

Mel May
Mel Interview 4

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the November 10 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/KfQIRD1wbkk>. 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 Comment: [During the week, Mel had texted RTH saying that she had broken the beeper. They met via Zoom to diagnose this issue, which turned out to be a broken wire in the earphone. In that Zoom, they did not discuss any sampling issues other than the beeper.]
- 0:00 Mel: Yes, we did. I got, um, a new headphones [holds them up] [RTH: Okay] last night from my local bo- bodega when I got back. [JBK: Um-hmm.] Yes. So, and cuz I had worried that I'd ruined the beeper somehow because I thought, oh, y'know what would be fun? I will take it on this expedition to Iowa with me, and on my travel day back, I will do it! And so I like, y'know, I thought I'll do it from the morning in terms of like getting in the cab and like going through security at the airport and like all these sorts of things. And then obviously I take it out of my ear to go through security and put it through the scanner. And so I, that's after that it stopped working and I was like, *have I ruined it with some sort of x-ray machine?* But no, it was just the headset.
- 0:47 RTH: So it was just the headphones. The headphones have actually, they're, they're inexpensive headphones, but they've been pretty, pretty durable, lately. You, you're the first one to break one in a while, but the beepers have been pretty durable too. I guess I shouldn't say that because I don't wanna jinx them.
- 1:03 Mel: Yeah. Anyway, so that's. But, um, I fixed it. And so I did my beeps this morning, which is actually a new thing because every other time that we've met, I did them the day before. Um, so I literally just got home about 10 minutes ago and had done them this morning, um, and have been out and about. So as I said to you, like... I'm conscious of trying to keep this really interesting for all of us and explore different versions of my inner experience in terms of making sure that I'm not just doing it when it's like really easy, i.e. like at home doing jobs. Like we've had a few versions of that. That's fine. I'm really keen to try and, um, do the sampling when I'm really social now. So I wore it out for coffee and things with my friend this morning, and then I think next time I'd really

love to do it, y’know, like out for dinner and in loud, busy environments and just see if there’s similarities, differences, whatever. So that’s where I’m at with it.

2:04 RTH: Well, I think that’s good. I, I think the more in more different places, the better. And, uh..., I, we could speculate about what we would find, but better we should do it and then we will, then we won’t have to speculate.

2:17 Mel: Yeah. Um, okay. So without further ado, would you like me to get onto it or do you have anything else to add?

2:23 JBK: Let’s [RTH: I’m-] let’s get into it.

2:25 RTH: I’m ready. [to JBK] And do we wanna alternate you, me, you, me, you, me?

2:28 JBK: Yeah, let’s do that. So I guess I could take the first beep. [Julian’s computer chimes]

2:31 RTH: Okay.

SAMPLE 4.1 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

2:32 JBK: So what was in your experience, if anything, for the first beep?

2:37 Mel: Um... okay, so it was 8:57 this morning, and I’ve written down, “I was looking in the mirror. No distinct thoughts *per se*. Not necessarily autopilot, um, inner experience...” (and I’m expecting you’re gonna challenge me on this) “inner experience was an overall vibe or state, like happiness. There was music playing, which I feel like consumes my brain, but there was no distinct *thought* to note.”

3:09 JBK: Okay. [Mel: Yeah.] So no distinct thought [chimes], but you say “not quite autopilot.” [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, okay. Can you describe more, more what, what was there?

3:23 Mel: So it interrupted me. The beep went off as I was looking in a full-length mirror. Um, like I’d just got dressed and stuff. Um, and I, I remember I’d sort of like done this with my hair, but I remember noting like, it wasn’t as if... the reason I think I put “not necessarily autopilot or noticing thought” is like, I wasn’t consciously aware of the fact that I had just touched my hair when it went off. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] I wasn’t looking at myself in the mirror and analyzing my outfit or anything. Um, I wasn’t thinking about whatever I was gonna do next. I can’t even remember what I did next. [sirens in background] I remember there was music playing over my speakers, and, um, at risk of, um, contextualizing too much, I, when music is playing, that often completely consumes my brain. So I feel like, um...yeah, there wasn’t when the beep went off, I was in that *state*.

