

Mel May
Mel Interview 2

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the October 17 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/BCkRRUDNPcU>. In brown are conversations about the Descriptive Experience Sampling process that took place during the interview. In green are Russ's comments, and in blue are Julian's comments about and explanations of the Descriptive Experience Sampling process inserted after the interview. If you have corrections, suggestions, or questions, please post them as YouTube comments.

RTH = Russ Hurlburt

JBK = Julian Bass-Krueger

Mel = Mel May

0:00 Mel: Okay. Um...

0:01 RTH: So this is gonna be day 2.

0:03 Mel: Yes.

0:06 RTH: [pause] And was there anything that we should be talking about, before we look at beeps?

0:12 JBK: All, all good on my end.

0:13 Mel: Yeah... Not on, not on my end. Um, the only... I'll, I'll get stuck into it, but the only thing that I'm gonna preface it with is that after last week... yeah, I tried to, yesterday, be far more, um... like just, just stop trying too hard [laughs] and, and just really be just like.... And actually, y'know what, this week I got *startled* by the beep pretty much every time. So I think, like we were talking about how that first week, you're kinda not anticipating it, but aware that you're doing it. And yesterday that every time it went off, I was like, oh! And then I was like, oh!, what was happening? So I'm gonna preface it with that.

0:55 RTH: Okay.

SAMPLE 2.1 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

0:56 Mel: Um, okay, so first beep was 10:10 AM. So I did this yesterday, Monday morning. Um, and I've written down... yeah, I was working, I wrote down, "I was thinking about the email I was about to write." Um, like I was looking at a photo of [laughs]... (I'm a producer... so I was looking at a photo of a Steadicam) and anticipating, um, writing the email I was about to write. So what was in my head, not a *clear thought*, but it wasn't *nothing*. Um, so that was kinda the, the distinction that I wanted to make there in terms of, it wasn't as simple as being like, oh, I thought *hire that Steadicam*.

Like, no, that's not what was in my brain when the beep went off. But there was... there was a *something*, more than a *nothing* [laughs]. [JBK: Mm-hmm.]

1:56 JBK: [to Russ] Uh, we haven't really decided who's main interviewer for this one.

2:01 RTH: Well, should you go? You, me, you me?

2:03 JBK: I could take it, yeah. [RTH: Okay.] Okay. So we, so it's a something and not a nothing. [Mel laughs] And [laughs], you seem pretty, pretty certain of that, so I won't fight you on it. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, and it was related to a Steado... an email you were writing about a Steadicam, um, and there was *something* there. Would you be able to give any more specifics, or you don't think so? You don't know?

2:31 Mel: I, and again, I'm trying not to give like too much context, but to give it context to explain. So like, I had a tab open on my computer and I was looking at a photo of this particular camera that I was gonna write in an email. Like... [JBK: Mm-hmm.] it was almost like my brain was caught *not* rehearsing and planning out the email that I was then about to write. I, I think that's too much. But there was like an awareness of that. So it's almost like the step before that. Um, like I was looking at the photo as the beep went off, and I had this awareness of... a something, but I wasn't in the process of putting language to that something yet. But it wasn't like we were talking about last week where it was autopilot, like, y'know, just like going from A to B. It wasn't that. Um, but it wasn't as distinctive and clear in terms of language as, "oh, that's the camera I wanna hire" and "Dear So-and-So," like, it wasn't that.

3:42 JBK: Okay. [Mel laughs]. So the content isn't specifically formed and planned.

3:48 Mel: Yes... Not specifically formed. I like that, yes.

3:53 JBK: Okay. But would you say there is content at all? Or is it kinda a process without content? Or you don't know?

4:01 Mel: No, I feel like that one *was* content. I, I definitely felt that at the time when the beep went off, that... *ooh, there was something in my brain then*. That, that's different to when we had, yeah, like vacuuming last week, and I could definitely say there was *nothing* in the brain. This one, there *was content*, but it wasn't, um, "fully formed" is maybe a nice way to put it. But there was a something.

4:31 JBK: Um, [pause] and in terms of this loose, loose kind of content, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] would you be able to give a best guess to what it was? Or, or you're not quite sure?

4:31 Russ comments: To ask for a "best guess" about experience is *not*, it seems to me, to ask about experience. It invites speculation, rather than description. But as always in DES, the issue is not whether *Russ thinks* this is a good question; the evidence about whether the question is good will come from whether it helps Mel describe experience at the moment of the beep.

4:47 Mel: Well, then I come back to like a knowing of like, it, it felt like a knowing, like I was, I was looking at a thing and I, and I, I was looking at this picture of a study cam and I, it was resonating and I was processing it, but I wasn't at the next point of, let's put that into an email about I want to use that camera.

4:47 Russ comments: This response is highly subjunctified, which may indicate that Mel has little confidence in what she is saying. That I take as evidence that JBK's request for a "best guess" was *not* a good question (see the comment at 4:31).

Q: Could you clarify or quantify what you mean by "highly subjunctified"?

A: Here is Mel's 4:47 turn with the subjunctifiers highlighted (in alternating colors to help visually separate them):

4:47 Well, then I come back to like a knowing of like, it, it felt like a knowing, like I was, I was looking at a thing and I, and I, I was looking at this picture of a steadycam and I, it was resonating and I was processing it, but I wasn't at the next point of let's put that into an email about I wanna use that camera.

For comparison, here is Mel's previous turn (4:01, before the "best guess" question) with the subjunctifiers highlighted in the same way:

4:01 No, I feel like that one was content. I, I definitely felt that at the time when the beep went off, that... ooh, there was something in my brain then. That, that's different to when we had, yeah, like vacuuming last week, and I could definitely say there was *nothing* in the brain. This one, there was *content*, but it wasn't, um, "fully formed" is maybe a nice way to put it. But there was a something.

So before the "best guess" question (at 4:01), there were 3 subjunctifiers in 77 words (.04 subjunctifiers per word). After the "best guess" question (at 4:47), there were 11 subjunctifiers in 70 words (.16 subjunctifiers per word—four times as dense after as before).

We could quibble about whether one or another highlighting is really a subjunctifier, or whether I missed some subjunctifiers. DES is not really interested in the counting of subjunctifiers; it is about developing a taste for how the density of subjunctifiers (subjunctifiers per word or subjunctifiers per second) changes across an interview. If the density is rising, then either we're heading in the wrong direction or we have reached a place where the experience is difficult to put into words. Here, to my ear, we are heading in the wrong direction.

Julian comments: I agree that the "best guess" part of the question was not well phrased. I think there are other problems with this line of questioning, too. I'm coming back to this interview after sampling Day 9, writing descriptions and discussing the descriptions. We've talked a lot about this distinction of content in experience vs content free experience. It's interesting that issues with content come up so quickly here.

I think the questioning is hindered by misunderstanding. What I mean by 'content' in my 3:53 question is if Mel's experience is *about* something, if it has a

referent. For instance, if something about Steadicams or hiring a guy is somehow part of it, even if it's not clear/vague/loose.

Mel doesn't answer in response to this. She at first confirms there was content—(4:01) “that one was content.” But then goes on to describe ‘content’ as she understands it “I, I definitely felt that at the time when the beep went off, that... *ooh, there was something in my brain then.*” So “content” for her here is not it being *about* something, it's about it being *something*. There is *not nothing* in experience here. There is some ‘content’ in her experience meaning that there is something. But we haven't addressed whether this experiencing has any ‘content’ in terms being *about* something.

I can't put myself in my mind as I was interviewing, but I think I realized there was a good deal of subjunctification, and I wasn't getting a clearer view of experience. So I switched to another line of questioning.

There is potentially another problem too. My whole approach to ‘content’ could be too stuck in a binary distinction and too based on preconceptions. Either experience is about something—about this Steadicam or that Steadicam or hiring this guy or that guy. Or it's not. This doesn't mean I'm expecting this ‘content’ to be clear. At this moment of interviewing, I'm open to the possibility of it being vague, loose, barely formed and somehow relating to Steadicams. I'm also (I think) open to the possibility of it being not about any of that at all. Mel could have some kind of forming/mulling process going on but it's not *about* anything.

I think I could be more open to a third possibility that this distinction is not possible for Mel and that the distinction doesn't apply to her experience. I realize that even the concept of ‘content’ is something theoretical.

These are still open questions on very recent interview days. But if similar questions come up, I'll have to stay as open as possible to all possibilities and to disentangle theory.

Russ comments:

RE “It's interesting that issues with content come up so quickly here.”

In my view, the issues with content/content-free is presuppositional with Julian, and the issues come up because Julian's presuppositions bring them up. That is, the quickness comes from Julian's presuppositions, not Mel's experience.

Mel said, quite clearly in her opening salvo (0:56) and in what she wrote immediately following the beep, that at the moment of the beep she had been thinking about writing some sort of email about a Steadicam—that is, I didn't think there was any doubt about the *about* of her thinking—it had some inchoate thing to do with Steadicams. And she said the same kind of thing at 2:31.

Then JBK asked at 3:53, “But would you say there is content at all? Or is it kinda a process without content?” That question was, in my view, unwarranted—she had said (twice) that there was content. To my ear, unwarranted questions generally signal presuppositions at work—this is Julian forcing some sort of process-without-content possibility into the conversation.

RE “I think the questioning is hindered by misunderstanding” and the remainder of that paragraph and the paragraph following.

I think it is deeper than a misunderstanding. I think these two paragraphs are (still) forcing a distinction that does not apply to Mel. No matter how you define

about or how you define *something*, and no matter how carefully you try to divide those two words, Mel's experience is inchoately about inchoately something (the shoot involving Steadicams).

RE "My whole approach to 'content' could be too stuck in a binary distinction and too based on preconceptions. Either experience is about something—about this Steadicam or that Steadicam or hiring this guy or that guy. Or it's not."

I think you are right: you are too stuck in that binary distinction, and that is the result of (or action of) presuppositions (or preconceptions—I don't care about the word, although I could argue that presupposition is more apt). The problem with presuppositions/preconceptions is that they seem important—it seems that it is virtuous to figure them out—but that leads you *away* from hearing what Mel is saying about her experience.

It is well above my pay grade to determine what is virtuous for Julian (or for me or for anyone else). But I think it *is* within my expertise to point out that trying to resolve some abstract binary distinction will interfere with apprehending Mel's experience with fidelity. You can't have it both ways. DES aspires to apprehend Mel's experience with fidelity; so if we are to undertake DES, we have to work at bracketing any presupposition that interferes with it. (See the comment at 9:41.)

- 5:12 JBK: Mm-hmm.
- 5:13 Mel: So that I feel like that's kinda as clear as I can be on that.
- 5:19 JBK: Okay. Yeah, Yeah. Was, so was the part of looking at the picture of the Steadicam, was that in this very moment in your awareness? Or... [Mel: Yep.] Okay. And the [Mel: Yep.] possibility that it's, it's broader. Maybe before you were looking, but at this very moment you're just kind of, y'know, something else is going on. Is that possible, too? Or do you, do you think the visual part right before the beep is in your awareness?
- 5:47 Mel: No, I think it was more than just the visual part. Um, like I think that this was this, when the right before the beep, it was more than just *seeing* a thing. This *definitely had* a something with it.
- 6:00 JBK: Okay. It's more than the visual.
- 6:02 Mel: Yeah.
- 6:03 JBK: But for the visual part itself, you think right before the beep that, *that* part wa, was there? Or you're not sure?
- 6:11 Mel: Wait, hang on. Sorry. How do you mean?
- 6:14 JBK: Um, so right now I just wanna focus on the visual part (if there is a visual part) of seeing this.
- 6:21 Mel: Oh, you mean inside my brain? Sorry.

