhere, is she describing a rather garden-variety figure / ground experience? And when Mel calls her conversation “hyper-focused,” does she mean more focused than some of her other conversations / experiences?

His questioning was not specific enough to answer those questions.

- 36:28 RTH: Looks good. Okay. I, I think I'm good.
- 36:33 JBK: I have maybe a question or two. [Mel: Yep.] Um, so she's saying "there's still tickets on the website." [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And you focused on her talking. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]. Is it, um, is it, is your focus more about the meaning of there being tickets on the website and, and those are the exact words, but it's more about the meaning of what she's saying? Or is it on her or on her speech and on, maybe on the vocal qualities of "there are still tickets on the website"? Or maybe on the words themselves? [Mel: Mmm.] Or maybe on something else? But could you, could you say like where like [Mel: Mm-hmm.] what you're zoning in on at this moment? Or is it hard to say?
- 37:18 Mel: Yeah, that's a good question. I wouldn't say anything like vocal qualities or anything like that. Um, I would say on like the meaning associated with the words. However, uh, I wouldn't go too far with that, in terms of, I almost think it's a little bit more just like hearing the words, processing the words, like obviously processing some degree of meaning. But it's like, y'know, with this hyper-focus, like input, like listening and taking in the words. I'm not then like attaching meaning to the words and then thinking three steps ahead of like, oh, well that means we should go. Like whatever. I'm just, "there are tickets on the website," so I am hearing and taking in that that means *there are tickets on the website* and that's about it! I'm not focused on any aspects of her vocal qualities or, or how she looks, or anything like that.
- 38:13 JBK: Yeah. Okay. Then, then I'm good on this sample too.

38:13 Russ comments: After the interview, Julian wrote the following description of this sample:

Sample 12.4: I'm listening as my sister says "there are still ticket on the website." I'm taking this in and registering it. (It's not just a meaningless collection of sounds. But it's also not that I'm attaching particularly strong meaning or thinking ahead—oh we should buy them while they're still there. I'm simply registering.)

I also feel the tingly pleasant warmth of the sun on my legs, knee down.

It's hard to say if any of these things—the listening and the tingly warmth—is more present.

RE "I'm listening as my sister says"

First, "listening" has undesirable connotations. One listens to a lecture: "I'm listening as Dr. Einstein says that the speed of light is invariant. Or "listening" implies a particularized attention: "I'm listening to the sounds coming from my washing machine, trying to decide whether the load is imbalanced."

So I think "hearing" has better connotations.

Second, "I'm listening as my sister says": the *as* suggests a separation between Mel and the action, for example: "I'm going to the net as my partner hits his backhand."

So I would write:

"I hear my sister saying."

RE “I’m taking this in and registering it. (It’s not just a meaningless collection of sounds. But it’s also not that I’m attaching particularly strong meaning”

First, “I’m taking *this* in” thingifies the action.

Second, the sentence suggests meta-awareness—I (first) take it in and (then) register that which I have taken in.

Third, I think she was more focused than this description suggests, so I would write:

“ I hear with absorbed understanding”

Julian comments:

RE “Third, I think she was more focused”

You’ve intensified the focus in the descriptions before. I have in mind 11.4 where Mel is absorbed in editing footage of her grandpa and you added “completely, deeply, totally” into the description. I was surprised there by that addition and am waiting to review the footage to address it. I didn’t remember anything about that sample that made the absorption more intense than some other absorption samples. It’s possible that:

---As the last sample in a long, late day, my concentration was fading and I missed something.

---I have presuppositions that prevent me from catching stuff. Maybe I’m thinking too much about featureless / non-featureless debates here to really attend to experience.

---Maybe I’m too much in the past, trying to see if samples can help iron out these lingering questions. The grandpa one and this one don’t actually apply much since they’re pretty featured. “There are still tickets on the website” is quite specific. I should remember that DES is about the present and future, not the past.

---There are other options. Maybe I somehow doubt Mel’s intensifiers. [36:14] “I would describe this as like a hyper focus, I think that’s so often the case when I’m engaged in conversation.” Maybe the generalization in the second part made me discount the description in the first part. But after so much sampling, Mel’s generalization is actually...pretty true. Maybe we’re reaching the point where generalizations aren’t just glass. And even without the generalization, Mel’s description otherwise did describe focused experience. I think you’re right to want to intensify focus in the description, maybe even more than I did in this revision.

Russ comments: I have a perhaps substantially different take that ends with the same result. I agree that “I think that’s so often the case when I’m engaged in conversation” is a generalization, and like most generalizations, I still don’t give it much credit, even after much sampling. (That’s where we disagree.) However, “I think that’s so often the case when I’m engaged in conversation” also functions as a descriptor (or at least a part thereof), a modifier of hyper-focus. By (probably faux) generalizing the hyper-focus to happening “so often,” she is underlining what she takes to be the importance of the hyper-focus. In short, even though the generalization aspect is probably (or at least possibly) false, its descriptive aspect has

probably true weight. (In a peculiar way, probably the more false the (faux) generalization, the more weight it should be given as a descriptor.)

With all those changes, the description becomes:

Sample 12.4: I hear my sister saying “there are still tickets on the website.” (I hear with absorbed understanding—I’m not reacting in any particular way; for example, I’m not thinking ahead—*oh we should buy them while they’re still there*. I’m simply absorbing what she is saying.)

I also feel the tingly pleasant warmth of the sun on my legs, knee down.

(It’s hard to say if either of these things—the hearing or the tingly warmth—is more present.)

38:21 RTH: Number 5.

38:22 JBK: Number 5.

SAMPLE 12.5 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

38:22 Mel: This went off at 3:58 PM. I’ve written, “I’m laying down outside and I felt my face pressed into the pillow. Um, I felt heavy, a little uncomfortable, and contorted. Uh, this was a skin-deep feeling, not a deep muscular one. I had just put my book down and I didn’t really have any thoughts *per se*. I can’t even recall if my eyes were open or closed. No visual aspects were particularly relevant to my experience. I felt that tranquility that I mentioned earlier.”

38:59 JBK: Okay. Um, so your face is pressed into the pillow. It’s a little uncomfortable, contorted, more, more of a skin-y thing, face and pillow [Mel: Mm-hmm.] thing than deep and muscular. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]. And then there’s the tranquility. Is, is the tranquility, is the tranquility part separate from this face pillowy thing or part of it, or do you just mean tranquility as in there’s not much else going on in your experience?

39:31 Mel: I think so. I would say the tranquility here is the same thing as is similar to me describing a state of nothingness, y’know?

39:41 JBK: Okay. So it’s not like there’s a separate tranquil feeling. It’s more just like the pillow/face thing is the main thing and, and not so much else.

39:51 Mel: Uh, yeah, actually, actually, and this, your question hasn’t changed my mind here. I’m pulling myself up. I think actually there *was* an aspect of like tranquility and relaxation experienced here, *not* just a nothingness. Like there was definitely an element of that state of being, um, present that is separate to that contorted weird feeling I had on my face.

39:51 Julian comments: I had to figure out how to interpret this statement from Mel. At first, I was skeptical because she had previously said that a tranquil feeling was not present. But she became increasingly confident—“definitely an element of that.” In the description later I still stuck to there being no explicitly tranquil feeling. But that

the relative absence of experience (besides the pillow sensation) did shape experience to make it tranquil or at least something that she could later describe as tranquil. This seems experientially different than if it was just the uncomfortable pillow feeling with Mel's experience blinkered and focused in on this. It seems to me that in that case, Mel would not have described it as tranquil. So there are various ways that experiential absences can still shape experience.

Russ comments:

Exercise for the reader (in the it's-not-about-the-words theme) Our answers are [at the end of the transcript \(at 59:05\)](#).

Go back to the video and watch the first two minutes of this sample (from 38:22 to 40:21) several times. Where is the power / conviction of Mel's conveyance? Don't try to parse the words (she says contradictory things, so the evidence can't be there), but let Mel reach you, grab you, convey to you what she takes to be true. What is Mel conveying? What leads you to that understanding?