3:23 Julian comments: It’s interesting that this *is* too much contextualization. We don’t know if music often completely consumes Mel’s brain. And if it does, we should focus on this sampled moment anyway. But it is interesting that Mel also realizes the risk. I overlooked this generalization but could have clued her into this thinking as well.

I still find that offering these kinds of corrections is uncomfortable. When I first started, I would say stuff like “well the method is really about looking at this one moment.” I would put the blame on *the method* rather than what I want to know. This is exactly what Russ says not to do in the transcript for Day 1 – 12:49.

An approach could be to think of it less as a correction (*you are doing it wrong and I will tell you what to do*) than as a mutual redirection—we each have knowledge that’s personal to us, and we can share it to the best of our ability to try to get at moments of experience. Mel has knowledge about her experience. I have methodological knowledge about bracketing and so on. I could say something like “well you may very well always be completely consumed when listening to music. Or maybe not. But let’s set that aside and look just at this moment.” The inclusive third-person plural “let’s” could help. Russ, I notice you often use it in such cases, although of course, it’s more about having the right attitude than the right word choices.

Russ Comments:

RE “well you may very well always be completely consumed when listening to music. Or maybe not. But let’s set that aside and look just at this moment.”

I do frequently say such things. But “Let’s” is *first-person plural*; I frequently have written that DES is fundamentally a *first-person-plural* endeavor: descriptions are *not* by Mel and *not* by Julian; they are by Mel *and* Julian. If a description is not of high fidelity, it is because *we* have fallen short.

- 4:32 JBK: Was, was the music playing experienced at this moment? Or was it like looking back you saw that there was music playing?
- 4:42 Mel: Hmm. I think it was experienced at the moment. Um, but in a way of it being like, um, peripheral. But, but there was an awareness of the music for sure, but it wasn’t completely, um, drowning out the rest of my ex-, like... Yeah, yeah, there was an awareness, but without it being the core focus of my awareness, if that maybe makes any sense.
- 5:11 JBK: Okay. So it was peripheral, it was, it was not the core focus. Um, was there any particular aspect of the music? Like, I dunno, the voice, the, the this, the that or, or, or no?
- 5:28 Mel: Uh, no. I would just, I would just say like, um, uh, the way I would link it to my awareness is just the way it was making me feel. Um, which is I think why I’ve written like “inner experience was an overall vibe or state,” and then I’ve got “happiness.” Um, I think that’s directly linked to the music that was playing.
- 5:53 JBK: All right. So, so this happiness, this vibe or state. Um, is, is there more detail you could give about that? Or you don’t remember?
- 6:06 Mel: Yeah. Um, so, (and this is where I’ve tried to, um, I feel like articulate this previously, and where it gets a little challenging, but where I’m trying to push myself on this a bit more), um, where inner experience, when the beep goes off, it’s not a, a, a tangible thing, like... oh, *I was thinking this thing*, or *I was visualizing this thing*. My version of that, when the beep goes off, is this like, this *overall state* is my inner experience. And

on this occasion that state, that feeling, that vibe was this calm and happiness. Um, and that's not, uh, I think maybe really, really early days when we started doing this, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] I sort of tried to articulate that and we worried that I was perhaps, um, adding too much context and thinking like that was my general mood for the day. I, I on, *that's not* what I'm trying to articulate here. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] When this beep went off, I had the, the overwhelming takeaway of my inner experience was that vibe, that feeling, that state of being, rather than a particular thought or whatever. It was just that [JBK: Yeah.] state of being. And, and I got that that was kind of happy, light, positive.

7:37 JBK: Yeah, I remember a similar beep where you had a relaxed, y'know, positive light feeling [Mel: Yeah.] you described there. And then [Mel: Yeah.] I asked if, if it was that feeling or just the absence of, of negative feelings or the absence of thoughts. [Mel: Yeah.] And then you weren't quite sure about it.