- 6:23 JBK: [laughs]. Yeah, yeah. Inside your, your brain, your experience, your mind, whatever.
- 6:28 Mel: Yeah. So in terms of like, I'm thinking *visual* as in like, I was looking at my computer, looking at the visual of the camera. But do you mean...Yeah. Internally in my brain? Was there a visual component of that?
- 6:39 JBK: Yes. Yeah.
- 6:40 Mel: I would say no.
- 6:42 JBK: Okay. No.
- 6:45 Mel: No.

Julian comments: I still didn't make myself clear here. I wanted to find out if Mel experienced just seeing the image of Steadicam, vs. if her eyes and visual cortex (whatever) were skillfully processing this image but it wasn't before the footlights of her consciousness. I tried to make this distinction in my 5:19 turn, but Mel understood it as asking if something else was also present. When I tried to focus on just the visual part, I think Mel understood it (6:28) as being about something beyond just seeing it, about there being a separate mental image or mentally visual component beyond just seeing it. I'm not entirely sure. But I do have to work on the clarity of my expression.

But if seeing the Steadicam is in her experience, I don't think it's the main thing. I digressed from my main line of questioning to ask about this. Maybe I wanted to rule it out, before returning to the hard stuff. But as discussed on subsequent days, this isn't a great idea. It's best to ask about what is most present in experience first.

Russ comments: I agree this wasn't clear. I would say that what contributes to the unclarity, at least in part, is that JBK asked meta-experience questions (questions about the experience of the experience). That is, at 5:19 JBK asked "was the part of looking at the picture of the Steadicam, was that in this very moment in your awareness?" That is not a question about whether the *picture* was experienced, but is rather a question about whether the *looking at* the picture was experienced—that is a meta-experiential question. The same thing happens at 6:03 when JBK asked "the visual part itself, you think right before the beep that, *that* part wa, was there?" Those are both meta-experiential questions. Mel has provided no warrant for asking meta-experiential questions.

- 6:45 JBK: So you would say no. But the part that is there, is something about, um, something about this, this Steadicam, um, which is...
- 6:59 Mel: It's, it's a really bizarre [laughs] thing to have been caught in the middle of. [sirens are heard outside and Mel turns to look]

7:03 JBK: And something about future email and kinda of... how would you des... how would you describe it? It's about trying to formulate something for the email? Or you're not even formulating it yet? You're kinda like, how, how, how would you describe it?

7:22 Mel: Yeah. It wasn't at formulation stage. I know when I'm at that stage, and I feel like there were a couple of beeps last week where it was more, I was in that stage and it feels more, um, process driven. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] This wasn't, this, I wasn't at that point yet at the moment before the beep. It was the step before that process. So it was, um, it was [sirens continue] yeah, like I keep coming back to a *knowing*, like a, um... (sigh) yeah. I, I wasn't, it wasn't, I wasn't caught being, I wasn't caught formulating an email. I wasn't caught thinking logically and rationally about like A to B of *this is what I want to say*.

8:16 JBK: Mm-hmm.

8:17 Mel: It was a step before that. But there was the *knowing*—this feels very airy-fairy, but there was the knowing of.... I, I was caught right in the middle of a process. Like, I think this was a really interesting beep, um, cuz it was in between where we've got me previously. So it wasn't just looking and registering, and then it wasn't just doing the thing. But how to describe what that inner experience was like, is really challenging, cuz it just felt like really... grounded in a concept and a knowing. But there's no, there wasn't a, a visual experience really *per se*, int-, in inside my brain. Like, it's not, I'm not seeing the Steadicam inside my brain. I'm not seeing the words of an email. Like there's nothing visual happening at that moment. And there's no like clear distinct language or, or words. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] But there's, um, an experience.

9:19 JBK: Okay. I think I have some idea. I, so I, I wanna try asking a couple other questions that I'm not sure where they'll lead or if they'll just be more confusing or whatever. Because I think pushing for too much specificity on an experience that might not have that much specificity [laughs], like we could get a bit lost.

9:40 Mel: Mm-hmm.

9:41 JBK: But, um, maybe I'll throw out suggestions and, and if, if something's totally off the mark just shoot it down. [Mel: Yeah.] Or like... were there, were there other qualities to this experience? Like, like, some kind of desire to write an email or, or any kind of feeling or sensory experience or anything like that ? Or you're not sure?

9:41 Julian comments: RE "desire to write an email": That questioning comes from researching 'will' and wondering if there are (potentially faint) volitional or desire-y components of many experiences. Maybe there are. But this question still comes from theory rather than from Mel's direct experience. I don't think it's a good idea to ask it. Best to ask neutral "anything else" questions and whatever's salient enough will eventually pop up. And if DES misses things that are very faint, that's okay, too.

RTH comments: I agree and would state it more strongly: To the extent that you are interested in any theory, you will (a) not be able to apprehend Mel's experience with

fidelity; and (b) probably will *not* be able to contribute anything to the theory based on Mel's experience. (See the final comment at 4:47.)

10:04 Mel: No. I don't think so. Sensory? Nah. Um...

10:10 JBK: Mm-hmm.

10:12 Mel: Hn hnn [negative].

10:12 JBK: And, okay. And I wanna clear up, because you say a kind of *knowing*. [Mel: Mm.] And it's not about the words as [laughs] as Russ said last time, but, but, I am curious if there's, is there a sep- like... this kind of process going on and a separate kind of awareness of this process, would you say, or not at all? Or that distinction doesn't make sense to you?

10:12 Russ comments: This is an unwarranted meta-experiential question. It is meta because it is not just about the experiential process but about the experience of the experiential process. It is unwarranted because Mel's original talk about knowing (4:47) suggested that knowing was an attempt to describe the inchoate thinking, not a process separate from it.

10:44 Mel: No, I don't think, I don't think I feel a distinction there. Whether I'm not understanding that properly or whether that's accurate. Um, but it felt like—and you'll see like later for some of my other beeps, I, I've not had a similar experience to this. So I think that that's important in terms of like, sometimes I feel like there's a really obvious *nothing* is the answer to what was happening inside my head.

11:10 JBK: Yeah.

11:11 Mel: *This wasn't that*. And that's the best way to distinguish that. And it, I know it doesn't, um, then get, like it's, I'm not getting better at describing [laughs] what that is, but it, it's *so not nothing*. But in terms of what the *something is* in more, um... yeah, specific language, I find that really challenging because the inner experience is not, uh, embedded in visual or any sort of language.

11:44 JBK: Yeah. So there, there's no visual component, no language at this moment.

11:49 Mel: But there's a something! [laughs]

11:50 JBK: There is something. There's not a clear formulated thought that you'd be able to express. [Mel: Yep.] But there, there is something.

11:57 Mel: Uh-huh.

11:58 JBK: Um, o, okay. I don't have any more questions. Um, Russ?

12:03 RTH: So I'm happy with that. Lemme summarize what I've heard and see whether I see whether I'm on the right track. So at the moment of the beep, I understand that I am

in some way processing something about a video cam and, and an email and something about that. And that is *experientially ongoing* for me. It's *not* just I'm *inferring that* because I'm looking at it, then I'm gonna about to write an email. [Mel: Um hmm (and has been nodding throughout RTH's summary).] But there's something experiential about it. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But there's nothing very specific or *at all* specific about that... processing. I recognize myself to be processing... but the specifics of it, there, but there are no specifics of it.

12:43 Mel: Mm-hmm. Yep. [laughs].

12:46 RTH: Okay then I'm good. Number 2. [Julian laughs].

12:46 Julian comments: I notice that you use first person when paraphrasing Mel's experience (in 12:03), as if you are speaking from her perspective. Does that help you see it from Mel's perspective? Does it help Mel feel her experience is understood? Is it important to the method or more your preference?

Russ comments: I don't have definitive answers to those important questions. I will make these observations:

1. Speaking in the first-person as if from Mel's point of view is very natural for me. It seems very forced and separating for me to put such observations into the third person. I don't know whether that is a personality quirk of mine, or a taste acquired during 50 years of DES interviews, or a universally (or widely) desirable DES technique.

2. I do think it helps me see things from Mel's perspective. My only evidence is what I said in #1.

3. I sometimes find myself switching back and forth between first and third person, sometimes within the same sentence or even within the same phrase. That also seems natural to me. (For an example, see the comment at 25:30.) I've never tried to analyze when or why I do that.

4. I'm pretty sure that DES participants are not at all confused by my using the first person to refer to them, or by my switching back and forth. They seem to accept it as a natural way of communicating. I've never conducted any quantitative studies on this, but I would say (for example) that when I watch Mel carefully across my 12:03 turn, I see absolutely no sign of some quizzical *who-is-he-talking-about?* Instead, she seems to be nodding approvingly in coordination with what I am saying.

5. I can't say for certain whether it is helpful to Mel (or to other participants)—establishing that would require some randomized design where I sometimes use first person and sometimes third, and I have not done those experiments. I can say from a whole lot of casual subjunctification-density-type observations (see the comments at 4:31 and 4:47), that I'm pretty sure that my first-person usage helps Mel and other participants.

6. I do not insist that those I supervise using first person.

7. On a few occasions, I have suggested that a supervisee use the first person when writing descriptions. My sense is that they have found that helpful. But I haven't suggested that for everyone. I suspect that I made the use-first-person suggestion when I had a hunch or otherwise good reason to think that it would be helpful for that particular person.

8. I think it would be a bad idea for me to *require* that supervisees use the first-person, because if that is not natural for them, their discomfort would likely be betrayed in their questioning. Instead, I recommend trying to hear Mel with fidelity, and use whatever voice works for you.

9. When I write contemporary descriptions of beeped experiences, I also usually write in the first-person, because I'm trying to convey at high fidelity, and first-person seems natural.

10. If I want to publish a sample description, I usually edit my contemporaneous first-person description, transforming it to the third-person because I think first-person descriptions are just one more hurdle for an objective-minded editor to get over.

12:52 JBK: Um,

12:52 Mel: Um, okay. Number 2. Um, one, oh yeah, sorry, go ahead.

12:57 JBK: Um, yeah, maybe I'll note this now, or we could talk about it later too, but just words...like "processing." I think part of the DES is to really get into what people mean by that, because it's like a common term that you might hear. Like it comes from kinda computers and processing these metaphors. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But I guess part of the method is getting under these terms.

13:21 Mel: Mm-hmm.

13:22 JBK: So do you have, do you have thoughts on that, Russ?

13:22 Julian comments: You used the word "processing" when you paraphrased Mel's experience, describing her as processing what to write. *Processing* doesn't have a clear experiential meaning. The conclusion in our discussion was that it was an okay word to use. Mel's experience was inchoate and not clearly defined here, so using the word "processing" doesn't pin down a meaning that isn't there. However, in retrospect we should be aware that the word isn't so informative about experience. *Processing* could be called a mentalism, which, Russ, you criticize at length, for example in *A Passion for Specificity* (141-145).

Russ comments: For my taste, your question is (a) too much about the word; and (b) does not seem to recognize that Russ undermined the word *processing* as he spoke it. Russ's statement was (12:07): "I understand that I am in some way processing something about a videocam and an email, something about that." To my ear, that is not a statement about processing, it is a statement about *in some way processing something...something about that*. That is, this statement is about <underminer> *processing* <underminer><underminer>, not about *processing* itself.