- 40:21 JBK: Okay. It seems like the, is the contorted feeling the main thing in your experience right at this moment, though?
- 40:21 Russ comments: That pushes pretty hard in the direction of the face and against the tranquility.
- 40:28 Mel: Um, like, yeah, but it's a bit, I have hesitation with that just because it's much easier to grab at. So like that's an easy thing for me to describe and say like, oh my face felt a bit weird and I felt a bit heavy and a bit contorted. Cuz that's so much easier for me to describe as opposed to like just this overall state of like, nothingness, tranquility, like whatever. So I think it's standing out more, but like, whether that was experienced in a greater intensity than this overall state of being that I'm explaining, like I have hesitation about that.
- 40:28 Russ comments: When a DES participant (or anyone else, probably, but the situations are clearer in DES) responds (as Mel does here) "Yes, but...", what they probably mean is *No*.
- 41:07 JBK: Okay. Because the tranquility... I mean, yeah I'm still wondering about it because of, at first it sounded like you were saying, uh, well first you described the, the tranquility, and then that maybe it was similar to the other beep whereby I, I dunno, tranquil or relaxed or whatever you said it was more just the absence of anything. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]. Then you said that *no* it actually is, is a state [Mel: Mm-hmm.]. I'm curious, was there something that made you, I dunno if it's changed your mind or just realize something different or, or compare it to the previous sample in a different way?
- 41:07 Russ comments: Julian's question is meta in the sense that he is asking not about Mel's experience at the moment of the beep but about something that might be related to that—what caused her descriptions of that experience to change from one turn to another.

41:52 Mel: Yeah. Um, I think that I was, uh, like experiencing relaxation at this point. Like in terms of, I just put my book down and I was sort of, yeah, I just remember like being, being aware almost at the time that I was relaxed and sort of in a nice state, which is slightly different to other times when I can just be nothing. But then oftentimes I'll describe nothing when, if, when the underlying feeling is perhaps that as well. So I don't know, Julian, is the answer. I don't know.

41:52 Russ comments: The good news is that Mel doesn't answer JBK's question, instead trying to stay closer to her experience at the moment of the beep.

42:41 JBK: [laughs]. Russ, do you have more questions on this part before? [RTH: No, I'm good about that, I think.] Okay. Um, then the, the face pillow thing. [Mel: Yeah.] Um, your, your face is on a pillow. [Mel: Mm-hmm.], you just, could you describe that again?

43:02 Mel: Yeah. Um, so [reads from notes] "I was laying down outside and I felt my face pressed into the pillow. It felt heavy and a little uncomfortable and contorted." I've written "This was a skin-deep feeling, not a muscular one." So I was sort of, um, yeah, again, laying outside. I had a pillow under here [demonstrates] and like, there was a lot of weight in my face, and I was sort of like in a weird uncomfortable position. So my face was kind of pushed up like this. Like that was definitely part of my awareness. Like it was, I was aware of the physicality of that, of like, my face felt sort of squished and, and as I said, it was all like sort of a, a skin-deep-y sort of feeling. Like I didn't feel like contorted in my muscles, but like there was an uncomfortable aspect of that.

43:47 JBK: Mm-hmm. Um, was it a specific part of your face?

43:51 Mel: Sorry?

43:53 JBK: Was it a specific part of your face?

43:54 Mel: Yeah. Like my cheek, predominantly, cheek, cheek bone, maybe a little bit of jaw.

44:00 JBK: Cheek, cheek bone. Okay. So the more the bonier parts?

44:09 Mel: Yeah.

44:10 JBK: Cheek, cheekbone, jaw.

44:10 Mel: All this bit [demonstrates]

44:11 JBK: [laughs], um, the parts that are touching the pillow [Mel: Yes.] at this moment?

44:22 JBK: Um, a little bit uncomfortable. [pause] Um, is this discomfort... So discomfort here is, is slight, it's not like, could you describe intensity?

44:43 Mel: Yeah. Not very intense, at all. Um, gosh, like yeah, if it, if there's an uncomfortable aspect to it, it's really like, sort of, I dunno, 10% or... Percent is a weird calculator, but

like, it's not a strong feeling. I'm not like in pain or anything. It's just like slightly uncomfortable.

45:12 JBK: Okay. Then I'm good on that part. [Mel: Okay.]

45:16 RTH: Me too.

45:16 Mel: Great. Um,

45:20 RTH: Number 6? And I've got, and I've gotta ask, is the picture, the window, [Mel: Yes! I was right here (moves camera to show view)] is that where you went outside there? Looks like a very pleasant, totally pleasant place to be. [Julian laughs]

45:20 Russ comments: The live video (unlike the one we display here) is widescreen, so RTH has been able to see outside into Mel's back yard during the interview.

45:20 Russ comments: After the interview, Julian wrote a description of this sample, the first paragraph of which was:

Sample 12.5 (excerpt): I'm lying down outside with my face pressed against a pillow. I feel it as slightly uncomfortable where the side of my face smushes against the pillow.

RE "I feel it as slightly uncomfortable"

First, the direct object of *feel* here is *it*, and *it* here refers to a fact of the universe: "I'm lying down outside with my face pressed against a pillow." We can solve that by putting that fact of the universe in brackets, leaving:

"[I'm lying down outside with my face pressed against a pillow.] I feel it as slightly uncomfortable where the side of my face smushes against the pillow."

Now *it* refers to a physical region with an implication of causation: "where the side of my face smushes against the pillow." So for the moment, let's get rid of that, leaving:

"I feel it as slightly uncomfortable."

Now *it* is a thingification and a meta statement—not describing what Mel feels but rather the characteristics of her feeling. Compare:

(a) I feel thumping in my chest

(b) I feel it as thumping in my chest

Option (a) describes a feeling/sensation. Option (b) describes feeling a thing (it) with characteristics (as). So let's get rid of *it* as altogether, leaving:

"I feel slightly uncomfortable." That is too vague/nonspecific, so we could write: "On the side of my face, I feel slight uncomfortable pressure (of my face smushing against the pillow)."

I see all that as a diamonds/glass exercise. The object is to describe diamonds. Brush away the glass (of the universe); brush away the glass (of the physicality); brush away

the glass (of the thingification and meta); that leaves a diamond, which then needs to be polished.

SAMPLE 12.6 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 45:32 Mel: All right. This is the last one, I believe. Um, yeah. Okay. So I've got 4:42 PM. Uh, [reads from notes] "I was looking at my phone and typing an email. Uh, the world, words are flowing out of me without much forethought. I describe this as *autopilot* as I have in previous beeps. Um, I'm laying on my side outside again. There's a chill in the air and I notice the cool breeze on my bare legs, but the majority of my awareness is typing out this email on my phone with my thumbs."
- 46:12 RTH: So about the email, let's talk about that, about, about the email. I understand I'm doing it with my thumb. Am I experiencing my thumb or is that just part of the autopilot?
- 46:21 Mel: I don't, I don't know confidently enough to actually say there.
- 46:27 RTH: Okay. And so does that mean that I don't know basically *anything* about my email typing? You said that the words were coming out...
- 46:36 Mel: Yeah. Like the words are coming out, I'm typing on my phone like this. [demonstrates] Um, I just sort of mean like, y'know, it's autopilot-y in the sense that it's sort of happening in terms of I'm not sitting there stewing over the exact words that are gonna happen, or, and it's, my thumbs are moving.
- 47:02 RTH: And is the, is the content present to you? Do y'know what your typing?
- 47:09 Mel: Uh, present in the sense that like, like that I'm writing the words, but like, what I was trying to describe is there's not, yeah, like a whole lot of forethought. So the content is part of my awareness or experience, but like, as sort of, sort of as a live thing. Like the words are just coming out and I'm seeing them and I'm typing them, but I'm not, I'm not crafting them before they're sort of coming out of my thumbs, if that makes sense.
- 47:50 RTH: So it does make sense, but I'm, I'm trying to figure out how, how, how much content is there. So, so I think it's, I think it's possible to, to say, y'know, I'm, I'm writing an email and I'm saying "I'll meet you tomorrow at four o'clock" or whatever, and I've already decided what I'm gonna say, and now that's just coming outta my thumbs and there's *nothing* in my experience that my, my thumbs are accomplishing this task [Mel: Mm-hmm.] that I've set, set for myself. Or I am typing and I'm not crafting anything. I don't have to worry about whatever, whatever it is to say. But while I'm doing that, I'm sort of aware of this target that I'm, that I've got, I'm, I'm gonna, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I'm setting this appointment for, and that's somehow present to me. So the question is, is this *entirely* autopilot? Like *nothing* other, *nothing* in about this aspect of my experience is actually in my experience, even in even the fact that I got this appointment tomorrow [Mel: Mm-hmm.] (or whatever the, whatever the content is). Or is that content somehow present? Or maybe that's not a possible question.