7:56 Mel: Yeah. So I don't think this is an absence of thought. Like this *was* the *thing* [JBK: Yeah.] that was my inner experience. That's different to sometimes when I've felt an absence of thought, uh, or, or a, or a thought, or an autopilot. I don't think this fits in any of those things. This, there *is* an experience there, and it *is* that, um, the *fe-e-ling almost* [waves her hand, squints as if in disbelief or doubt].

7:56 Julian comments: Russ, do you have thoughts at all about "active listening"? I find I do it much more than you—pepper in "yeah"s and "mm-hmm"s. I've found that in the worst case I use these even when Mel is generalizing or theorizing about experience. I think it's harmful in those cases since it's disingenuous. I think she's on the wrong track but I say "yeah" instead of expressing that.

At this point, Mel isn't generalizing or theorizing. She is being clear. Still I wonder if my "yeah"s risk putting me into a judgmental role—*yes, you're giving me answers I want to hear*.

Or maybe it doesn't matter so much either way.

I also sometimes wonder if I laugh too much. Sometimes it looks quite awkward in a transcript. I don't think researchers need to be cold, clinical, emotionless to be objective. But I do wonder if you've given any thought to role of these extralinguistic features.

Russ comments: My response is in the it's-not-about-the-words category: I don't much care about "yeah"s and "mm-hmm"s. I do care about being disingenuous, and I'm agin' it. If a focus on the "yeah"s etc. leads you to recognize a disingenuous streak within yourself, and you agree with me that being disingenuous is not a good thing, then I'd recommend paying attention to how disingenuousness arises in you, using each "yeah" (etc.) as a marker or clue. But I *wouldn't* recommend trying to reduce the number of "yeah"s—that would put another disingenuous *hiding* intention on top of an already disingenuous intention. Instead, I would recommend using the "yeah"s to help you attend to your own disingenuousness, help you refine your antennae for it, which will probably naturally develop your distaste for it, which will probably naturally (eventually) reduce the number of "yeah"s.

The bad news is that the distaste has to arise before the disingenuousness diminishes—that is, progress is unpleasant and takes a long time. The good news is that there is an end to the tunnel if you can stick it out.

In short, it's the disingenuousness that's a problem, not the extralinguistic features.

Same goes for laughing.

8:30 JBK: Yeah. So this feel... I'm curious, why do you say this "feeling *almost*"? Because I something you...

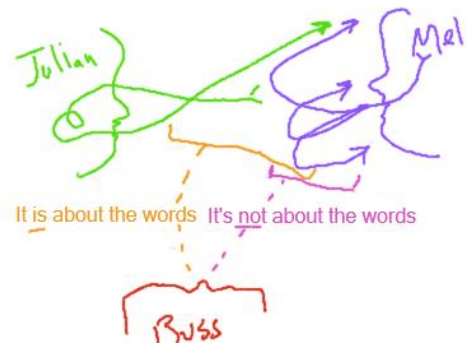
8:30 Russ comments: I have said repeatedly in our interactions "it isn't about the words," but for weeks I have been having misgivings about that, a sense that that sentiment is half right, but I haven't been able to put my finger on which half. This scenario gives me some insight (maybe).

Mel's descriptive attempts across her 6:06 and 7:56 turns is a good example of the correct half of "it isn't about the words." Mel is struggling to describe her experience; she is (of necessity) using words in that describing, but she is intimately aware that the words she is using aren't adequate, so she uses *state, mood, vibe, feeling, state of being*, and ends with a twistedly mispronounced "fe-e-ling almost." That is, Mel is telling us, substantially organically, that the words she has been using are not adequate. That is, *it's not about the words* seems apt.

JBK (at 8:30) asks, "why do you say this 'feeling *almost*'?" To my ear, he emphasizes the *almost* but leaves the *feeling* naturally inflected. That is, his question to me seems to translate as "why do you use the word *almost*?" which seems to indicate to me that he may have missed the power of Mel's struggle. Setting aside for the moment whether that indication is correct, it seems to me that I am focusing on Julian's words in a way that makes the *it's not about the words* maxim *inapt*. So the question is, to what does *it's not about the words* apply and not apply?