It remains to be seen how Mel understood Russ's communication. If she spends some time trying to define *processing*, then Russ's underminers were not effective.

Your question does point to an important part of the DES communication skill: in the interview, it often happens that I want to call attention to something someone said without making more of it or less of it than it was in the original, without adding, subtracting, or otherwise warping the person's original sense. That is a substantial

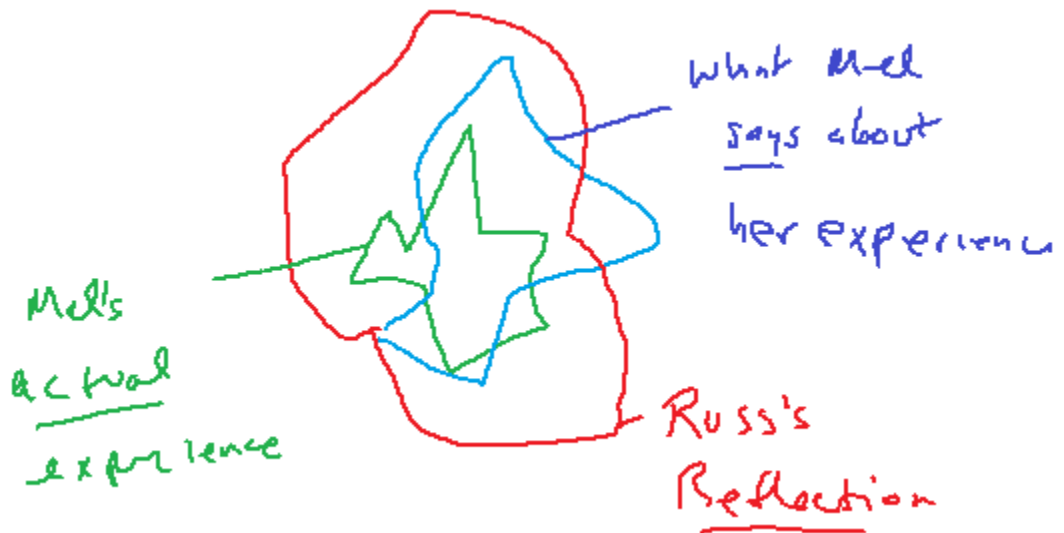
art. Here I made that attempt by inserting some underminers; later (12:30) I insert a skipped beat with the same intent: “But there’s nothing very specific (or at all specific) about that <skip a beat> *processing*.”

Julian comments: That makes sense to me. I had latched on too heavily to the word *processing* without paying attention to the underminers. It’s an interesting topic that has come up several times so far (for example in the discussion about offering other possibilities for experience and adding “or whatever” at the end). I don’t remember your stressing it so much in your writing, but with a quick search I did find some explanation: “As a general rule we try to undermine our own questions and conclusions as part of the art of not ‘leading the witness’, not accepting anything as established until the participant has established it herself with little doubt.” (*Describing Inner Experience* p. 95).

You also write about underminers as indicators for when participants may not be describing direct experience. It’s interesting that vague language which may indicate *distorted* reporting of experience for an *interviewee* can be *desirable* for the *interviewer* to use. DES in that way is counter to what we might expect of precise research—in DES, precise language is often undesirable and may prematurely fix the participant’s experience.

Russ comments: Indeed, DES is “counter to what we might expect of precise research” in the way that you describe, and even moreso. An important aspect of the DES art is what I have called “dragging my feet” (*A Passion for Specificity*, pp. 397-398). My aim with Mel (as in all DES interviews) is to be even more ambiguous or even *more* doubtful *than is Mel* about her experiences. If a phenomenon is real (that is, is actually a characteristic of Mel’s experience and not merely a presuppositional, abstract, or theoretical account or an accidental result of word choice) and important for Mel, then that phenomenon will (likely) occur at some subsequent beeps. *Then* Mel can say something like, “This is like that beep from before...” and describe the same phenomenon from a new perspective (that is, now illuminated by its occurrence in the newly discussed sample). That is, I want Mel to “drag” me (and herself!) along to where we have to go, because that’s where the phenomenon actually is. As I said in *A Passion for Specificity* (p. 398), “I recommend dragging your feet as long as you can, until it becomes absurd to drag your feet.”

Visually schematized:



What Mel *actually* experienced is schematized in green; what she *says* about her experience is in blue (what she says is not perfect—she doubtless gets some things right and some things wrong); what *Russ* says about her experience is in red. So Russ does *not* want to be precise about the words she has used—that would be misguided precision. So he speaks *in the vicinity* of what she has said. Then, *if or when this phenomenon occurs again*, Mel can be more precise about it, Russ can reflect with greater differentiation, and Mel can triangulate with, now, two experiences to help Russ be more precise in his reflection.

All that is, of course, the iterative procedure at work. DES does *not* seek to refine her words. It seeks to refine her ability to apprehend and describe her experiences—the words will naturally adjust themselves.

In particular, across this process, I don't want *what I think* to drag *Mel* along to whatever precisely stated theory I might have had about inner experience.

The art of DES is to convey to Mel that I really do want to hear what her experience is really like, and that will require some patience on both of our parts. She might have to tell me things twice or a few times before I can really hear them, and I might have to ask her things twice or a few times before she can really understand what I want to know. That's just the way it is. The art of DES is to provide whatever it seems to take to allow that to occur.

Experiential and psychological science as it is currently practiced, as you correctly point out, is (as I would see it, far too) enamored of / impressed by its precise language, precise analysis, etc. It doesn't really want to hear about Mel's actual experience; it wants Mel to provide a data point relevant to some theory which the researcher had advanced entirely prior to and in sustained ignorance of Mel as a person.

RE "Processing could be called a mentalism, which, Russ, you criticize at length."

No, *processing* is not a mentalism, as B. F. Skinner and I use that term. A mentalism is an explanation for behavior. For example, in "I eat *because I am hungry*," hunger is a mentalism, the presumed mental cause of the eating behavior.

Processing as RTH used it at 12:03 is a description of directly apprehended experience. There is no explanation implied, of behavior or anything else. That is a

hugely important distinction, because I think (and have always thought) that Skinner was totally right in his critique of mentalisms. DES is in large measure my answer to the question, If inner life is (or at least might be) an important aspect of the human condition, what can we say about it without making the mentalistic mistakes that Skinner correctly criticized? My answer was to create DES, that is, *to describe inner experience and only to describe inner experience*. No causation. No explanation. No theorizing.

In short: mentalisms are about causation; DES (including RTH's 12:03 summary) is about description.

BTW, "processing" was Mel's word (4:47) in her attempt to describe her experience.

13:28 RTH: [pause] Well, I thought you ruled out quite a bit of the possibilities. [JBK: Yeah.] And I, I elected not to try to rule out any more possibilities cuz I thought you'd sort of done enough about that. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] And, but I agree that the term *processing* is ambiguous and, and...or inchoate or something like that. And I thought that was, that sort of matched her experience at this particular time. And given that this is the second sampling day, I wasn't motivated to try to get more to it than that.

14:02 JBK: Okay...sure, let's, let's move to the second sample.

SAMPLE 2.2 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

14:07 Mel: Okay. So the second one went off at 10:13, which is only three minutes later, so I was very startled [laughs]. Um, but *here* I was writing the email. So I've noted that I was just on autopilot doing a thing. Um, I wrote, "I wouldn't say my brain... um, was... I wouldn't say my brain was empty or that there was *nothing there per se*, but it was just doing the thing that I was doing at the time, which was writing an email." So I feel like this inner experience was sort of more in line with the vacuuming and things that we had last week. And this felt very different to the first beep that we've just discussed, because this felt more, um, like... so right before the beep, I was just quite literally writing the email. I was not halfway through a sentence *thinking about* like the rest of it. I was halfway through doing the sentence, and then I got startled when it went off and I yeah... Just wrote that, um, my inner experience was kinda just autopilot of, um, doing the physical act. Um, so in terms of in my brain, am I, was I...audibly hearing what I was typing? No. Was I seeing the words or concepts that I was typing? *No*. I was just sitting there doing the thing.

15:49 RTH: So the words are skillfully coming out of my fingers onto my keyboard.

15:53 Mel: Yes. [laughs].

15:54 RTH: And my brain is no doubt doing that.

15:57 Mel: Yep.

15:57 RTH: But I don't have any *experience* of my brain doing that.

16:01 Mel: Yep.

16:01 RTH: That's, that, that these, these sentences, this reasonable thing that I'm writing is, is coming out of me. [Mel: Yeah.] And I'm, I *don't* experience myself as planning about what I'm about to say? [Mel shakes her head negatively] I don't experience myself even in the, inchoate way that we talked about in the first beep.

16:21 Mel: No, I don't, I don't believe so.

16:24 RTH: So this *is* like the vacuuming, [Mel: Yeah.] except that, except that the task in the vacuuming was to move a machine around the rug or whatever. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And here the task is to end up with words written on a computer screen.

16:40 Mel: Mm-hmm.

16:41 RTH: But as far as my experience is concerned, I don't experience this as being, I don't have any verbal experience beyond, beyond that? Is that....?

16:50 Mel: No...Yeah. I would say that the, the experience is actually very similar for me, despite one resulting in language and one being a physical act. In terms of inner experience of the two, I think it's, it's really similar, um, because I don't think that there was this, that there wasn't a... like when the beep went off, there wasn't this, 'oh, I'm-' there's not a clear gap between the words that I'm writing and them...they're not being *rehearsed* in my head as they're coming out or anything. Y'know, it's just all happening at once. So inside my brain it's, it's sitting there doing the thing. It's not, there's no step before it where it's m- mulling it over inside my brain before they're coming out of my fingers.

17:39 RTH: Okay. So I'm happy with that.

17:45 JBK: Um, I'm, I'm still curious.[Mel: Yep.] Is it different than nothing [laughs]? Is it different from not experiencing anything?

17:53 Mel: Yeah. Yeah. It, it is, and that is a challenging [laughs] thing to describe, because... how I would try and differentiate that is, um, it's an experiential difference in that almost like my inner... like it's more alllerrrrt [elongates the word]. I have, I'm hesitant when I say that, but like... it almost feels... do y'know what, what I wanna say is: when I say that there was *nothing*, it's like the inner experience is dormant. And when I say that there's something, it's *not* dormant. [Julian: Mm-hmm.] But it's not, um, easy to articulate what the something is quite often because it's not, um, *fully formed* in that way of like audio, or, or visual, or—it's not *that*. But there's a clear dis- it's... I can feel the difference of when I say it's *nothing*, I'm sort of, it's as though it's (yeah) asleep [laughs], um, and more like in a zen state. Whereas when it's *something*, it's not that. And the easiest way to describe it is, is just that of like, well, it's *not nothing*. [laughs] [Julian laughs]. But then trying to describe the *something* (which I understand is what we're trying to do) is kinda challenging. But I can feel the difference.

19:29 JBK: Yeah, that makes sense to me.