- 48:53 Mel: Yeah, I'm struggling a little bit, but I think of those options, like the content is present, um, because I think some maybe relevant context is, uh, the email that I was typing was not a simple thing like that. I like, um, it wasn't as straightforward as like, *oh, send an email about this thing*. Like, I hadn't, I hadn't, prior to my thumbs moving, I hadn't decided what this email was gonna say. Um, so the content was part of my awareness in some sense, but it sort of like was live unfolding. Like I can't, um, like it ha-, it has to have been part of my, like I, I know that's what my attention was focused on, on writing this email and these words coming out. But, um, yeah, it didn't, there wasn't, they weren't there until they were on the page sort of thing. That— I dunno.
- 49:55 RTH: So the, so the part about the content *has to be there* because I make an email. I don't think that's actually true. I think, I think it's *possible* for your bag of bones and neurons to be processing stuff and having it come outta your fingers, thumbs, without any before-the-footlights awareness *at all*. I think that's possible in the same sense as driving, I can drive, [Mel: Mmm.] have a conversation—the driving is skillfully happening, [Mel: Mmm.] but not, not in my experience. *Or* it's possible that I have in my experience *some sense* [Mel: Mmm.] of what I'm typing. But maybe that's not a question that's possible to answer and, or maybe it's an ambiguous question, and we'll just have to leave it at that.
- 50:46 Mel: Yeah. Unfortunately, I think it's some sort of mix between the two. Like, I, I wanna gravitate towards the driving example, but I don't think it's quite that simple. I think that there was something else as well. But, yeah.
- 50:46 Russ comments: This experience seems like more than nothing and less than something in particular. It is perhaps impossible to get more specific about it.
- 51:03 RTH: Okay. And then the other half of the experience, or the portion of the experience is I'm feeling [Mel: Mm-hmm.] a chill on my legs.
- 51:13 Mel: Yep. Um,
- 51:18 RTH: And is there anything more to say about that?
- 51:18 Mel: Um, not really, just in the sense that like, that was also like, it was, that was a very secondary part of my experience at the time. Like, majority of my experience was my thumbs and this email and whatever. But there was also an aspect of me just being aware, aware of my physical body due to the chill of the breeze on my legs. Um, and that felt like, um, I guess sort of similar to the like, feeling of the sun on my legs in terms of like, it was a skin feeling. So there was just like a, I wouldn't describe it as tingly and warm and not all of that, quite the opposite, but, um, it was skin deep, that experience, but it just, y'know, there was an awareness, even if it's at 10, 20%, there was an awareness of my legs at this moment, or like my physical body due to the wind.

- 52:23 RTH: Okay. And then I haven't figured out... The 10% [Mel: Mmm.] or whatever. It seemed like we were talking about the thumbs as being sort of autopilot. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Close to being 0%. So does,
- 52:45 Mel: Yeah. I don't think percentages are actually helpful here because it's one of those scenarios where I'm like, I don't know, like the difference between me describing it as like, *whoa, y'know, 90% of my experience was like typing this email*. But like, in a sense, in a way that's like, that's the focused part of my attention, but in like an autopilot way. Do y'know what I'm trying to say? Of like, so it's not like a... It's a very hard thing to try and describe because it is the clear, key aspect of my experience at the time, but not, um, an intensity in the same way that I'm listening to my sister, I guess, or whatever. So I find these experiences really hard to describe because they're that autopilot-y nothingness-y thing.
- 53:47 RTH: So is what we're saying here that the autopilot / nothingness portion, which is sort of aptly described as autopilot-ly / nothing, is still substantially more present to me than then the chill on my legs. [Mel: I think so.] Both are present, but [Mel: I think so.] but the autopilot-y is more present?
- 54:12 Mel: I think so. Like for instance, I don't think in weeks gone by or months gone by that I would've even noted the chill on my legs. Like that is a, an aspect of me expanding my attention, um, or like trying to get better at encompassing all aspects of my awareness. Whereas previously I would've just described this as autopilot nothingness. But I was trying to, I'm trying to like be aware of all aspects of my experience, including sensory ones or whatever.
- 54:50 RTH: And is, and is the chill on your legs present in your experience *before* the beep, and one microsecond *before* the beep goes on? So not just the result of a cataloging? [Mel: Yeah.] Then I think I'm good.
- 55:10 JBK: Um, so sometimes previously we did percentages, but that they didn't add up to a hundred. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] They'd be like, one thing is 5% and another thing is 1%, but like, those don't add up to 100. Would, would that make sense here?
- 55:10 Russ comments: I think it makes sense to consider the percentages applied to experience as useful in some situations and not useful in others. This sample seems to be in the percentages-are-not-useful camp.
- 55:32 Mel: Um,
- 55:41 Mel: [pause] Yes. [said tentatively] Except I think that the challenge I'm finding with the percentages is like, so I find it very easy to, um, denote a percentage to a sensory experience like a breeze on my legs. Where I'm finding percentage challenging is when it's levels of nothingness and autopilot-ness. I think that's where I'm getting, um, confused. Like I'm confusing myself. So I'm could say like, y'know, I could give a percentage for the experience of the, um, breeze on my legs, um, and it would be like minor, it would be like a 10% sort of thing—that I'm okay with. But then trying to label the autopilot-y nothingness-y, this-email's-happening-without-much-thought sort of

thing, trying to put a percentage on that—I'm like, I like what does that even mean? Because the whole thing is so, like the, that whole experience is so weird anyway, so it's so not tangible that to try and put an, a percentage on it feels really weird.

56:52 JBK: Yeah. Yeah. I, yeah. I also had trouble with this one because it seemed in terms of, y'know, degrees of nothingness, um, I was leaning towards understanding it as, well, not quite nothingness (I mean, there's no clear content of what exactly you're typing in the email), [Mel: Mm-hmm.] but there is some kind of not-hyper-focused attention, but, but it's, it is there, it's still before the footlights in some way. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] It seemed like maybe, Russ, you, you didn't understand it as, as that...

57:34 RTH: So I, if I understood what you were saying, I think I agree with you about that. I, I think it's [Mel: yeah.] what, what what we're finding is that the, that it is both fair to say about this particular beep that there was nothing and autopilot, but it also is somehow occupying her, occupying Mel before the footlights of consciousness. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Both of those things are true. [Mel: Yeah.] And uh, I think that's just the way it is.

57:34 Julian comments: This is still what I'm finding. While transcribing, my understanding vacillated. At first, it seems that the emailing was present. Then at 49:55, Russ clarifies that just because an email is being written with clear content, doesn't mean it has to be experiential. Understanding shifts away towards the more nothingness, autopilot-y realm. But Mel still understands it as present. In the end, some paradoxical thinking is still necessary to understand this. What we ended up in the description is "I don't experience this in any particular way, but it may be somehow present to me." I do think that the emailing does shape experience in some way. But maybe it is apt that we're not certain about if it's directly present. It seems Mel does think so. But also there was some clarification about things being directly present [the 49:55 convo]. So it could be best to still leave some uncertainty in the description. In any case, the interviewing was useful in an iterative sense.

58:09 Mel: Yeah. I think that's, um, definitely feels accurate to me. It's just a somewhat unsatisfactory thing for me, [laughs]. But that it, but it's true. So I need to just deal with that!

58:25 RTH: And, and I think it's, the unsatisfactoriness, *I think*, comes from some presupposition about the way [Mel: Mm-hmm.] the thought process has to work. And apparently that isn't the way it has to work. It has to, it's, it's somehow else. I can be, I can, I can be more or less totally involved and still have it be more or less nothing. [Mel: Yeah.] And uh, that seems like an oxymoron, but apparently it, we have to figure out why that's not an oxymoron cuz that's the way its.