It seems to me that *it's not about the words* applies when Russ (and also Julian) considers Mel: he should recognize that Mel is using her limited vocabulary (this is not a criticism of Mel—everyone's vocabulary is limited) in the attempt to adumbrate something that is invisible to Russ (and also to Julian)—Mel's experience. As schematized in magenta at the right side of the figure, Russ (and also Julian) has direct access to what Mel says, but no access at all to the

about what of her saying. Mel grunts out words that invite the hearer to grasp something of Mel's experience, but each grunt is imperfect, aims in the general direction of Mel's intention but not perfectly so. As shown in magenta at the right side of the figure, Russ (and also Julian) hears what Mel says with no access to what that saying refers to. *It's not about the words* means that Russ (and also Julian) shouldn't make more of Mel's words than they deserve. Russ (and Julian) shouldn't mistake a grunt for a truly directly-on-target utterance; Mel is a mere mortal. And there's no reason that Russ (or Julian) should try to mine Mel's words for hidden



meanings or veiled implications—sometimes such intimations are informative, sometimes they are misleading.

The solution (if solution there be) is the iterative process: Mel can practice grasping experience and saying things about it; and Russ (and Julian) can practice hearing what Mel says now, and how she says it, and the context; and together we may figure out how, on later occasions, in other perhaps similar contexts, Mel's words can lead us more directly to her experience. That whole process is *not about the words*, it's about helping Mel and us get in a better position to understand each other.

But Russ's relationship to the words used is entirely different when Russ considers what *Julian* says. As schematized in goldenrod, Russ has direct access both to what Julian says *and* to the *about what* he says it. Julian's talk arises from what Mel said; Russ has access to both. Therefore, Russ is in a position to have an opinion about the relationship between Mel's words and Julian's words; that opinion is *about the words*.

That is, *it's not about the words* arises from our ignorance about what the words are aimed at; we should *not* let the words get in the way of our grasp of Mel's unknowable-to-us inner experience. But *it is about the words* applies when Russ comments on what Julian says—there is no fundamental ignorance there.

Now (finally) applying that to Julian's talk at 8:30: Russ is concerned that Julian is aimed only at the word *almost*. Russ thinks that *almost* is a minor part of Mel's conveyance about her at-the-moment-of-the-beep experience.

8:37 Mel: Because I... Um, because I feel like *feeling* is not the right word to use. Um, because and [laughs], and I need to like, investigate my vocab more for this, because the, the most appropriate word so far feels like *vibe*, which feels very millennial and Gen-Z. But I think that sort of, um, encapsulates what I'm trying to describe, of like, it's a, a feeling, but not in the way of like a... it, it's, it's more holistic than I think *feeling* perhaps says. Cuz it's that state of being a, um... like a *subconscious but felt* thing. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] This isn't making any sense [shrugs]...

9:26 JBK: [laughs] So subconscious but felt. Um, so, okay. Let me try to think of the, the next avenue for questioning. So happy, light, positive. So, um, is, is there other ways to, to describe this feeling? Does it have any physical sensation or not? Or you can't remember?

9:26 Russ comments: As we saw at 8:30, Mel forcefully undermined the use of "feeling," and at 8:37 says explicitly (several times) that "*feeling* is not the right word to use." But JBK here asks Mel "to describe this feeling." That pushes her in the direction of conceptualizing her experience as being feeling.

Julian comments: True, I should have switched to include *vibe* as an option. You later say "*vibe/ mood/whatever*" [14:09]. I'm disappointed that I didn't, since I think that *vibe* is a perfectly good word to get at experience—or at least to use as a rough draft stab at experience. Even though (or *especially because*) you don't see it in consciousness literature.