- 19:32 RTH: So I, I think I lost the *predicate* of that question. So is this beep in, in the *nothing* category, whereas the first beep was in the *more than nothing* category?
- 19:43 Mel: I would say this one is still not *fully* nothing [laughs]. So the first one was clearly a something, and I would say this one wasn't clearly a nothing. Um, but [laughs], this is so ambiguous. [RTH: Okay]. But the, um, because I think, um... to me there is a difference. The next four beeps are gonna... you'll see, but like there's a difference between... the *nothing* but kinda-like *autopilot nothing* and the *nothing*. But whether that is [car horn]... yeah. Now I'm getting too context based, but I was [car horn] gonna say whether that's linked to the particular activity or lack thereof that I'm doing—perhaps that's what I'm getting confused by. Um, but anyway, so I would say the first one was *very much*...uh, yeah *a something*. There was, there was thought. But this one I'm doing something, but there's less like conscious thought.
- 20:50 RTH: And, and by comparison to the vacuuming beep...?
- 20:55 Mel: Yeah, the vacuuming beep... I have, I think it's still, it's shades of nothingness [laughs]. [RTH: Okay.] That's what we're getting to, so I think...
- 21:10 RTH: Slightly above zero, but not, but not at zero.
- 21:15 Mel: Yeah, I think so.
- 21:16 RTH: And that, and that's pretty much the same distance above zero in the present beep as the vacuuming beep?
- 21:23 Mel: Yeah, I think so. Yeah...Yeah. Maybe like sha- this one's slightly more, but yeah. Shades [laughs].
- 21:30 RTH: Okay. [pause] And I think I'm good.
- 21:34 JBK: I'm good.

21:34 Julian comments: After sampling, as is the DES procedure, I wrote the following description of sample 2.1 and sent it to Russ for comments/corrections/edits:

2.1 [Mel was looking at a picture of a Steadicam online and was <<<reviewing what I wrote, RTH inserted: "doubtless">>> forming what to write in an email.] There was something of this present in her experience. (This process wasn't clear and articulated. There were no words present. There wasn't a clear thought with clear content. There wasn't the visual experience of looking at the picture. But there was some experience present.)

Russ, added the word "doubtless," but in subsequent editing I removed it because I'm not sure what it added. I almost changed it to 'assumedly' before I remembered what you wrote about this tacitly but dishonestly undercutting our belief in Mel. For me there still is room to doubt if this minimal inchoate experience could be

adequately characterized as part of the email formation. We know she wrote an email later, but without the beep, perhaps things could have gone in another direction. Just to say, I don't get what 'doubtless' adds.

Russ comments: I have at least four levels of reaction. First, what I (as the DES convention) put in brackets in a description is anything other than what is in experience at the moment of the beep. So I don't think anything that is in brackets will undercut Mel's description of her experience.

Second, "Mel was... forming what to write in an email" is an omniscient statement about Mel's inner process. It's one thing to say she was looking at a picture—that's a description of external behavior. But "forming what to write" is a claim about inner processing. I know I am not (and I'm pretty sure you are not) omniscient, so we have no warrant to write such a statement. Therefore I inserted the omniscience-denying "doubtless." I would have been equally happy with "assumedly," or "presumably," or "broad-strokedly," or "what would look to an external observer like"—anything that made it clear to me (and to the reader) that I don't know what I'm talking about here.

Third, the description that I approved (because, according the DES procedure, if I don't approve, I am obligated to edit), said about experience only "There was something of this present in her experience." Everything else is bracketed or parenthesized. I thought (and think) that was a pretty good description of her experience. It reflected pretty well what I took Mel's experience to be: *something* (not nothing) was in her experience, and her experience was *of this* (the picture, the Steadicam, the email, and not of a Cadillac Escalade, or of the war with Israel, or of Fermat's last theorem).

Fourth, (and probably most important, and a corollary of the second one, or maybe the second one is a corollary of this one) a fundamental DES skill is distinguishing between what is directly experienced and all else. To write that Mel was "forming what to write" is to risk blurring the distinction—it suggests, connotes, might possibly indicate, potentially hints, that we know something experiential about her email writing. You might say "that's not what I meant," and I would accept that. But I would also say that I think if you had an adequately refined distinction-between-experience-and-all-else sense, it would offend you to write "forming what to write" without some I-don't-know-about-experience-here qualifier.

Julian comments: We're basically on the same page. I do think the description needs a qualifier, I just think "doubtless" is the wrong one. Merriam-Webster gives two definitions: 1) without doubt 2) probably. It's doubtless a contronym. Best to use another word to avoid mix ups.

Russ comments: I think it likely that we are *not* on the same page. I am not a mind reader, so I may well be mistaken, but the page-that-we-might-or-might-not-be-on-the-same-of is important, so I will explain why I think that. And in so doing, I will give a few examples of why (as I have said several times) it is not about the words.

The heart of DES (and the heart of any attempt at high-fidelity apprehension) is the happy acceptance of ignorance about the inner experience of another person (which, said another way, is the valuing of the bracketing of presuppositions about inner experience). I think you would agree with the general proposition of the

desirability of bracketing presuppositions, but you are not adequately applying that to your own presuppositions. That is a universal (not just Julian) issue: people's presuppositions are delusions, and everyone is blind to their own particular presuppositions/delusions and resist giving them up. So I take it to be my responsibility to point out what I take to be your presuppositional blindnesses, and what I take as evidence for my view. (I re-emphasize: I am not a mind reader; I am not omniscient; I may well be mistaken; etc.)

Your original version of the sample 2.1 description began "[Mel was ... forming what to write in an email.] That sentence, to my ear, suggested that you presumed to know what was ongoing in Mel's inner life—that she was forming what to write—and thus overlooked the possibility that at the moment of the beep, she had interrupted the forming-what-to-write task and was now thinking about the hockey game, or smelling the cooking dinner, or attending to her upset stomach, or whatever.

I think that presuming-to-know is the enemy of any attempt at apprehending experience in high fidelity, even if (as I happily accept) it is *likely* that Mel was indeed forming what to write. So I suggested inserting "doubtless" as an underminer of that presumption-of-knowing.

You responded by deleting "doubtless," explaining that "I'm not sure what it added." To my ear, that suggested that even when I pointed directly at the desirability of acknowledging ignorance, you did not find your original (to my ear presumptive) statement objectionable. (As it seems to me, that is the way presuppositions operate: presuppositions do what it takes to sustain themselves. If something really is a presupposition—that is, is a delusion—then you *must* deny its operation. My experience over many repetitions over many years is that it takes at least three denials, followed by three corrections, before a presupposition can start to weaken.)

So I clarified why I objected and listed a bunch of possibilities for what an underminer-of-a-presumption-of-knowing might look like: besides "doubtless," I said "I would have been equally happy with 'assumedly', or 'presumably', or 'broad-strokedly', or 'what would look to an external observer like'—anything that made it clear to me (and to the reader) that I don't know what I'm talking about here." To that you have responded by inserting *presumably*: "[Mel was ... presumably forming what to write in an email]." To my ear, your choice of *presumably* (rather than the original *doubtless*) indicates that your presupposition may still be operating.

One might object: You say it isn't about the words, but aren't you now quibbling about the word *presumably*? No. If you had used the word *presumably* in your original description, I would not have reacted and we wouldn't be having this conversation. That is, the word *presumably* would have been fine in the original sentence (would not have jangled my presupposition-monitoring antennae)—words are, in my view, rubbery, stretchable, flexible, ambiguous gestures/imperfect pointers, and *presumably* in the original sentence would have seemed to me to be a fine gestural undermining the omniscience of the sentence.

But *now*, your use of the word *presumably* has a very different function than it would have had in the original. Now, your use of *presumably* carries with it a rejection of the suggested alternatives *doubtless*, *assumedly*, *broad-strokedly*, *what would look to an external observer like*, or *I don't know what I'm talking about here*. That is, your use now has taken quite a bit of the ambiguity out of *presumably*, so that now, instead of writing merely *presumably*, you are (to my ear) writing

presumably after having removed the connotations associated with assumedly or presumably or broad-strokedly or 'what would look to an external observer like' or 'anything that made it clear to me (and to the reader) that I don't know what I'm talking about here.' That is, to my ear, in the present context, *presumably* no longer includes the possibility "I don't know what I'm talking about," but instead means something like "of course that's probably what's happening." And that, to my ear, reflects the operation of a presupposition.

So it is *not* about the *word* *presumably*; it is about the context in which that word is used. And to my ear, this new context of *presumably* suggests that you still presume to know what's happening inside Mel, and I think that will make it difficult or impossible for you to aspire to fidelity.

I have gone on at pretty great length, so again I emphasize that I am no mind reader. I have spelled out each step of where you seem (to my ear) to have preferred to know what Mel was doing over your own happy ignorance, because I think that relentless confrontation is necessary if presuppositions are to be bracketed. Perhaps I am mistaken about one or all of those steps, in which case I apologize. But I think that possibility, while unfortunate, is less undesirable than collusively overlooking the operation of a presupposition.

On a related if not identical note, you objected to my use of the word *doubtless* on the grounds of its self-ambiguity. That is an objection *about the word*, when the aim of high-fidelity apprehension would rather have you focus on *experience*. If you think my use of the word *doubtless* reflected some distortion of my understanding of Mel's experience (or your characterization thereof), then the aim of high-fidelity apprehension would suggest that you confront me with the possibility of my distortion. But if you have no objection to my *understanding*, then a quibble about a *word* is a distraction.

There may well come a time when we wish to be precise about the words we use to describe Mel's experience, but that will be *after we know what we're talking about*. Then it will be desirable to convey in as unambiguous way we can what we have discovered. In the meantime, it is not about the words; it is about being open to Mel's experience, unadulterated by any premature interest in word choice or presumed understanding.

[By the way, and for the record, the self-ambiguity of the word *doubtless* is exactly the point I was making when I inserted that word: I *didn't* know what Mel actually doing, and I used a word that *contains within itself* the fact that I didn't know what I'm talking about. I am *not* defending my use of the word *doubtless* (although I think it was skillfully apt); I don't care about the word. I *do* care about conveying, by whatever word, gesture, grunt, grimace, and so on, that I don't know what Mel was actually doing at the moment of the beep.]

From an overview perspective, I am sometimes asked why I think DES has not caught on more widely. The answer, at least in part, is that the acquisition of DES skills and the operation of DES requires confrontation of the kind I have just written. Such confrontation is hard, risky business for me for a variety of reasons: it is hard, time-consuming, focus-demanding writing; it is specifically personal, not abstractly general (about Julian as a particular person, not about people in general); I may be wrong, and that could be hurtful; if I am wrong, I am thus exposing my own presuppositions; there is no easy resolution of such issues—if I am right, Julian cannot possibly easily agree with what I have written because I have aimed at a

delusion, and delusions never give in without a to-the-death fight, and if I am wrong, Julian cannot possibly easily agree with what I have written because I am wrong; and if I am right, this will be only an initial step, because delusions die hard, and I will have to initiate such confrontations over and over, and Julian will have to work it through over and over. For DES to advance, both of us have the courage/energy/commitment/time/patience/forbearance/opportunity to work such things through, and that is doubtless rare.

Julian comments: Thanks for the long comment in attempt to clarify. I think it's good that you tried to address what you saw as a possible misunderstanding instead letting it slip away and possibly lead to greater misunderstandings later.

"Presumably" wasn't meant to carry connotations that I know what I'm talking about. I'm aiming to convey doubt and uncertainty. And my initial quibbles about "doubtless" really were about the word's ambiguity. I actually knew it only by the definition of "without a doubt". For me the sentence read like "Mel was undoubtedly forming an email" and I wasn't happy with this.