58:53 Mel: I completely agree with that. That feels really accurate to my experience.

58:53 Russ comments: After the interview, Julian wrote a description of this sample, the first paragraph of which was:

Sample 12.6 (excerpt): [I'm looking at my phone typing an email with my thumbs.] I don't directly experience this in any way. (I'm not thinking about what to say. I'm not noticing my thumbs. Nothing visual stands out.)

RE "I don't directly experience this in any way"

That seems too definitive. I might say "Some aspect of this may be somehow present to me, but if so, it is inchoate. I don't experience this in any particular way, but it may be somehow present to me."

So the entire description becomes:

Sample 12.6: [I'm looking at my phone, typing an email with my thumbs.] Some aspect of this may be somehow present to me, but if so, it is inchoate. I don't experience any aspect of it in any particular way (I'm not thinking about what to say; I'm not noticing my thumbs, either visually or kinesthetically; nothing visual stands out about the phone; etc.).

Slightly, I also feel a cool breeze on my legs.

(The emailing takes up more of my experience. Even though it doesn't have any direct characteristics, it still is more part of this moment than is the cool breeze.)

59:05 RTH: So should we do this again?

59:05 Mel: Yeah. I was, um, saying to Julian that I *could* be back in New York this time next week. Um, it's a long story, but I will find out today or tomorrow about a job which would then have me booking a flight ASAP or not. So do you wanna like pencil in this same sort of Australian time zone for next week? And then I will let you know if that changes and I'm in New York?

ANSWERS TO EXERCISE FOR THE READER

(From 39:51) Exercise for the reader (in the it's-not-about-the-words theme)

Go back to the video and watch the first two minutes of this sample (from 38:22 to 40:21) several times. Where is the power / conviction of Mel's conveyance? Don't try to parse the words (she says contradictory things, so the evidence can't be there), but let Mel reach you, grab you, convey to you what she takes to be true to you. What is Mel conveying? What leads you to that understanding?

Russ's answer: At 39:51, Mel is, with her words, her body, and her tone of voice, explicitly and coordinatedly saying and demonstrating that she is about to contradict / correct her earlier description. To my ear, it is *not* that she becomes *increasingly* confident, but rather that she says, at the outset of her 39:51 turn, *No! I was wrong! It's not your influence! I must correct myself!* This is not a gradual morphing of opinion, perhaps influenced by an investigator's question. This is an explicit realization that she needs to start over about this aspect; thereafter she is consistent.

Julian's 39:51 comment makes it seem like we have to figure out what Mel is saying. I think it is crystal clear what Mel is saying: there *was* an experienced tranquility. One could advance an argument that Mel is not to be believed, perhaps because she changed her mind. But I *don't* think it is fair to advance the argument that Mel doesn't know what she believes.

Julian comments: This is what I wrote as a response:

The face pressed into the pillow feeling is clear. Definitely there. Tranquility is thrown in kind of as an afterthought. Given the option of tranquility as not much else going on—Mel takes it. Something emphatic about how she says “I think so” here [39:31]. She describes there definitely being relaxation present but then seems unsure after that [40:18]

I would say probably no separate relaxed feeling. But the relative nothingness might still shape experience. I'd still go with that actually.

Having read your comment, mine is somewhat different. I did still doubt that Mel had a separate tranquil feeling as such. But if I de-nounify that to say that Mel felt tranquil, I think that gets closer to her experience. I don't think there's a separate feeling here. But the relative absence of experience/stimuli lends a tranquil quality to Mel's experience.

This is somewhat paradoxical, but I still think possible. I've had other samples like it. I think I should have clued Mel in on this possibility and pursued it. We could have maybe found out more about this tranquility.

DISCUSSION OF THE DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE 12.1

Part 1: Discussion of “empathetic”

After the interview, Julian wrote a description of this sample; the first paragraph is printed here in black:

[Sample 12.1 (excerpt): I was reading a book where a character was drinking away a negative emotional state]. I **empathetically** felt a lonely negative feeling (felt clearly but not bodily). This was the main thing in my awareness.

Russ then inserted the red “**empathetically**.” The following interchanges were an email discussion of the red addition.

Julian comments: I don't necessarily disagree but have questions about putting “empathetically” into the description. Mel's feeling comes from reading and having a reaction to the character's presumed feeling. But don't we often try to avoid causal connections in descriptions? This one seems so obvious that it's hard not to put it in. Still, maybe causal connections make us assume things we don't need to assume.

Is an empathetic lonely negative feeling different from a non-empathetic one? Specifically for Mel here. If it is different, is it just by intensity? Or in some other way? Does putting “empathetically” make us assume a kind of remove or separation between Mel and the feeling that may or may not be there?

Then again part of the scene and situation with the character may have been present at this moment. Mel wasn’t directly imagining this scene at this moment, but it’s possible it wasn’t completely ‘content-free’ so then ‘empathetically’ does address them.

I don’t have an answer here but am thinking out loud.

Russ comments: I think that is an important question; I suspect it is what drove you to ask the (8:38) “hypothetical” question during the interview (which I thought and think was on the wrong track—I’ll say more in the transcript); but I think your logic, while common in psychology and philosophy, is backwards.

Your logic is that at the moment of this beep Mel felt *lonely*, and on the basis of that logic you then have to ask how she knew that this loneliness is empathetic rather than personal-situational. The presupposition there is something like: loneliness is an entity; that entity can be evoked by a fictional or by a real-personal situation. I think that is probably not true, and for sure it is something that we shouldn’t assume.

I think that Mel’s experience at this beep was *empathetically lonely*, and it is much more presupposition-free to acknowledge that. Mel was, at the moment of the beep, totally clear that this was empathetic loneliness. She did not at all feel lonely and *then* have to sort through, after the loneliness fact, whether this was empathetic or non-empathetic loneliness.

RE “Does putting ‘empathetically’ make us assume a kind of remove or separation between Mel and the feeling that may or may not be there?”

That is the question that I think you have exactly backwards. *Not* putting “empathically” there assumes that loneliness is a thing removed or separated from Mel, and that when this thing loneliness arises in Mel, she has to inspect it to determine whether it is empathic or natural.

I suspect that this is another installment in the “it’s-not-about-the-words, nounification subsection” series: There is no loneliness separate from Mel. There is Mel feeling empathically lonely. I accept the likelihood that on some other occasion Mel feels (personal-situational) lonely. It is likely that Mel will use the same word (“lonely”) in both situations, doubtless with descriptive fidelity. But the fact that the same word is useful in two in-some-ways similar situations does not mean that the word refers to an entity that exists in both situations. Turning the adjective lonely into the noun loneliness makes it seem like loneliness is an entity. It is not.

RE “part of the scene and situation with the character may have been present at this moment”

There is no *may have been* involved; Mel’s empathetic loneliness *was* fundamentally a part of the scene and situation with the character present at this moment. You don’t have to see or hear or otherwise cognize a scene and situation and character for it to be present.

Julian comments: I do agree with you that *empathetically lonely* is better. I don’t think my issues are a nounification thing. I don’t understand the loneliness as separate from Mel. I think I might have just been overthinking it. Going off of Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, we can’t assume any relation between experience and the outside world. So we have a book with a character. And at the moment of the beep, Mel is feeling *someway* (I’m denounifying, but I don’t think that’s the issue.). My thought was that all we have at this moment is Mel’s feeling. Whether this stemmed from the character, the text, associations with memories from Mel’s past, some mix; we can’t know. **We just have Mel feeling**

someway. It seems entirely obvious it's from the book, but in interest of total rigor I was trying to keep that separate.

I had no doubt that the feeling here was unique to this moment. I wasn't trying to tie it to all of Mel's lonely feelings. I tried to capture the hard-to-pin-down-in-words nature of it. I did expect it to be different from a non-reading lonely-depressive-feeling for Mel. But in the absence of such a sample it was hard to say how, and I was worried that mentioning empathy, and bringing on its causal association might cause assumptions in readers: *oh when I feel empathy, it's weaker than that actual feeling so for Mel it must have been weaker. Oh when I feel empathy it's hazier and more diffuse, so for Mel it must have been diffuse.*

Out of interest, I wanted to compare to a sample from a past DES interview of mine, with a woman who often had empathetic feelings.