- 9:50 Mel: No, I don't, I don't recall noting anything physically. Like as I said, I'd, I'd run my hand through my hair. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] But I didn't necessarily notice that physical [JBK: Mm-hmm] action or like tactile, y'know, thing.
- 10:09 JBK: Yeah. And, um, I'm curious about when you said "subconscious [car horn] but felt," [Mel: Mm-hmm.] (I don't wanna do what Russ said not to do, just get too hung up on words.) [Mel: Uh-huh.] But, um, I, I dunno, is there something, something behind that, that too? Like that part of this is maybe subconscious, but part of it is experienced or that...
- 10:34 Mel: Yeah, I think what I'm trying to get at there is that like, it's, the [laughs] kind of, I think is a bit of an oxymoron in that like, there's an *awareness*, but at the same time there's *not*. Like it's felt, and I know that like, that's the experience that I'm having or the state of being that I'm in, but it's not like, uh... it's not like, that meta sense of where I'm like super aware when I'm living and feeling that, that that's the thing. But on reflection, when I'm asked to articulate what my inner experience was when that beep went off, well then I can think, well, it was *this*. I dunno, [JBK: Yeah.] I'm just saying words and not adding much there.
- 11:24 JBK: But, so you mean that it's not like at that moment you're self-consciously thinking, *oh, I am happy right now*. It's, it's not that? It's, it's more just?...
- 11:34 Mel: A lived *thing*.
- 11:36 JBK: This feeling. And, um, is, is all these words you've used, uh, I think *calm, happy, positive, light*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Is it all, all as, as one kind of thing? Or is it maybe separate aspects of one feeling, or separate feelings, or?...
- 11:36 Russ comments: JBK's use of "feeling" is still more definitive than Mel has described.
- 11:56 Mel: No. One thing and they're just words, um, that I'm using to try and describe that overall state of being.
- 11:56 Russ comments: The good news is that Mel does not seem to be influenced by the use of "feelings," and instead re-emphasizes that she is trying, with difficulty, to describe something less definitive than a feeling.
- 12:06 JBK: Okay. Yeah. And were any of them that you used more than metaphorical or, or was it all, or, or does that not make much sense to you?
- 12:23 Mel: Mm, I'm not quite sure.
- 12:26 JBK: Okay, then I think I'll drop that question. Um, was there anything else in experience?
- 12:32 Mel: Um...no. I, I don't think so. There was, I, um, as we found on previous weeks, sometimes it's easier for me to describe like what *wasn't* there and stuff like that. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] And so I think that that's... yeah, there are some notice- notable distinctions there for me with this one. Like, comparatively, as I said earlier in terms of

like... I wasn't caught mid, um, action and therefore feeling like I was in autopilot, like I was caught, kind of caught in this, in-between thing where like I wasn't, I wasn't mid something.

13:10 JBK: Mm-hmm.

13:10 Mel: And I wasn't mid, like actual thought. I was just present, and that, those words that I've used to describe that presence are sort of what was happening.

13:26 JBK: Okay. So I have that at 8:57, you're looking at a full-length mirror. Um, the actual looking isn't so experienced. Um, you're listening to, to music. And if that's experienced, that's more in the periphery. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And more about how it's affecting your mood. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]. But, uh, what it, what's definitely present is this, this mood/feeling/vibe of [Mel: Mm-hmm.] happy, positive lightness. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, but that doesn't have a specific location or, or anything like that. But, but it is experienced.

13:26 Russ comments: I think the summary statement was good, suggesting that Julian had heard Mel's disavowal of an explicit feeling. Things in the vicinity of feeling are difficult to describe and difficult to inquire about. I would quibble with "And more about how it's affecting your mood." I would omit that because I took that to be speculation about causation rather than description of experience (in the 5:26 turn). I would also quibble with the "definitely" of "definitely present"; "somehow present" or even "indefinitely present" would be better to my ear, to reflect Mel's "subconscious but felt" description.

14:03 Mel: Mm-hmm.

14:05 JBK: Ok, uh, I don't have, I don't have any more questions, uh, Russ?

14:09 RTH: So I'm pretty good with that, I think. But I, I would like to push a little bit on the distinction between this vibe/mood/whatever, and that it *doesn't* seem to be what you would call a *feeling*. This is somewhat less than or different from a feeling. Is there anything more to say about that?