Originally when I wrote the description I also questioned if I should add a qualifier to the "forming an email" part. I can't say for sure what went through my mind, but I think it was something related to our discussion of the word "processing." Processing itself is an empty word that doesn't pin down experience. I thought "forming" could serve the same function. I wanted that part to be neutral and then for the subsequent description to clarify—it didn't involve words, clear content, etc. I do think a qualifying word is needed so I'm happy to put one. I think your point is valuable that whatever lies outside of parentheses is of most importance here, so we should take care to get it right.

I think also I was influenced by our conversation earlier about it being possible to have too much doubt or rather doubt that is dishonest and not openly stated. I believe Mel did say she was "forming an email." If I had written the description before that conversation, I bet I would have put a qualifier.

I'm trying to think (and write) out loud what exactly the difference is between this case and the one from Day 1. On Day 1 I used the phrase "described herself as." Perhaps I could have said the same here: "Mel described herself as forming an email." The intention could be the same—That 'forming an email' is a broad-stroke description that may not adequately separate the physically occurring process from experience and may not be so descriptive about what's actually going on experientially.

The difference I think is just that using a phrase like "assumedly" or "broadly speaking" is more direct. It states our doubt as investigators openly rather than tacitly. It doesn't put the burden on Mel's words or Mel's descriptions. Thinking through that helped in clarifying what kinds of ways of expressing doubt are okay. Let me know if you have other thoughts on it.

But I would like to avoid these kinds of misunderstandings in the future. When I write these descriptions I often don't have as much time as I would like to write the perfect, careful descriptions. When I write, I usually operate by writing a shitty first draft and then since I know what I mean I can go back and refine it later. That's harder with collaborative work since you don't know what I mean. But please be patient. And understand that if I do say something straightforward, then I mean it. If I say "I do think the description needs a qualifier" that means I really do think it

needs a qualifier. You overlooked this and thought that I was still operating with a presupposition that I knew what I'm talking about. No such presupposition was in place. I think a qualifier is necessary precisely because I don't know what I'm talking about when I write "forming an email." Trust that I'm being straightforward.

Russ comments: For the record, I *don't* trust that you are being straightforward, any more than I trust that Mel is or that I myself am being straightforward. Your request that I trust your straightforwardness is, in my view, the operation of your presuppositions/delusions. Unless one has arrived at nirvana, one is not in a position to know whether one's presuppositions are operating.

If you are interested in fidelity, as opposed to blind trust, then you should hope that I will continue to let you know when my presupposition antennae jangle, and that I will try to explain why they jangle, and that I will do so in a way that doesn't presume that I have access to the Truth. I will doubtless be mistaken on occasion, but I would say that I have a pretty good track record in the presupposition-antennae-jangling department across 40ish years.

SAMPLE 2.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 21:36 Mel: Um
- 21:37 JBK: Number 3.
- 21:39 Mel: Okay. Well, I don't know if I wanna spoil your party, too, but for the next one, two, three, four beeps, they've all got the same answer.
- 21:48 JBK: [laughs] That makes it easy.
- 21:49 RTH: Let's do one at a time.
- 21:51 JBK: Let's, yeah.
- 21:51 Mel: So the next one is 10:49. And I wrote, "Nothing." I said, "I just closed Instagram on my, on my phone when the beep went off." Like I just... there was no thought about what the next task was gonna be. There was, so I wrote "nothing." And I was annoyed at the time because I want more language, but I was trying to not overthink it. And the very obvious way to describe what was my inner experience was nothing.
- 22:24 JBK: Okay. I don't think— there's no reason to get annoyed if, I mean, if that's what the experience is, [Mel: (Laughs bitterly or ironically)] [laughs]. Um, but so in the, in beep number 2, it was *not* nothing. It was a, a *little bit* of something.
- 22:38 Mel: Right. Yeah. [laughs]
- 22:39 JBK: Here you wrote "nothing."
- 22:41 Mel: Yeah.

- 22:42 JBK: Is this one act- actually nothing, you think? Or [Mel: Yeah.] a little minimal something. Okay.
- 22:50 Mel: No, this one felt like *fully* nothing. Um... because in the way of the one before this, which was a bit *shades* of nothing, there was still (and I'm reluctant to use your least favorite word *processing*), but I was still like...
- 23:09 JBK: [shrugs] I don't *not like* that word. [laughs]
- 23:12 Mel: [laughs] ...but I was still [gestures moving hands around head] *processing* something. So I feel like my inner experience was still sort of firing. Like I was still...even though it's autopilot-y or whatever, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] [car horn] the brain's taken over. What that looks and feels like is, as we're hearing, difficult to explain. But then by comparison, this beep felt really nothing. And coming back to what I was saying earlier about like the word *dormant* feeling really nice, that's sort of what this experience felt like. There's nothing to latch onto in terms of trying to describe that.
- 24:00 JBK: Yeah. Um, to just make up numbers. Let's say beep number 2, maybe was like 1% of experience or something. Is it possible that this one is like 0.1% or, or something very small? Or do you think fully, fully zero is more accurate to it? Or you're not sure?

24:00 Russ comments: I think it is not possible to make a bright-line experiential distinction between nothing and a little experience. (See Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel, 2011, "Little or no experience outside of attention?") So on general principles, I wouldn't ask that question.

RE "Is it possible that this one is like 0.1% or, or something very small? Or do you think fully, fully zero is more accurate to it? Or you're not sure?"

First, Mel has said, at least four times: that there is nothing: "nothing...I was annoyed at the time because I want more" (21:51); "fully nothing" (22:50); "really nothing" (23:12); and "dormant" (23:12). And she never equivocated (that I heard). So I see no warrant for JBK's question. It is a leading question that suggests that Mel's previous answers are not adequate, pushes hard in the direction of "not sure."

Second, the question "is it possible" (asked also at 5:19 and 37:56) is *not* a question about experience. It is a question about theory. Theoretically, *of course* it is possible—everything is possible.

So I think that is a problematic question; as usual, the judgment of the quality of a question depends on whether the answer is about directly apprehended experience.

There are ways to ask about experience without leading and without theory (see the interview starting at 24:51 and the comment at 26:19).

- 24:21 Mel: I'm not sure. I mean, I, I've, I would never say like a zero, but yeah, it didn't feel like there was anything happening that I could just like distinguish.

24:21 Russ comments: Mel's answer starts out as a statement about theory or generality (see the comment at 24:00). The good news is that she tries to describe experience in the second half.

- 24:35 JBK: Mm-hmm... Um, and... I, I, I don't have any more questions on this.
- 24:45 RTH: So I have a, I have a couple. So you've, you have just closed Instagram, is that correct?
- 24:51 Mel: Yes. I had just, um... like when the beep went off, I thought, oh, what's happening inside my brain? And I realized it had, like, that had just happened just before the beep went off. So in terms of physical activities or whatever, I was sort of caught in between any, and I hadn't, but my brain hadn't like, moved on to thinking about what I was gonna do next. And I wasn't necessarily caught in that autopilot phase that I've sort of discussed. Um, but there was no conscious or, or thought that I was aware of beyond that [inaudible].
- 25:30 RTH: So what I, what I wanna get at is what I don't, I, I would like to explore this word "inner" a little bit, or the experientialness of *inner*. So I think it's possible to have your eyeballs aimed at the computer screen, which I gather is a fact of the universe—my eyeballs were aimed at the computer screen. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And do I see the computer screen? Or, and, and, and by that I mean, do I have any experience of that? Because our sensory aspects can be aimed at something, and, and I don't experience it *at all*. [Mel: Um hmm.] Or I could be... my eyeballs could be aimed at it and I could be seeing the computer screen.
- 25:30 Russ comments: In the comment at 12:46 we discussed my switching back and forth between referring to Mel in the second person (you, your) and in the first person (I, we, my, our). My 25:30 turn is a good example of that switching. I'll reprint that turn noting the first-person-pronoun reference:

RTH says in 25:30 turn	First-person pronoun refers to
So what I, what I wanna get at is what I don't, I, I would like to explore this word "inner" a little bit, or the experientialness of <i>inner</i> . So I think it's possible to have your eyeballs aimed at the computer screen, which I gather is a fact of the universe—	RTH
—my eyeballs were aimed at the computer screen. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And do I see the computer screen?	Mel
Or, and, and, and by that I mean,	RTH
do I have any experience of that?	Mel
Because our sensory aspects can be aimed at something,	An abstract collective
and, and I don't experience it at all. Or I could be... my eyeballs could be aimed at it and I could be seeing the computer screen.	Mel

That is some rapid switching, sometimes with the same sentence. But when I watch Mel closely, I see no glimmer of confusion.

- 26:08 Mel: Mm.
- 26:10 RTH: So for example, right now your backside is on the chair and you, and now that I call your attention to it, you can feel the sensations from that.
- 26:18 Mel: Mm-hmm. Yep.
- 26:19 RTH: But probably you haven't been paying much attention to that for the last 15 minutes, cuz you've been trying to think about something else. [Mel: Correct.] But the, but the *processing*, (to use that word again) that you've been processing that information outside of, but entirely outside of your experience, your [Mel: Mm-hmm.] direct, directly apprehended experience. So my question is about the, the eyeballs aimed at the computer screen. Am I, is it just *my eyeballs are aimed and I'm not processing it* at all? I'm not experiencing it *at all*?
- 26:19 Russ comments: This question, in my view, asks directly about Mel's "nothing" experience without either of the problematics described in the comment at 24:00.
- 26:51 Mel: Mm. Yeah. Maybe... that, that sort of feels... yeah.
- 26:58 RTH: And, and the, the what, so what I wanna be clear about is that inner experience is not necessarily something that seems to be happening in, inside. Like if I see a sunset, for example, and I can be into the orange and the gold of the, of the sunset, well that's clearly *out there*, but I would still call that an *inner* experience, even though it's, it's clearly... It's not that I'm paying attention to my paying attention, that would be sort of a meta kinda experience. [Mel: Mm hmm.] But, but I'm, I'm involved with the sunset. I'm seeing the sunset experientially. I would still call that an inner experience. [Mel: Hmm.] So the question is, am I seeing the computer screen and involved with the computer screen? *Or* I've just turned that off, just like I've turned my backside off. And...
- 26:58 Russ comments: For a discussion of why I use "inner experience" to refer to what is obviously external experience, see Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel, 2007, p. 15.
- Julian comments: I think this clarification is necessary because of some confusion I got into at 6:45. I was asking if Mel had some visual perceptual experience (seeing the Steadicam on the computer screen). I think Mel took it as asking if she had some separate more internal kind of experience, like a mental image. Here, Russ, you make clear that you're not talking about that. But that even basic perceptual experience counts as inner experience. That's a necessary clarification.
- 27:44 Mel: I think on these occasions it's, it's *turned off*, because I can... (and I know we wanna keep this to the beeps), but I can think of times where what you're describing, I have experienced. Um, so comparatively, *no*. On these ones, it's turned off. If anything, I don't think that there's like a, a, an experience to it.

27:44 Russ comments: Here Mel starts by talking about experience, then gives a clarifying generality, and then returns to experience. Compare Mel's turn here to the turn at 24:21; see the comments at 24:00 and 24:21.

28:09 RTH: Okay. And I'm good with this one.

28:14 JBK: And, and to clarify, it's, uh, your phone screen or a computer screen?

28:18 Mel: Yeah. This, this beep was, um, my phone screen. [JBK: Okay.] Yeah.

28:26 JBK: Um, move on to number 4?