Nora sample 4.3.M1:

Nora saw a woman who was walking switch directions and walk the other way. This was in Nora's periphery and was maybe not even seen. The actual visual part may have been subliminal. Nora said "you see it and you don't see it at the same time."

What was experienced was feeling the woman's confusion. Nora described this as feeling "her impulse." It didn't have a bodily location and was different than Nora herself feeling confused.

It's interesting that here my mistakes are in the opposite direction. I wrote that Nora was "feeling the woman's confusion." The woman's confusion may have been completely different. She may not even have been confused. I'm pretty sure I realized this. I was just less in overthinky-rigor mode when I wrote it.

Interesting that I was clear that it was different than Nora herself being confused. We didn't have such a sample to compare it to.

Also interesting from this sample is that Nora most likely didn't see the woman at all, at least not in direct experience. For Mel's sample, I was wondering whether Mel had some experience of the book's scene or if this was somehow featureless, and all that was present was the feeling. I didn't have these same qualms with the Nora sample. Even though perceiving the woman was likely out of the direct footlights of consciousness, I still attributed Nora's feeling as empathetic confusion.

I think rigor is something I'm grappling with. I honestly think I have issues with our current project that I didn't always have with DES sampling. I went in with the approach: ok, DES with the sensei Hurlburt, I have to put on my best science spectacles, be the most rigorous, the most skeptical. And since I first did DES I've also had to read and write a lot of academic texts and PhD proposals and adopt what academia thinks of as rigor. So I'm in simultaneous learning and unlearning process. But I think DES research is a continuous learning and unlearning process.

So to the question of if adding "empathetically" better conveys Mel's experience. Yes, I do think so. Maybe Mel wasn't directly apprehending the character and his situation in any way apart from Mel's feeling. But I do think it shaped the feeling. I very much do. Is there *some* possibility that it didn't; that Mel's feeling was some amalgamation of her past experiences that her reading may have triggered—maybe, but leaving this possibility in for the sake of 'rigor' strikes me more as just risk avoidance, which is what mostly passes for as rigor in academic fields in my opinion. I think DES descriptions do need to take some risks, to convey experience as faithfully as possible.

Thinking through this has also been useful for considering how not-directly-experienced elements can directly shape experience. This is something I'm grappling with for the 12.6 description. If it does shape experience, then that does make it directly present.

Russ comments: The question is whether it is fairer to say (a1) “Mel was feeling lonely” or (b1) “Mel was empathetically feeling lonely.” The DES task is to describe Mel’s experience as she apprehended it. Let’s consider a parallel example:

Sample 12.1X: [I was reading a book where a character (“Jan”) was drinking away a negative emotional state; the book described Jan slumped on the couch mindlessly looking down into the glass of Scotch as he swirled the ice cubes.] I saw a glass of Scotch, looking down on it from above, in motion as the ice cubes swirled.

Would it be fairer to say (a2) “Mel was seeing a glass of Scotch” or (b2) “Mel was innerly seeing a glass of Scotch”?

The choice between a2 and b2 depends on Mel’s experience. If she experiences herself as actually seeing a glass, then we would prefer a2; if she experiences herself as imaginarily seeing a glass, then we would prefer b2. The object of the interview would be to discover which of those understandings is to be preferred. We would *not* do that by analyzing or interpreting the particular word choice. Mel might have said “I was imagining the glass,” or “I was seeing an image of the glass,” or “I was innerly seeing the glass,” or “I was empathetically seeing the glass,” or any of a wide variety of other locutions; the interview would have to sort those through.

In that sorting, we would be asking about Mel’s *experience*, whether her experience was of real seeing or imaginary seeing. We would *not* ask her to *explain* or *theorize* about her experience. We would *not* ask her to explain *why* she was innerly or really seeing. We would *not* ask, “What is it about the seen glass that leads you to say it was *inner* seeing?” We would *not* try to deduce from her word choice whether her experience was real or imaginary. We would *not* invoke Husserl. We *would* try to make sure we had a shared understanding of the real/imaginary distinction, and we *would* inquire carefully whether her *experience* was of actual seeing (hallucinatory or not) or of imaginary seeing. We generally accept those two options as being experientially quite different from each other, even though they are experientially quite similar—both involve seeing. If the interview suggested, after adequate probing, that the experience had been imaginary, then we would have written “Mel was innerly (or imaginarily or empathetically) seeing a glass of Scotch.”

For the most part, those distinctions are pretty easy (but there are times when they are quite difficult (hallucinations and synesthesia, for examples).

Mel’s actual sample 12.1 is parallel. The question is whether Mel experienced herself, at the moment of the beep, as (a1) actually feeling lonely or as (b1) innerly or imaginarily or empathetically feeling lonely. The answer has to come from Mel’s experience, after we had made sure we had a shared understanding. We should *not* ask her to *explain* or *theorize* about her experience. We should *not* ask her to explain why she was empathetically or really feeling. We should *not* ask, “What is it about the felt loneliness that leads you to say it was *empathetic* loneliness?” We should *not* try to deduce from her word choice whether her experience was real or imaginary. We should *not* invoke Husserl. We *should* try to make sure we had a shared understanding of the real/imaginary distinction, and we *should* inquire carefully whether her *experience* was of actual personally relevant feeling or of empathetic feeling.

The bottom line, I think, is to recognize that “empathetically” is not meant as a way of distinguishing how an imagined feeling feels different from a real feeling. “Empathetically” is a way of acknowledging that Mel, to her core, knew at the moment of the beep that the feeling came from the book, not from her personal life.

I thought the interview was pretty clear in this regard—that the feeling was empathetic—until the interview was torpedoed by the (8:38) hypothetical, after which there’s no reason to believe anything: we have departed the land of the descriptive for the land of the speculative. Mel’s turn at 9:47, when she says “I sort of have to remind myself that I’m not personally going through a depressive

lonely episode,” is not at all descriptive. Julian invited her (at 8:38) to make up things, and she obliged, and then Julian and Mel believed each other.

BTW, I wrote the comments in the 12.1 transcript before the current discussion. At 11:38 I commented that the penalty for the hypothetical was a waste of 3.5 minutes, but it turns out it is much worse than that. I think most if not all of the back and forth here is the result of the 8:38 hypothetical invitation.

DES is pretty simple: stick to description of experience and nothing else. But it’s DES only if you do it.

RE: “If it does shape experience, then that does make it directly present.”

I think that is problematic on two related counts. It is a theoretical statement, not a description of phenomena. Entertaining such statements will make it difficult if not impossible to do DES well because (a) it leads directly *away* from the apprehending of phenomena—it tells you what phenomena *must be*, not what they *are* or how to apprehend them; and (b) to make sense of such a statement requires a careful discrimination of words, when DES is *not* about the words. Here, for example, to make sense of “If it does shape experience, then that does make it directly present,” you have to practice discriminating what is meant by “directly present,” which is a technical term in DES, meaning “apprehended before the footlights of consciousness.” But lots of things are directly present in some other sense (pressure of the armrests on your elbows, for example) that are not directly present in the way DES uses that term. So to make sense of your statement, we have to focus carefully on the particular use of the term “directly present,” and such focus on terms is a skill that undermines the ability to attend to phenomena.

Julian comments: You think I care more about theory than I do. I wouldn’t ask Mel or any other DES participant about Husserl, and I wouldn’t try to build up a theory of empathy. The only thing I care about from Husserl is bracketing known relation between the physical world and experience. We both do this. If someone had a beep while they were driving, they might originally assume that experience of driving, turning the steering wheel, putting on the turn signal must have been a part of this. Not necessarily. And part of DES questioning is making that distinction.

If someone has a beep while reading and feels an emotion, they might assume that the context of the book has to be present at the moment. They might assume that their emotion is empathetic, that it is tied to the character they’ve been reading about.

Let’s get to Mel’s experience specifically. I think the description we have above is probably as good as we’ll get. That being said, I don’t think the interview completely ruled out other possibilities. Let’s take this sentence you wrote: “Mel, to her core, knew at the moment of the beep that the feeling came from the book, not from her personal life.” First off, this is a meta phrasing. There’s no feeling and then separate knowing of where that feeling comes from. There’s only the feeling.