14:09 Russ comments:

Q: You say that DES is not about the words. But here it seems RTH is asking Mel to distinguish between how she uses the words *vibe* and *feeling*.

A: No, he is not. RTH's 14:09 question was aimed at the *experience* that the words aimed at, *not* at the words themselves, and that distinction is important.

For comparison, here's a question *aimed at the words*: "How is a *vibe* different from a *feeling*?" The indefinite article *a* indicates that that question asks for a differential definition between the word *vibe* and the word *feeling*. It does not ask about *any particular experienced* vibe or experienced feeling, but instead refers to some abstract or general vibe and some abstract or general feeling.

By contrast, RTH's 14:09 question used the demonstrative pronoun *this* to indicate that he was asking about a specific, particular experience. Furthermore, he used the indetermining pronoun *whatever* (in "vibe/mood/*whatever*") to specifically

indicate that he was *not* particularly interested in the words *vibe* or *mood*. Further furthermore, the pronoun *it* in “it *doesn’t* seem to be what you would call a *feeling*” is a reference to the experience itself (not the word).

So RTH’s 14:09 question translates as: I am interested in your *experience*. You said you were happier to grunt “vibe” or “mood” than to grunt “feeling,” and I want to know: what is it *about your experience* that leads to that?

Q: You give a complex grammar lesson. There’s no way Mel or any other participant will be able to track that.

A: The situation is actually very simple. RTH wanted to know about Mel’s *experience* and he asked about it. He did *not* ask about the words Mel used to describe that experience.

I gave the grammar lesson not to Mel but to the reader as a way of explaining/demonstrating/exemplifying how RTH’s grammar simply, easily, accurately, naturally, repeatedly, consistently reflects his interest in Mel’s experience.

But as with all things DES, the judgment about whether RTH asked a good question at 14:09 is decided not by a grammatical (or any other) analysis but by its fruits—what Mel says in response. If she focuses on her experience, and uses words to try to describe her experience, then the question will have been well crafted. If she focuses on the words, then the question will have missed its mark. My observation is that Mel 14:33 focuses on the experience. How do I know that? There are lots of ways, but to give a grammatical analysis, one could ask, to what does her demonstrative pronoun *this* refer? *This* refers to her experience, which indicates that her entire paragraph is about her experience.

Julian comments: I did find the grammar lesson useful. I’ve had my grammar butchered a bit by academia and PhD applications. The emphasis there is insistence on clear and invariant terms even for things that may not be clear. And mainly the point is to focus is on Mel’s actual experience. I do think I eventually got there. But I also see lost opportunities to push beyond. Reading back, I was mainly struck by how the experience was subconscious but felt. I think distinctions between subconscious and felt are a presupposition of psychology and my own presupposition as well. The vibe makes sense.

Russ comments:

RE “The emphasis there [in academia and PhD applications] is insistence on clear and invariant terms even for things that may not be clear.”

I agree with that, except that I think “may... be” is too charitable: psychological science wants clear and invariant terms for things that *are* not clear. It is the death knell of psychology.

RE “Reading back, I was mainly struck by how the experience was subconscious but felt.”

Mel is a skillful communicator. She said (8:37) “Cuz it’s that state of being a, um... like a *subconscious but felt* thing. This isn’t making any sense,” which, to my ear, is an effective way of communicating that it is impossible (or nearly so) to describe the experience at the moment of the beep. That is, the “isn’t making any sense” is as important as the “subconscious but felt”; and the “subconscious but felt” is internally

contradictory; and anyway, it's more like a "state of being." None of that communication can be understood by parsing the words themselves. *Subconscious* isn't right; *felt* isn't right; when they are combined isn't right. But the overall communication is pretty effective. That is a good example of *it's not about the words*.