28:28 RTH: Number 4.

SAMPLE 2.4 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

28:30 Mel: Well, I don't know how much fun you're gonna have [laughs]. It was 11:33 and I've written down "Nothing."

28:38 RTH: And is there context about that? Or?

28:43 Mel: No, I was, um, inside... like I was doing all the same things. So I was working from home and, uh, I was doing... yeah, all the same sort of stuff, like wandering around my house or writing emails or whatever. But, so, but I've... I think like on this one I was in between making a cup of tea, like, and it was just a really clear *nothing*. It was *dormant*. There was no inner experience to like, go off what you were saying before of like, I *know* what you're talking about when you actually experience something. Um, but this wasn't that.

29:26 RTH: So I'm, I'm making tea. Is that as a fact of the universe, is that right?

29:31 Mel: I was in between, like, I honestly... I think I was like walking over to my tap to fill up the kettle. Like I was in between doing anything of note.

29:45 RTH: Okay. So context-wise, I'm walking towards the sink.

29:51 Mel: Yep. [car horn]

29:52 RTH: And, [car horn] and I understand you to be saying that experientially, this is even less than vacuuming.

30:00 Mel: Yep.

30:01 RTH: They're both physical activities. They both involve, involve some kind of motor act and some kind of visual act. I'm no doubt seeing where I'm walking into, walking to, and no doubt seeing what I'm vacuuming. But in this particular beep, there's *no* even slight (as far as we can say) inchoate kind of experience about it. There's nothing.

30:01

Julian comments: I wonder if “I’m no doubt seeing what I’m vacuuming” risks confusing things. For me “seeing” is something experiential. I think a clearer phrasing would be “I’m no doubt visually processing what I’m vacuuming” or something of the sort. Because around 26:58 you spent a long time clarifying that basic perceptual experience of seeing a sunset, you would still count as inner experience.

Russ comments: If DES were about using technical terms accurately, “visually processing” would be better than “seeing” here. But DES is not about the words; it is about experience and the acquisition of skills at apprehending it. The issue at 30:01 (and everywhere else) is whether RTH understands and clearly makes a distinction between (a) the experience of <something that might be called seeing> that involves a before-the-footlights-of-consciousness experience of the thing seen, and (b) the experience of <something that might be called seeing> that does *not* involve anything before the footlights of consciousness. I think RTH at 30:01 (and everywhere else) does clearly make that distinction—regardless of the word choice, that’s what the whole 30:01 turn is about—and therefore I think Julian’s concern about the words RTH uses is likely an excursion down the wrong track.

I think it is a big deal, which I think is not adequately appreciated. The object is *not* to create agreed-upon definitions and then use them—I think that approach (which forms the basis of much of philosophy) is never adequate and (usually unknowingly) hugely counterproductive. The object is to keep track of the experience that we are trying to apprehend/describe, which entails keeping track of the fundamental imperfections of all words used to describe it. There is no perfect word, no unambiguous shared definition, and to the extent that you are trying to use perfect words, you are not aiming all your faculties at faithful description. Furthermore, it requires keeping track of the context, the goal, and the recipient of the communication

In 30:01, for example, the issue is not whether RTH uses the proper *words*, but whether he makes, when necessary, the proper *distinction* between “visually processing” and “experientially seeing,” and whether Mel, in response, makes the same proper distinction. If so, then his communication was successful.

The best way to judge that is by observing what Mel subsequently says. If she confuses these constructs, then RTH 30:01 was on the wrong track. If she easily makes the necessary distinctions, then RTH 30:01 was fine. See the comment at 33:45.

30:29 Mel: No, because yeah... I feel like...and maybe, and again, you can knock me down if I’m [laughs] drawing too many, um, joining too many dots here. But I feel like in the vacuuming, because I kinda, that’s a task that I like really sort of settle into. And then so experientially or like (I don’t wanna use stupid words), but like, so I am experiencing the thing that I’m doing because it’s, it gone on for long enough for me to like ex- to settle into the moment maybe? Whereas like this went off and I, I just wasn’t, I wasn’t *there*, like, I wasn’t aware of *anything* I was doing inside my head um, and experientially. Like there the, like, truly there was nothing to note. I didn’t feel particularly tied to any of the physical activity I was doing. My brain wasn’t thinking about an email I need to send in an hour or anything like that. Noth- none of that. I just... no.

- 31:41 RTH: Okay. So I I'm, I, I don't want us to get lost in trying to speculate about *why* these things happened. So [Mel: Yeah, I know. Sorry.] the settled-in portion—well, that may, that may be true and may be not true. I'm, I'm not disbelieving that, [Mel: Okay.] I just, I, I, I think there's a rabbit hole to go down and I'd rather not go down that. So what, what I *am* interested in is the *experiential aspect*. And what I'm gathering *is* that there is *some* experience of the *vacuuming*—not a great deal, but some. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And there's *no* experience of the traversing the distance between here and the sink and the... [Mel: Yep, yep.] Ok, I'm good with that then.
- 32:24 JBK: And if you compare it to beep number 3, which is also nothing?
- 32:30 Mel: Same level of nothingness.
- 32:32 JBK: The same nothingness. [car horn] [Mel laughs]. So there's no *experiential* difference between number three and number four? Or slightly different flavors of nothingness? Or [mumbling] you don't know.
- 32:43 Mel: No,
- 32:44 JBK: No difference. Okay.
- 32:45 Mel: No, this, they both felt like the, the bottom level of [laughing] nothingness.
- 32:54 JBK: Alright. I'm...
- 32:55 RTH: So, I, I, I guess I'm, let me, before we go on to number 5, I guess it is. I, I think, Mel, you're doing a great job. The, the, and I personally don't have any theories about whether having nothing is a *good* idea or a *bad* idea. That, that's, that's above my pay grade to make that, make that kind of a determination. I, I could make an argument that nothing is the *best* kind of experience; and I could make the argument that nothing is a waste of a few seconds. [Mel laughs (inaudible)] But, and I, and I don't know the answer to that. My, my in my interest is in just whether, what the experience is. And we'll leave the evaluation to the omniscient being who, who can do those kinds of things.
- 33:00 Russ comments:
Q: On day 1, Russ criticized Julian for taking a judgmental role when Julian said he would tell a DES participant that she was doing a good job: "No, it's OK. As long as... you tell us what you are or aren't certain about, you're doing the method right" (Day 1, 1:08:16). Isn't that what Russ is doing here, when he says "I think, Mel, you're doing a great job"?
*A: I think both Julian's and Russ's comment come from a desire to be supportive. There are differences, though. Julian's "you're doing the method right" is a judgment about how well the participant's responses match up to an external standard of what a DES participant *should do*, whereas Russ's "I think, Mel, you're doing a great job" is a statement about what Russ thinks. Julian's statement is a claim about something objective, whereas Russ's statement is an expression of something personal. Julian's comment is couched as an expert opinion, whereas Russ's comment is steeped in*

ignorance. Julian's statement puts the concept of DES skill between him and Mel, whereas Russ's statement is a direct communication between him and Mel. (See also the comment on Day 1 at 1:05:48.)

33:39 Mel: Great. That's part two of this! [laughs] [RTH laughs] Um...

33:44 RTH: Number 5.

SAMPLE 2.5 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

33:45 Mel: Okay. Um, this went off at midday. Exactly! Um, and I've written "Nothing" [laughs]. Um, and so for context for this one, I, uh... I, um, was like getting changed. So like I had a hoodie on and had it, the, the, my earpiece in and the thing was in my pocket and I was like, j, just sort of about to take my hoodie off and, and um, swap into another top. And it went off halfway through that, cuz I remember, cuz I, I was like, *oh, where's the button to turn this off?* Um, but... yeah I wrote "Nothing," not, nothing. There was nothing particularly experiential about it. Was I, um... y'know, like Russ, how you say before about sort of the awareness of like, the feeling of the chair right now, when you bring that to my awareness and things like that, like in that same line of thinking, was I like super aware of the jumper I was putting on and how that felt? Or like that process like...*No*, I was, um, dormant in this moment.

33:45 Russ comments: At 30:01, we speculated about the possibility that Russ was confusing things by using imprecise terminology. The evidence: Mel is *not* confused about the distinction between directly apprehending and processing outside of experience. So Russ's 30:01 language was successful and did *not* confuse things.

35:01 JBK: Okay. So the exact process is you're taking off a hoodie...[Mel: Yeah.] And it's midway through, it's kinda like over your head or something, or...

35:08 Mel: Yeah. Yeah.

35:10 JBK: Okay. And the beep goes off. Um, and before, you mentioned something, like some thought like, *oh, where's the* (I didn't hear the word exactly) *where's the sleeve?* *Where's the hood? Where's the...*

35:22 Mel: No, where's the, the beep? [laughs] Because I, I was sort of halfway through taking off and then the beep's going off and I'm like, where is the thing? Because it was still going off.

35:30 JBK: So that was, that was after the, after the beep happened, that wasn't before.

35:34 Mel: Yes. Correct. That's how I recall this actual moment very clearly. But, um, but *prior* to the beep going off, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] no like...there's nothing.

35:47 JBK: Okay. And if you go back and really try to remember, are you sure there's not some *sensory* component of, of pulling it off?

35:55 Mel: I don't think so.

35:57 JBK: Okay. Yeah. I [laughs] I was trying to see if, uh, if you could be suggested to, to think there was an experience. So that, I don't think that was a good question, but I wanted to kinda see. Um...

35:57 Julian comments: I tried different approaches including a kind of trick-questions-approach along the lines of: "Are you sure you weren't feeling the hoodie?" Mel resisted.

Russ comments: I don't ask trick questions. I think it is not possible to ask Mel trick questions and simultaneously to expect Mel to be a co-investigator—one can't be manipulative and genuine at the same time. I think it is generally (always?) possible to ask a genuine question in places where one might have been tempted to ask a trick question. Here, for example: "I want to make sure we are not overlooking some sensory aspect—was there any feeling of the hoodie in your experience?"

Julian: Yes, I think you're right and it was inadvisable. I've used this approach once before with a participant who had inner speaking highly localized to very specific parts of his head—like a thin pancake shape. In one question I switched the location of this inner speaking. He corrected me. Maybe it helped me gain some confidence in his report. I think the main reason I did it, and asked this question of Mel, was not because I had doubt, but because I was anticipating doubt if for example this data was shown to *other consciousness researchers*. Then I could say, "well, look at all the evidence and resistance to leading questions." Bad idea, now that you point it out. The focus should be on Mel, her experience, and our mutual good-faith attempts to reach this experience. Trick questions could undermine trust and turn DES reporting more into a test where participants feel the need to come up with the right answer. I think I had to walk back from this question later when Mel seemed thrown off by what came across as doubt in her reporting.

Russ comments: An agreement and then a quibble. First, I think it is possible to be genuinely transparent. Here, for example, you could have said something like, "I'm worried that others might doubt me if I gave this description of the location of your inner speaking, so wonder whether it should be described as...." That is a true statement about Julian's genuine insecurity, not a manipulation of the other.

I think genuine transparency is an acquired taste / skill. It is not valued in psychological science, which, for example, finds it perfectly acceptable to manipulate, mislead, or otherwise lie to its (what it euphemistically calls) participants if it has performed the requisite cost/benefit analysis. I think that there is the potential for a virtuous cycle: the more genuine you are with Mel, the more likely she will want to be genuine with you, and the more you grasp that she is trying to be genuine with you, the easier it will be for you to be genuine with her, and the easier it is for you to be genuine, the more genuine you will be, and the more genuine you are, the more genuine she will be, and so on. That is, of course, the iterative procedure at work. But it is not easy, not to be taken for granted, and requires (or at least may require) work and practice, work and practice.