Russ comment inserted: I agree this was sloppily meta phrased. I had thought that “to her core” would be enough to head off the meta, but I agree that it would have been better “Mel, to her core, at the moment of the beep immediately apprehended the feeling as coming from the book, not from her personal life.”

[Julian’s comment continues] I think there are separate questions—a) is the scene part of Mel’s experience? and b) is Mel’s feeling empathetic? For question a, the scene isn’t present in an obvious way. There’s no mental image of the character drinking. There’s no accompanying unsymbolized thought about his drinking. There’s just Mel’s feeling. This feeling may have just been spurred by the scene, but then largely left the scene behind. Or stuff from scene and situation may somehow linger and

be contained in the feeling. Mel answered that it's a bit of both. We don't have anything beyond that so it's hard to say. I think it's most likely is that stuff from the scene was somehow contained in Mel's experience, but I still think questioning here could have been clearer.

b) is the feeling empathetic? I see this as different but somehow related to the question about the scene. Is stuff about the book and the character somehow contained in the feeling? Or is stuff about Mel's personal life somehow contained in the feeling? Or do we just have the feeling here? Actually I think 'is the feeling empathetic' risks being a pseudo-theory question. What's important, as you say, is just understanding the feeling.

But I think *it is totally possible* that Mel at this moment just has a lonely negative feeling. And that 'empathetic' does nothing to clarify and explain it and at worst makes a causal link that isn't relevant. Possibly Mel at this moment just has the feeling. There's no separate (or even intrinsic) knowing if it comes from the book or knowing that it comes from her personal life.

I think this is a possibility because Mel might assume that since she is reading and simultaneously has a feeling, the feeling must be tied to the reading—causally and experientially. I still think questioning could have been clearer to untangle. The hypothetical wasn't the right route, but I couldn't think of how else to do that. Maybe just as something as simple as after 8:30 when Mel says (about drinking content being there or not) "I think it's some sort of mix of both"—just asking what she means by that.

That being said, while I still think an unattached feeling is a possibility, I think the description we settled on above is the most likely.

RE: The hypothetical torpedoing the interview and "Julian invited her (at 8:38) to make up things, and she obliged, and then Julian and Mel believed each other."

Her responses didn't do anything to clarify for me her experience before the beep. I quickly realized the question was diverging from DES's purview and tried to get it back on track. While (I assume) you and I were temporarily confused, Russ, I'm not sure it confused Mel about the moment of the beep, though. She talked about reminding herself it was just a book "when the beep went off." But I think our confusion just comes from the temporal ambiguity of this, being able to mean both a) before the beep b) after the beep. Going through the transcript/video, it always seems like Mel meant it as after the beep. Anyways, I don't think the question was useful, but I don't think it was sink-the-rest-of-the-interview bad. And Mel's answer didn't inform what I've written here.

Russ comments: Here's what I understand you to be saying, in brief: *I accept that Mel feels lonely/sad, but I don't know whether that feeling arises from the reading or from Mel's personal experience. Mel's claim that it comes from the reading is a speculation about causality, which must be discounted.* I will respond as if that's what you think, and if that's incorrect, I apologize.

I think there is no warrant for crediting that lonely/sad feeling but discrediting the source. It would be fine with me if you discredited both—*all introspection is bad* is a perfectly legitimate point of view (wrong-headed, I think, but legitimate). But I see no reason for crediting that she has a feeling but not crediting the fact that she told us at least eight times in her opening salvos that the feeling arose from the reading:

- "the passage is fairly depressing, and I felt that emotion within me" (0:05)
- "like embodying that emotion and stuff, that's what I was trying to explain" (1:09)
- "I had the *feeling* that was being described in the book" (1:09)
- "I felt that sense." (1:09)
- "Like that was definitely the result of reading, uh, this passage." (1:09)
- "I felt like this deep empathy or embodiment of the character's emotion" (1:09)

- “I was experiencing what I was consuming, rather than visualizing” (1:09)
- “I was soaking in that, um, scene in a feelings way” (2:51)

Here’s my fantasy of the kind of situation that leads Mel to say those things:

5 min before the beep the book described “Jane” [just giving her a name for convenience] driving past The Capitol Grille, the last restaurant where boyfriend “John” and she had eaten together. Jane remembered their lighthearted conversation about the Senate hearing where John’s question had stymied a witness that neither Jane or John liked; Mel felt conspiratorially happy. Then the book described how Jane found out, the next day, that John was having an affair with another Senate aide; Mel experienced the bottom falling out of her happiness as it transformed into hurt and rage. Then the book described Jane’s subsequent recollections about how there were things about John that she didn’t like—his cursing, his sloppiness—maybe it was good riddance. Mel felt her rage lessen to a combination of pissed-off and relief. Then the book described Jane arriving home, pouring herself a drink, and then another drink, as Jane mused about being alone. Mel felt a sad loneliness <beep>.

I made up all those details, of course, in an attempt to illustrate concretely what I think Mel meant by the eight bulleted statements (and their surroundings) where she described her feelings as arising from the book.

There is no required meta-awareness; there is no implication of causation. There is an understanding of her experience, of the same ilk as while walking to my kitchen, I see the bathroom, and then I see the entryway, and then the dining room, and then the fireplace, and then the kitchen. I understand to my core that I’m walking through my real house, not just imagining it.

I think Mel said, over and over, with consistency, that her feelings arose from the book. There was not a hint of meta-awareness or causation implied in that telling. I see no more reason for crediting Mel’s feeling but discrediting the link to the book than for crediting my account of walking to the kitchen but discrediting the part about passing by the bathroom, entryway, dining room, and fireplace. Beyond brain-in-a-vat logic in which anything is possible, I think the feelings and the trajectory of the feelings are on the same plane as the walking and the sights.

All this is *not* to say that Mel experienced the exact feelings that the author intended—of course her feelings were colored or created by her own experience with boyfriends, infidelity, rage, conspiracy, etc. All empathy (except, perhaps, in Nirvana, about which I have no personal experience) is built out of our own experiences.

Perhaps you understand the “that” of the bulleted “the passage is fairly depressing, and I felt *that* emotion within me” as suggesting that Mel intended *exactly what the author intended that I feel*. Then I would agree that that is a speculation about causation. But I don’t think that that is what Mel was talking about.

RE “If someone has a beep while reading and feels an emotion, they might assume that the context of the book has to be present at the moment. They might assume that their emotion is empathetic, that it is tied to the character they’ve been reading about”:

There is no assumption that the context is present. The context is directly apprehended as being present, as being in sync with and changing with the reading.

RE “a) is the scene part of Mel’s experience? ... The scene isn’t present in an obvious way. There’s no mental image of the character drinking. There’s no accompanying unsymbolized thought about his drinking. There’s just Mel’s feeling.”

The scene is absolutely present in an entirely obvious way. It is not present *cognitive-ly* (she did not *visual-ize* the scene, she did not *conceptual-ize* the scene, she did not *symbol-ize* the scene), but it

absolutely is present *feeling-ly* (she *feeling-ized* the scene). In short, you seem to be saying that having a mental image of the character's drinking makes the scene present in an obvious way, but having a mental ("empathetic") feeling of the character's emotion does *not* make the scene present in an obvious way. I see absolutely no reason to say that.

I'm no mind reader, but this passage makes it seem like there might be a cognition-must-cause-affect theory in the vicinity.

RE "There's just Mel's feeling. This feeling may have just been spurred by the scene but then largely left the scene behind. Or stuff from scene and situation may somehow linger and be contained in the feeling. Mel answered that it's a bit of both."

There is no *just* involved with Mel's feelings. Mel feeling-izes the reading every bit as expertly and differentiatedly as someone else might conceptual-ize, or visual-ize, or symbol-ize it. I'm no mind reader, but this passage makes it seem like there might be a cognition-must-cause-affect theory in the vicinity.

RE "Is stuff about the book and the character somehow contained in the feeling? Or is stuff about Mel's personal life somehow contained in the feeling?"