14:33 Mel: Um, yeah. Perhaps that it is... kind of... In the sa- same way that I'm saying that the music was peripheral. I think a distinction between how I'm describing that state of being and being reluctant to use the word *feeling* is because *feeling* feels like something that would be more *intensely present*. Whereas this feels like a *layer below* that. It's this. [gestures one hand above the other, both palms down] And so I would say like, if I'm angry, [raises one hand, leaves the other in place] that perhaps feels more intense. Or if I feel like definitely happy, that feels like a more intense thing [raises one hand, leaves the other in place] and that's when I would use *feeling*. Whereas this feels like a layer below that, cuz it's sort of below the surface and it's just an overall sort of mood/vibe... Hmm.

15:35 RTH: Okay. And then I think I'm good. Number 2.

15:41 Mel: Okay. Um...

15:42 RTH: [interrupts] And, and I would say, by the way, feelings are, I think the hardest thing when they're clear and when they're sort of diffuse, as this seems to be, then that's one notch harder.

15:53 Mel: Yep. Thanks. I feel like I'm talking a lot of gibberish, so thanks [laughs] for [inaudible] along. Oh yeah.

16:04 RTH: I used to think, by the way, it was *my* fault, that I just didn't know how to talk about feelings. But I don't think that's really true. I think, I think it's just hard.

SAMPLE 4.2 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

16:11 Mel: Yeah. Completely agree. Um, okay. Uh, next one I've got going off at 9:45 AM uh, and I've written, "I was about to head out the door, same, [laughs] same thing," which I was embarrassed about when this went off, cuz I was looking in the mirror. I swear I'm not always looking in the mirror. Um, but "I was about to head out the door, so I was looking in the mirror, um, and I touched my hair again, but nothing tangible going on inside" is what I wrote down. So, um, on this occasion, there was a slight difference, uh, in sort of like being mid-action in terms of like, I sort of like looked in the mirror and just like, y'know, one last look or whatever before I genuinely headed out the door. Um... uh, for comparison, the earlier beep, I was really yeah... trying to describe that state of being and that *sort of* feeling and whatever. I haven't tried to describe that here. Here I'd go back to that category of more like nothingness and an, and a sort of emptiness, um, inside my mind.

- 16:11 Russ comments: That Mel would tell us about an experience that she finds embarrassing is (a) a sign that Mel is trying to be genuinely forthcoming about her experience; and (b) an honor that I will try to deserve.
- 17:21 RTH: And, and so the contrast between this and the previous beep: would, would you say as context, you were sort of happy at this beep, but that was not in your experience?
- 17:31 Mel: At, at this one?
- 17:32 RTH: Yes.
- 17:33 Mel: Yeah, I think my mood was definitely the same as the earlier beep, but I was not *aware* of that state of being on this occasion. Yeah.
- 17:42 RTH: That, that's exactly the question that I was asking. So the, the mood seems sort of the same, but it, but I'm not experiencing it now, and on the previous beep, I was somehow experiencing it as a mood diffusivity or something?
- 17:58 Mel: Yeah. Yeah.
- 17:59 RTH: But at *this* time, at, at *this* time, even though the rest of the beep is *sort of* similar, I'm *not* experiencing. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I'm not experiencing that.
- 18:08 Mel: Yeah, definitely this one felt just more ju- just sort of just nothing. But the other one, there was definitely an overwhelming feeling/vibe thing. Yeah.
- 18:19 RTH: Okay. Then I gotta go back and ask about... By "overwhelming," do you mean really strong, even though not specified? Or do you mean just by "overwhelming" sort of throughout...?
- 18:34 Mel: "Overwhelming" as in "present," um, because I think given it's a vibe and [laughs] this language we're just...(this is so ridiculous but). But, um, it was like that distinction where I'm reluctant to use the word *feelings*, like in that [inaudible] intensity. When I'm describing this like, overwhelming vibe that I'm, I'm feeling and that state of being to the point where I jotted it down and noted it, I still think, like, I like when you use the word *diffused* there, like there's still almost like there's, um, like a gray scale over that. So I'm feeling that I'm present... but whatever, but it's not like, uh, it's not the forefront of my brain... y'know, it's not distractingly present, it's not, it's not super strong like that. [RTH: Okay.] Then in this this beep, which I'm describing now, it's *not even present*, even though, in noting that I'd like probably argue from a meta level that my mood was exactly the same as the, as the previous beep. However, I haven't been aware of that, that. It hasn't been in my inner experience on this occasion.
- 18:34 Russ comments: I have noticed that Mel has, on previous days and here, an idiosyncratic usage of *overwhelm*. Webster's *overwhelm* connotes substantial or extreme power; Mel's *overwhelm* connotes rising to the surface, becoming the figure in a figure/ground sense. That is, Mel's use of *overwhelm* is much milder than the typical usage.