The quibble: It is not about “focus[ing] on...our good faith attempts” to reach Mel’s experience. There is no such good faith attempt happening here: you’re lying to Mel (as we have just seen) and she’s doubtless lying to us. That is not an expression of my dissatisfaction either way. We can work towards good faith attempts; we will doubtless always fall short, but the effort may be worthwhile.

All this is, of course, the iterative process. It’s iterative all the way down.

Julian comments: I can agree to that. I am wondering, though, what do you mean by “doubtless Mel is lying”? She did resist attributing sensation of the hoodie to her experience (or lack-thereof). She did seem less certain in her reporting, though I wouldn’t call it lying. But maybe she was exaggerating her uncertainty because she thought this is what we wanted to hear. Is this what you meant?

Russ comments: As I have said, I think words are rubbery, ambiguous gestures; sometimes, if all goes well, we can get ourselves into a position where we know what we’re talking about, at which time the ambiguity of the words themselves will have receded, replaced by our actual understanding of the facts. Until that happens, I have found it a useful strategy to emphasize the ambiguity of the words by employing a socially undesirable option. I think that is useful because it discourages me from presuming that I know what I’m talking about until I actually know what I’m talking about.

So here, you suggest that I replace *lying* with *exaggerating her uncertainty because she thought this is what we wanted to hear*. Your interpretation may be absolutely true, but it’s probably not, unless you are a mind reader or omniscient. I, myself, don’t want to imply to myself or others that I know what Mel is doing, so I crudely use *lying* to stand for any kind of misrepresentation, uncertainty, exaggeration, minimization, etc., etc., which I don’t know anything about. I say *doubtless Mel is lying*, using *doubtless* in its internally ambiguous manner that I discussed above. *Doubtless Mel is lying* means, to me, probably her accounts are less than perfect, but I don’t know really know in what way or even if they are less than perfect—I’m not in a position to recognize perfection if I see it.

Julian comments: That makes sense to me. In line with the discussion on colloquial, ambiguous phrases often being more useful than ‘precise’ ones.

- 36:12 Mel: I don’t think so, no.
- 36:14 JBK: So...Hmm. What other questions to ask about nothing. Russ had all these interesting questions to ask about nothingness. [Mel: I know.] Um, [laughs] and if you compare it to the previous two nothings, would you say... ?
- 36:30 Mel: Yeah, the same. All, all of my last four felt like *exactly* the same experience. Whereas those first two we went through felt different. And particularly the first beep felt a really *distinct* difference to these last ones. Um...
- 36:46 JBK: Mm-hmm.

- 36:47 Mel: The, the, the, like that first one when I was sort of there, there was, [car horn] there was a *something*, there, there was *thought*, but not a *clear* and *distinct* thought. Whereas in these, [JBK: Mm hmm.] there's none of those. I'm not... yeah. I'm not particularly like, aware of the feeling of anything around me. I'm not, um, particularly like emo-, there's not like emotions, or like, whatever. Um, so in terms of *sensory* experience, like none of that stood out and I wasn't, uh.... Cuz it's, it didn't, it doesn't even necessarily feel like... yeah. Again, back to like the vacuuming sort of autopilot thing that we've identified it, it doesn't feel like that, though, either, really. And I don't know how to articulate the difference very well, I think, but like, because how we've said like that feels like a *degree* of nothingness, like a step up from a something like, whereas this, there's just not, I'm not aware of *anything*.
- 37:56 JBK: Mm-hmm. Do you think, um...do you think it's possible that you just don't re-remember anything that happened? Like the beep comes and you're surprised and it shocks it out of you and you can't really remember? Or?
- 37:56 Russ comments: "Is it possible" is a question based on theory, not a question about experience. See the comment at 24:00.
- 38:14 Mel: Yeah, I think maybe, cuz I, um... again, don't wanna over-context, but like, I know I have a really *bad* memory. But like the beep goes off and *then* I jot down like *immediately*. So I can't [laughs] I can't forget it that fast! So, um, like whether I can't remember it *super* well *now*, is it, that's probably *very* likely. But when I write this down *immediately after it goes off* and the, the overwhelming thing to write down was just *nothing*. [JBK: Yeah.] Then I have to trust *that*, cuz it's so quickly.
- 38:14 Russ comments: I find Mel's accounts to be very believable, because: (a) she appears to be genuinely distressed by giving an account that she herself finds hard to believe; (b) she distinguishes between levels of nothingness (between the first two samples and the last four); (c) she demonstrates an understanding of the concepts (as by understanding the backside-sensation issue); (d) she describes having been careful in her method (she's noticing immediately after the beep); and (e) she is being consistent across many minutes in her descriptions. She could, of course, be intentionally misleading us. If so, she's a very good actor.
- 38:52 JBK: Yeah. The method is designed to override kinda long-term memory demands. Um, but I guess earlier, um, today you mentioned being startled by these beeps. Like when, when the beep comes, are you kinda startled [gestures rapid motion] and, and shaken out yourself? [Mel: Mm hmm.] Or, Okay.
- 39:13 Mel: Yep, yep, for all of these, yesterday, I was really.
- 39:16 JBK: So you were startled by the beep? It was surprising.
- 39:20 Mel: Yeah.
- 39:21 JBK: Okay.

39:21 Mel: Yeah, I've definitely kinda gotten used to it in, y'know, as opposed to a little bit last week, you're sort of always anticipating the beep, whereas I wasn't yesterday.

39:34 JBK: Do you, do you think it's startling in a way where, oh, it happens and now you try to remember what your experience was, and it makes it difficult? Or, or is it...[Mel: Yeah.] surprising and you try to remember, but there you, there is nothing there.

39:53 Mel: I feel like there's a bit of that still and maybe that that will, y'know, this might be different again next week. Um, but I think you're right, there, like, I get startled and then maybe in the process of the startle I'm like, ahhh, what was, and then I find it a little bit challenging to identify, like *maybe*. And I think that that's like a, a muscle that, um, I, I suspect I'll get a little better at. But...

40:22 JBK: I mean...

40:22 Mel: ..but there was nothing obvious to grab at.

40:24 JBK: Okay. But it's not about me being right. I don't, I don't wanna...I, I'm not really doubting you in, in trying to present other theories and 'oh, it *has to be* something. We have to come up with a reason why there's nothing.' I'm not trying to do that, but just kinda see if I throw other possibilities at you, y'know, will, like, will any of them kinda stick or, or, or not really. Um, but, but it's fine too if, if you say like, 'it was *startled*, but I could still tell that my experience, there's nothing going on.' So, um... but I, I guess...

41:00 Mel: Um, I think the, the, the language that I would use there is like, and whether it's a memory thing or a startle thing or whatever, is that I don't feel like 100% confident to be like, well... (I have some hesitation saying this... but what I'm trying to say is) like, as to the best of my ability to recall straight after the beep goes off, *I feel like it was nothing*. Um, whether like, because there's, *there was nothing that stood out*. So whether that is definitively *I was experiencing nothing* or whether it's like I haven't been able to...um, y'know, accurately feel or describe or, y'know, identify that, I'm not sure. Like, y'know, I don't, I can't be definitive about that at the moment. [JBK: Mm hmm.] But it, but the flip side of that is like, I, I definitely, *it definitely wasn't something*. [JBK laughs] This is all so ambiguous. I'm so sorry. [laughs]

42:09 JBK: [laughs] It definitely wasn't something.Okay, so I'm, I am done with my line of questioning. I guess I wanted to kinda probe and, and, and test to see like how resilient, how confident you were of your experience. And you said that like you weren't 100% confident, but to the best of your ability to describe that's what it was. [Mel: Mm hmm.] And, um, and I, I don't doubt that...Yeah. I don't think the method can ever be like a hundred percent confident. We just try to do the best we can. [Mel: Mm hmm.] But, do you have anything to add, Russ.

42:47 RTH: Well, I would, I would say first off, that describing nothing is among the hardest things to describe.

42:53 Mel: Hmm.

- 42:53 RTH: And so I think we're doing an adequate job of, of trying to do that. I also think it's possible to have *no* inner experience *at all*. [Mel: Hmm.] So, and, and, and I would make that argument by sort of subtraction, y'know, are [Mel: Hmm.] you innerly speaking? No, I'm not innerly speaking. And are you seeing a visual image? No, I'm not seeing a visual image. Am I having sensory awareness of the hoodie being pulled over my arm? Well, no, I'm not, not doing, not doing that. [Mel: Hmm.] And is there anything left over? Well, there might be *something* left over, but I... but I'm not, I'm...
- 43:28 Mel: [inaudible] trying to describe that. If that. Everything you've said is where I feel like I'm at. Like I can confidently tick: No, it's not that. It's not that. It's not that. And then okay, well, try and describe what's left. Well, all that's, I, um, that's tricky.
- 43:42 RTH: Right? And, and I would say I've actually written a paper called *Little or Nothing in Experience* or something like that, in which I have made the argument that, that it's not necessarily possible to distinguish between those two things.
- 43:42 Russ comments: The paper is Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2011, "Little or no experience outside of attention?"
- 43:53 Mel: Yeah.
- 43:54 RTH: But between *almost nothing* in experience and *nothing* in in experience is too far down into the weeds [Mel: Hmm.] to, to, uh, be, be able to be confident about it. So we, we we're gonna do the best we can, and we might learn something about how to do that from you who seem to have maybe more practice at the nothing end than some than some people do. And [Mel: Mm hmm.] we might find something out about that. [Mel: Mm hmm.] So should we take a look at number 6, see whether there's anything to be said about that.

SAMPLE 2.6 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 44:25 Mel: Sure. Um, this was at 12:41, uh, and I'd just made porridge...have lovely lunch [laughs]. Um, and I've written down the same thing... "Nothing." Um, I hadn't, I hadn't quite started eating it yet. Um, but I'd made it ...think again, like, yeah, I was walking back over to my desk, um, and it went off like right before I sat down. Um, uh, I think it was even in mid-conversation with my sister. Um, I can't recall what it was about. Like we were just talking about nothing. Like, y'know, I probably said to her, do you want some as well? Or something like—It wasn't, I, I mentioned that because I wasn't on my own and in silence or whatever. Like, I think that... anyway, maybe this is too much context. Um, but in terms of experience, nothing, and nothing in the way that the previous few have felt. Um, I wasn't overly aware of anything.
- 45:34 RTH: So is the, is what's going on in the, in the real world at that moment of this beep, is a conversation between you and your sister?