Empathy always contains something of the other and something of the self (except perhaps in Nirvana). But I don't think that's what your comment is going toward here. I happily accept that it is *possible* that Mel, out of her personal life, happens to feel lonely/sad; and that a moment before that, out of her personal life, happened to feel pissed off/relieved; and that a moment before that, out of her personal life, happened to feel hurt/rage; and that a moment before that, out of her personal life, happened to feel the bottom falling out of happiness; and that a moment before that, out of her personal life, happened to feel conspiratorily happy. And the fact that sequence of feelings happened to coincide with the book's description of Jane's feelings was entirely coincidental. I think such coincidence is possible, with about the same probability as that I am a brain in a vat.

RE "But I think *it is totally possible* that Mel at this moment just has a lonely negative feeling. And that 'empathetic' does nothing to clarify and explain it and at worst makes a causal link that isn't relevant. Possibly Mel at this moment just has the feeling."

I think Mel told us, over and over (as in the quotations bulleted above), that the feelings were linked to the reading, that the reading was feeling-ized. I see no warrant for discounting all that.

I'm no mind reader, but perhaps the issue is that you have zeroed in on one particular state (the one at the moment of the beep) as if nothing existed other than the sad/loneliness and the single particular passage interrupted by the beep. I speculate (and this is in the not-about-the-words lecture series) that the problem might be the word "state." Here (from the transcript) is Mel's opening salvo and JBK's response to it:

0:05 Mel: Okay. So this was at 2:22 yesterday afternoon. And I have written, uh, "I was aware of the weight of my body as I laid on the ground. It feels heavy, relaxed, soft. I'm reading, and the passage is fairly depressing, and I felt that emotion within me before the beep went off. The character's drinking away her depression alone on the, her couch. And I'm sort of embodying that emotion as I read it. In this sense, I would say the two clear elements of my inner experience were the physical weight of my body and the empathy I felt for the character I was reading about. The emotional imaginative state was stronger of the two."

0:49 JBK: Okay. So the emotional imaginative state is stronger of the two. Um, could you, could you describe this state some more? I know you described it somewhat already in terms of the character drinking and this depression. [Mel: Mm-Hmm.]. Can you...is there more you could say about it before I try to ask specific questions?

In my understanding, the absolutely *least* important word in Mel's opening salvo was the word *state*. She did *not* intend to say she was in a state; she intended to point to the emotional stuff rather than the relaxed heavy stuff. JBK asked about the state, which was unfortunate and may reflect some presupposition.

In the world according to Hurlburt, no one who uses the word *state* (especially psychologists and philosophers) to apply to anything experiential knows what they are talking about. The conversation here is one small example of why I think that.

Julian comments: I've come around more to your point of view. Still, I want to clarify my previous point of view and my thought process.

---I was never against the inclusion of 'empathetically', just open to the *possibility* of its not being useful. I thought questioning could have gone further at certain points.

---I fully accept that content/context stuff can be part of a feeling. Without a separate thought/mental image, etc., I think there's a spectrum of how much differentiated content is present. For example, from past sampling of mine, a participant Ali had a feeling (or thought/feeling, whatever) that the person on the balcony across from him was giving positive vibes. Other samples can be more about just the feeling, without clear differentiated content as directly experienced. However, I was looking through past samples find some like this and was struggling. I always included the context for the feeling as intrinsic to the feeling.

[See Russ response 1 below]

I think my current preoccupation here is the result of trying to (maybe excessively) dot my i's and cross my t's.

But the thinking was that some feelings could have more or less differentiated content as intrinsic to them. I was trying to discern that with Mel. Her responses in this vein ("a bit of both") show that she does fall along this spectrum.

[See Russ response 2]

I don't know if feelings can be truly undifferentiated, but I was open to that possibility when questioning. I was more attuned to it because of her "content-free" discussions related to her being carried along by the movie or by conversation. Maybe unfairly. Maybe dragging along unnecessary baggage.

[See Russ response 3]

But if differentiated content is present directly before the footlights, there's no need for 'empathetically'. We could write in the description "I was feeling a lonely negative feeling about a character drinking away his depression."

[See Russ response 4]

If a feeling is less differentiated though, then 'empathetically' comes into play. What the word basically does is pull what's inside the brackets out. [I was reading a book where a character was drinking away a negative emotional state]→Empathetically pulls this in some way into direct experience. Mel experiences the character and his negative emotional state.

[See Russ response 5]

My original thinking was, do we know for sure that it's there?

Regarding a theory of empathy or emotions or whatever. Yes, I agree with you that empathy is probably a bit of the self, a bit of the other. I honestly wasn't thinking something like something from Mel's personal life rather than the book made her feel lonely. But rather her lonely feeling could be some amalgamation of book, personal experience, possibly many such experiences, encounters with other people, all drawn into one... But anyways, the point is not to draw up a theory of emotions. My doubt wasn't really with the emotions coming from the book (this was more my on-paper crossing the t's doubt).

It was more for what 'empathetically' does in turning the brackets inside out.

But I do agree with your points in the end. I think that the drinking and character are part of the feeling. I know they're not directly experienced in any ways besides the feeling. But I was also wondering if they're somehow *less differentiated* in the feeling itself that we might presuppose. We saw in later samples *maybe* something cannot even be in Mel's direct experience and still color it. I was wondering if that was the case here.

[See Russ response 6]

But yes, this very well may dragging in too much from our something/nothing discussions and applying it to this sample.

[See Russ response 7]

Russ comments on the above turn:

Russ response 1: I don't want to get into a discussion of Ali, but the "feeling" you describe for him is, in my view, not in the same bin as the "feeling" we are talking about with Mel. Ali's "feeling" sounds more like intimation or inkling, whereas Mel's "feeling" is the experience of emotion. I don't think would be productive for us to try to clarify what it was for Ali—I wasn't there, etc.—but I do feel the need to mention that the word "feeling" is hugely problematic for DES because it is ambiguous in the way just discussed but also in many other ways.

RE "Without a separate thought/mental image, etc., I think there's a spectrum of how much differentiated content is present [in a feeling]."

You seem to be saying that thoughts/mental images can be differentiated, but feelings can't be differentiated unless there is also a thought or mental image. If that's what you mean, I disagree strongly. Thoughts/mental images exist on a range of differentiation; feelings exist on a range of differentiation. There is no necessity for a thought or/mental image to be alongside a feeling to differentiate it.

Russ response 2: I don't know what "feelings could have more or less differentiated content" means. Mel's feeling was substantially differentiated. There was no doubt (beyond brain-in-a-vat doubt) that the feeling arose from the reading. I don't know what content has to do with it.

Russ response 3: I still don't know why we're concerned about undifferentiated feelings. Mel's feelings were substantially differentiated.

Russ response 4: No, we can't write that. First, it is a meta-expression—a feeling of a feeling—so let's fix that: "I had a lonely negative feeling about a character drinking away his depression." Second, Mel's experience was not about *a character*—a generalized class—but about *Jane* [as I am calling her]—a specific portrayal—so let's fix that: "I had a lonely negative feeling about Jane drinking away her depression." See panel 5 in the graphic novelette below. But that's not descriptive of Mel's experience. Mel's feeling was not *about* Jane; Mel's feeling was (empathetically) *as* Jane.

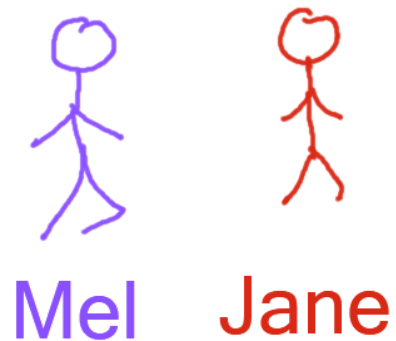
Russ response 5: Translating to specificity as before: “Mel experiences Jane and her negative emotional state.” No she doesn’t. Jane is not before the footlights of Mel’s consciousness. Mel’s empathetic loneliness is before Mel’s footlights. Jane, the prose, the weather, Mel’s breakup with her boyfriend, the fact that she is wearing the beeper, and so on, and so on, and so on, all contribute to Mel’s empathetic loneliness in some way, but they are not before the footlights.

Russ response 6: Not sure what you mean here, but lots of things (arguably all things) that are not in Mel’s direct experience color it.