- 45:43 Mel: Yeah, but I can't, I haven't written down what it was, but I did like, but I wrote that was chatting to my sister. Perhaps I should have written down exactly what we were talking about.
- 45:52 RTH: And, and do you recall at the moment beep whether you're speaking or whether she's speaking?
- 45:57 Mel: I think I actually was mid-sentence. Yeah.
- 45:59 RTH: So *you* are speaking?
- 46:01 Mel: Yeah.
- 46:02 RTH: But even that is not in your experience.
- 46:06 Mel: No. Like, [hesitatingly] nooo...Like ... not in a...yeah. Okay... ye- [looks out the window, shakes her head] It's like, no, I didn't think in terms of... because how— like, I know I can, I can hear the words come out of my mouth, but.. not...I find that hard to answer.
- 46:43 RTH: So, so let me, let me lay out some possibilities. And it doesn't have to be any one of these... But it's possible that the words are coming up my, out of my mouth and, and I'm just not paying attention to them *at all*, in the same sense that I was typing in beep 2 or whatever it was, and the words were coming out of my fingers and, and they're, they seem to be just flowing out without my... my consciousness, I guess you would say, of them. It could, so it could be like that. [Mel: Mm hmm.] *Or*, or it could be that I'm speaking and it just doesn't seem so important, what, that, that I shouldn't even bother to remember what it, what it was. But at the moment I was...I was...recognizing myself to be speaking.
- 47:30 Mel: I think more the, the first bit, of like just words are flowing out, [car horn] but then by the same token, like it was inconsequential sort of chat. Um... [Shakes her head, as if in confusion.]
- 47:42 RTH: So in that case, you, you one could say, "I was walking towards my desk, I was speaking at the same time, and at the moment of the beep, the fact of the universe was that my left arm was swinging forwards while my right foot was swinging forwards, but I wasn't paying attention to my left arm swinging. I wasn't paying attention to my right foot plopping, and I wasn't paying attention to the words that were coming out. All of that was coming out of my body [Mel: Mm hmm. (nods affirmatively)] *including* the words, but with no more recognition, no more *verbal* recognition than *gait* recognition. Is that right?
- 47:42 Julian comments: I think Mel understood RTH correctly. These kinds of explanations still are challenging and I was wondering if this phrasing could have implied some kind of meta-awareness. "I wasn't paying attention to my left arm swinging"—this could imply that the left arm is swinging, there's some sensation of it, and there's also a separate awareness, like 'hmm my left arm is swinging.' Or it could mean

something more basic—that the left arm swinging is somehow ‘before the footlights of consciousness’. Phrases like ‘before the footlights’ and ‘in consciousness’, ‘in your inner experience’ are more technical and risk interviewees not knowing what you mean. Phrases like ‘paying attention’ are more colloquial but risk misunderstanding in a different way. Russ, you’ve also misunderstood some phrases I’ve used like ‘in awareness’ to mean something meta when I just mean ‘in inner experience’.

So while I’m pretty sure Mel understands you here, I still see how confusion might linger that the iterative process (hopefully) irons out.

I do think it’s interesting that most of the *nothing* experiences are from these early two days. Other days more often had slight experience or carried-away / absorbed experience. That could be an artifact of the method or it could just be how Mel’s experience played out.

48:18 Mel: Yes. Correct. Yes.

48:24 RTH: ...Then I think I’m good about that.

48:27 JBK: Um, I’m good too.

48:30 RTH: And, and I would, I would say I, I find the conversations interesting. So I, I, I, I don’t want Mel to be thinking, [coughs] (excuse me) *Well, I don’t have anything interesting to say. All I’ve got is, all I’ve got is nothing.* Because I think the exploration of nothing is a challenge and has its own interests and intricacies and whatever. So...[Mel: Yeah.]

48:58 JBK: It’s the opposite of *not* being interesting, because ‘nothing’ is very contested. I mean, I wouldn’t normally present psychology research to participants, but like a lot of people very fiercely debate that people can have times in their consciousness with no experience. There’s the continuity hypothesis that we always have some kind of experience. When I talk about some DES samples where people don’t have experience in a, in a sample, people can be vehement that *that can’t be possible! The method’s off, y’know*, [Mel: Hmm.] *the beeper* erases it. So... yeah. I, I think it’s very interesting.

49:36 RTH: So I, I would caution us *not* to get caught up in trying to answer that question. [Mel: Mm hmm.] [JBK: Yeah.] What I would say is that we should try to describe the experience as best we can, as best we can, recognizing that there is a debate out there. I’m not saying that we should put our heads in the sand about that. [Mel: Mm hmm.] But I would say we should *not* explicitly try to answer that question. [Mel: Mm hmm.] We should, we should provide as good a, as high-fidelity description as we can and let the, let people who are interested in making that distinction look at what we’ve done, if they want, and which they probably don’t because that would screw up their theories. [JBK: (laughs)]. But, but, but we, we shouldn’t try to enter into that debate. [JBK: Yeah.] We should, we should try to get Mel’s experience as it is.

50:30 JBK: Definitely not in the, in the DES interviewing part.

50:36 Mel: It's, it is kinda like... but I hear what you're saying, Julian, in terms of like, it is a bit comforting for me because when I write down like "nothing," y'know, and you're like, well, [laughs], it feels like a bit of a full stop. And, but yeah... At the same time, I'm not, I'm trying to not overthink it and get too, like, meta about it and like try and really be conscious of *that*. And if that's what I felt like, what is the right response at the time, then that's chill. Um, so, but also, and I mean I... yeah, I know we just focus on the beeps, but like, in doing this, I've become more aware of sometimes when the answer *isn't* nothing. Like just in my real life when we have to wait for beeps to go off when that is the case. But...I like...so for me, I know that, like, that is, I feel confident in my answers because I've been able to identify *other* times that that *isn't* the case. So there's... so I, I don't feel like I'm just not able to, um, articulate the experience. I feel like good about it.

51:43 JBK: Yeah. And we tried to throw a lot of things at you, like, like, "are you sure it wasn't seeing?" "Are you sure...?" "Like, if you compared to this...?" So I think we tried to throw different things at you to see how you would respond, and if you would be like, oh, maybe there was some visual component.

51:59 Mel: Yeah. So.

52:00 JBK: I think you, you clarified everything.

52:08 RTH: [Pause] It's a complicated task because it really, it's not about the words and yet it's obviously about the words. Like, we've used the word *nothing* a lot today. [Mel: Mm.] And our task is to try to make sure, as best we can, that we understand what we mean when we're saying "*nothing*." [Mel: Mm.] And because some people can say, "well, I, I, I was doing nothing." And what they mean by that was that they were actually doing something particularly, but they didn't, they didn't think it counted, or whatever. And other people say, "I was doing nothing," and, and they meant *absolutely nothing*. [Mel: Mm.] We gotta figure that out.

52:43 Mel: Mm. Yep. That's a good note. Yep. I agree.

52:48 RTH: So shall we do it again?

52:50 Mel: Yes. Okay. Um... well, do you wanna stick to this? Like this same time, same place next week works really well for me again, if that suited everyone.

53:05 JBK: Works for me.

53:11 RTH: Uhhhh, works for me. We're talking Tuesday the 24th at eight o'clock, 11 o'clock and 5 o'clock? 8 o'clock for me?

53:23 Mel: Yep. 11 for me. Yep. Yep. Is that good with you, Julian?

53:26 JBK: Uh, yes.

53:28 Mel: All right. Fabulous.

53:29 RTH: Let's do it.

53:30 JBK: Let's do it.

CONVERSATION AFTER SAMPLE DISCUSSIONS

53:32 Mel: Cool. Um, are there any other... I know you're gonna say "no," but are there any other notes, anything that is helpful for me to note down at the times or whatever? But you're gonna say "nah."

53:47 RTH: Nah! [Mel laughs]. If, if you've got questions, I'd be happy to answer 'em.

53:51 Mel: [laughs] Is it helpful for you if I note more context about my physical self during the beep, in terms of the action I was doing, or where I was located, or...

54:07 JBK: Um, [RTH: Oh, go ahead.] I would say, um, it's, it's like a, it's a little bit helpful, but it's not totally necessary. We don't need to know everything. If you made yourself a *nice* dinner, we don't need to know like exactly what's on the plate, [Mel laughs] if it's not in your experience, but just as much context to, to kinda understand the experience. Like to know that if you're, you're midway through making tea and filling the kettle...

54:34 Mel: Mm hmm.

54:35 JBK: ...like that's a good amount of information on, on my end.

54:39 Mel: Hmm.

54:40 RTH: So I would've answered by that question by saying, "I don't really care about what you are doing *at all*, *except* as it helps to describe your experience or lack thereof. [Julian: Mm hmm.] So I'm interested in your experience. And, and if it's, if it's gonna be helpful to say, "well, I was filling the kettle" or whatever, then I'm interested in that.

55:03 JBK: Yeah. But the last four beeps were, as you said, no discernible difference in experience between the beeps. I still think for description it's a little bit nice to say, well, this one was nothing during kettle filling. This one was nothing [Mel: Yeah.] during this. So, but yeah, generally I'd agree.

55:22 RTH: So the, the distinction that I think you and I are making there, Julian... is that it sounds like to me, is *you're* making a recommendation to Mel that she should make note of what she's doing. And *I* am making a recommendation to Mel that she pay particular attention to her experience, and I don't care about her, what she's doing. And that's a big difference from my point of view, because you're in— to, to my ear, *anything* that interferes with Mel's going directly at her experience as best Mel can go at her experience is a mistake [Mel: Hmm.]—reduces the fidelity—because it, it puts an overlay on there. *Well, y'know, Julian wants to know about what I'm doing, so I gotta, I gotta tell him about that*, and, and I would say that's risky.

56:14 JBK: Yeah, that makes sense to me.

56:16 Mel: Yeah. That's interesting.

56:17 JBK: Just to take, take *nothing* away from just describing the experience.

56:20 RTH: That's exactly right.

56:24 JBK: It might be helpful to know, like the time of it. But yeah, I see your point of being very pure about just the experience. Yeah.

56:24 Russ comments: When Julian says (at 55:03) "I still think for description it's a little bit nice to say, well, this one was nothing during kettle filling," and (at 56:24) "It might be helpful to know, like the time of it," he reveals (to my ear) that he is concerned with the *writing about* Mel's experience rather than *about Mel's experience*. (The same could be said about the comment at 35:53: "I was anticipating doubt if for example this data was shown to *other consciousness researchers*.") That is not surprising, and quite natural—he is trying to learn how to do DES, and writing about experience is part of DES. So I am not being critical of Julian. I am pointing out that it is iterative all the way down: the more genuine is his interest in Mel's experience, the less he will be worried about how to write about it, and the less he is worried about how to write about it, the more fully he will be interested in Mel's experience, and the more fully he is interested in Mel's experience, the easier it will be to write about it, and the easier it is to write about, the less worried he will be about how to write about it, and so on.

Julian comments: This is absolutely right. Things like wanting to know the time and wanting to know a bit of context were motivated by thinking about writing the descriptions. The 35:57 'trick question' discussion as well. Concentrating solely and single-mindedly on experience is a main takeaway from this interview.

Russ comments: A corollary is my ongoing lecture series about words: wanting to get the words right is a distraction from concentrating solely and single-mindedly on experience.

56:31 RTH: The DES task is *really simple*. Let's pay attention to experience, but... and nothing else. [JBK: Yeah.] But *almost everybody* wants to get something else into there. [Mel: Mm.] And, and that's... I'm, I'm not, I'm not sure *why* that is, but that is, that is the way it is. And, and I, I *resist* that.

56:55 Mel: Mm hmm. Yep. And I...and yeah...it's, it just will come with time, but I feel confident in like my ability to like, y'know...so I know there are times in life where sometimes I'm really experiencing the colds, or the whatever, or a particular scent, so I know what you mean. It's just none of, none of the physical stuff for those, particularly the last four beeps yesterday were particularly relevant.

57:19 RTH: Yeah. Well, we'll find out.

57:22 Mel: We will... alright.

57:25 RTH: Thank you very much. Next time same, same, same time.