Russ response 7: See panel 6 in the graphic novelette below.

Russ comments: This is a graphic-novelette musing in the it-is-not-about-the-words series.

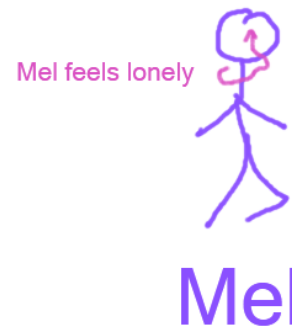
Panel 1 is Mel and Jane:



Panel 2 is Jane feeling lonely. The schematic shows this as a winding around the heart that is experienced. (Not a perfect conveyance, by any means, but adequate for present purposes.)



Panel 3 is Mel feeling lonely. Note that Mel's loneliness is not exactly the same as Jane's, regardless of whether they know that their experiences differ from each other. Most importantly in the present discussion, Mel did *not* describe herself as feeling lonely. That is, this does *not* describe Mel's experience at the moment of the beep.



Panel 4 is Mel empathetically feeling Jane's loneliness. Mel understands, to her core, without a hint of meta-awareness, that her directly apprehended feeling (call it loneliness) does not arise from her—Mel immediately apprehends that she empathetically feels Jane's loneliness. It doesn't matter whether Mel's empathetic feeling has similar or different characteristics from the Mel's-own-loneliness of panel 3. It doesn't matter whether Mel's empathetic loneliness has similar or different characteristics from Jane's loneliness of Panel 2. What matters is that Mel understands herself as feeling (that's the winding-around-the-heart part of the schematic) what Jane is feeling.



Panel 5 is Mel having a feeling about Jane drinking away her depression. This is *not* Mel's experience at the moment of the beep. Mel's feeling is not *about* Jane, it is *along with* Jane or *as* Jane.



Panel 6 schematizes why DES is difficult. To the extent that JBK is interested in his own interests (distinctions, theories, philosophies, concepts, principles, beliefs, systems, etc., and so on), those interests interfere / obscure / distract / confuse / obliterate / hamper / impede / etc. / and so on the ability to grasp Mel's experience. Those interests may seem important, fundamental, vital, imperative, essential, worthy, central, erudite, scientific, etc., and so on, but they all interfere.



I am not omniscient, so I am not in a position to measure or judge the extent of JBK's interests and their interferences. And I am not omniscient, so I am not in a position to judge whether it is better to grasp Mel's experience or to clarify distinctions, theories, philosophies, and so on. I am an ignorant mortal, but I can say that the previous paragraph reflects my experience. To the extent that one wants to do DES, one has to fight against / struggle / abandon interest in anything other than Mel's experience at the moment of the beep.

Now for the not-about-the-words significance. The most important thing (I might want to revise the *most* there after I sleep on it—maybe there is something else that is more important) about a high-fidelity description is that it gets *the arrows* right (referring to the arrows in the above graphic novelette. Where experience is *aimed*, what it experientializes, what is *doesn't* experientialize, what it brings before the footlights—being straight about that is of fundamental importance. It matters less whether the words are right—there's lots of different words that might be used. Some words are better than others, to be sure, and some are downright misleading, but that is secondary to getting the arrows right.

JBK said (in the transcript 12:24 turn):

depression, I could think a lot of things, there could be lots of things I'm not even thinking about. Could be more of a sadness, or could be more of just a emptiness or hopelessness or feeling of like lack of self-worth or just like, I think depression can mean maybe a lot of different things.

I don't much care about those distinctions. I think Mel's private definitions of "lack of self worth," "emptiness," etc. is probably different from JBK's and from mine, and we don't have the time, energy, or ability to sort those through. (As a general rule, I don't have much interest in things where I don't know what we're talking about.) Here, I accept that Mel is feeling something in the ballpark of loneliness, depression, sadness, emptiness, hopelessness, lack of self worth, or whatever. I accept that the feeling is *not* happiness, *not* anxiety, *not* anger, *not* a bunch of other things. That's probably as good as we are going to get, so I'm ready to move on.

But the distinguishing between panel 3 loneliness (where the arrow starts and ends with Mel) and the panel 4 loneliness (where the arrow starts with the reading and winds around the passage description and ends with Mel) is of vital importance. I don't much care, when we talk about panel 4, whether we call it "empathetic loneliness," "arising from the reading loneliness," or "some feeling that is related to loneliness and may or may not be similar to Jane's feeling that the author called loneliness" or just "loneliness." As long as we know that we are riding the panel-4 arrow, the words don't matter much.

We have spent many hours over the last week debating whether to insert the word "empathetic" into the description. I don't care about that insertion. I do care that we write something that rides lightly along Mel's experience, so I think we need *something* in the ballpark of "empathetic" to do that.

(And I would say as an aside that I appreciate the opportunity to think about and clarify what I mean by "it's not about the words." I have used that locution for many years, and my significance detectors suggest that it is a vitally important concept, but I have not clarified for myself or for others exactly what that sentence means, and what it's range of convenience is. I'm working at it...)

DISCUSSION OF THE DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE 12.1

Part 2: Discussion of other aspects

Accepting the addition of “empathetically,” here is Julian’s entire description of sample 12.1, so that we can discuss aspects of it:

Sample 12.1: [I was reading a book where a character was drinking away a negative emotional state]. I empathetically felt a lonely negative feeling (felt clearly but not bodily). This was the main thing in my awareness.

I also was physically relaxed, like my body was heavy but also soft and malleable, pressing into the ground. This wasn’t in any specific part of my body, more overall.

Russ comments:

RE “drinking away a negative emotional state”

From the character’s point of view, she has no “negative emotional state”—that would be something a theoretician might say. The character is lonely/depressed, so I would edit:

[I was reading a book where a character was drinking away ~~a negative emotional state~~ her depression / loneliness]

RE “I empathetically felt a lonely negative feeling”

First, that is a statement of meta-experience: “I felt a feeling.” There is no meta-awareness here. Second, as before, “lonely negative feeling” is something a theoretician might say, not a description of Mel’s experience. So I would edit:

I empathetically felt ~~a lonely negative feeling~~ lonely / depressed.

RE “I also was physically relaxed”

That is a statement about physics, not about experience, so I would edit:

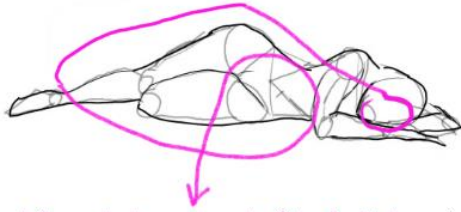
~~“I also was physically felt~~ relaxed, like my body was heavy but also soft and malleable, pressing into the ground.”

Julian comments: I agree that “I felt relaxed” is better.

Russ comments: I don’t think that “I felt relaxed” is *better*. I think “I was physically relaxed” is *wrong*. I accept that that sounds severe, but the essence of DES is to bright-line-discriminate between directly apprehended experience and all else. Anything that crosses or blurs that line is as wrong as playing E $\flat$ in the opening measures of Beethoven’s 5th. It is not merely better to play E $\flat$.

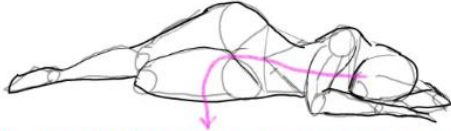
RE “I felt relaxed like my body was heavy / soft / malleable / pressing into the ground”

That is a meta statement. “I felt relaxed” is schematized by the circling in the head; “like my body...is pressing in the ground” is schematized by the arrow noticing my body and that it is pressing into the ground



I felt relaxed, like my body was heavy / soft / malleable / pressing into the ground.

However, she *felt* heavy, not *like her body was* heavy. Her experience is more like this:



I felt my heavy / soft / malleable body pressing into the ground

So when those changes are made, we end up with this description:

Sample 12.1: [I was reading a book where a character was drinking away her depression/loneliness]. I empathetically felt lonely / depressed (felt clearly but not bodily). This was the main thing present to me.

I felt relaxed—felt my heavy / soft / malleable body pressing into the ground. This wasn't in any specific part of my body, more overall.

Sketch from <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/74/e5/26/74e526821696e74656f7251d7c93dc58.png>