19:47 RTH: Okay. Then I think I'm good.

19:53 JBK: Um, I'm pretty good. I'm, I'm wondering, uh, if it's, do you think it's a full nothing or a *little tiny smidge of something*? Or again, like, don't wanna say or, or can't tell?

20:08 Mel: Mm, don't know. But I think if I was gonna lob something up, I would say like a *full nothing*. And not an, but not [laughs], not an autopilot, which we've established previously. That feels like a different thing. But, um, this felt... yeah, like empty.

20:08 Julian comments: When I wrote the description of this sample, I wrote "4.2: [Mel was about to head out of her apartment and was looking at herself in the mirror]. She was not experiencing anything (or much of anything)." Mel had said, basically, "not anything". The "or much of anything" was written with your paper in mind on how it's difficult to distinguish between nothing and next to nothing (and that such effort doomed the introspectionists).

So for samples like this where Mel and our best attempt to reach experience suggests "not anything," should descriptions still indicate some margin of error ("or much of anything")?

Russ comments: You are correct, I have written and still think that in DES, it is generally unfruitful to try to determine whether a participant's experience actually excludes "a very little" when she grunts "nothing." This is a corollary of the premise that the words used to describe experience are imperfect.

Here, the question is whether it would be better to write (a) "she was not experiencing anything" (and understand "not anything" as meaning "nothing, but not reliably excluding absolutely everything"); or (b) "was not experiencing anything (or much of anything)." Option (a) aligns itself with how Mel experienced it, and puts the onus of understanding what DES means by "nothing" on the reader. Option (b) misrepresents Mel's take on her experience by importing the DES-in-general-skepticism into the Mel-specific description, suggesting that the center of Mel's target as Mel sees it included the possibility of "a very little." Neither option is perfect. I prefer (a) because (b) is much more specific than was Mel's experience.

Option (a) is acceptable if we understand that all descriptions (probably all utterances) are true only in a manner of speaking, that words are grunts meant to be understood as approximations. Some sects of the Jains (if I recall correctly—it's been quite a while since I was a student of the Jains) had a tradition of inserting the word *स्यात्* (syāt) before every word in a sentence. Syāt means roughly "may be, perhaps, possibly, in a manner of speaking" and the object of repetitively punctuating with syāt was to keep front of mind the lack of direct connection between words and things (the Jain interest was more ontological, whereas the DES interest is more descriptive, but the syāt logic is the syāt same). So your question would be: So for syāt samples where syāt Mel and syāt our syāt best syāt attempt to syāt apprehend syāt experience syāt suggests (as syāt here) syāt "not anything," should syāt descriptions syāt still syāt indicate some syāt margin of syāt error (syāt "or much of anything")?

The syāt DES syāt skill is to syāt accept that syāt all syāt communication is syāt imperfect. The syāt DES syāt object is syāt to aim at the syāt experience, syāt not at the syāt words that syāt one syāt uses to syāt describe the syāt experience, and if syāt

one syāt does that syāt relentlessly, the syāt iterative syāt process syāt may syāt well syāt diminish the syāt size of the syāt syāt.

Julian comments: Syāt that syāt somehow syāt makes syāt sense.

20:25 JBK: Okay. I'm good, too.

SAMPLE 4.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

20:29 Mel: Okay. Number 3. Next one was at 10:21. Uh, and I was out for coffee with a friend at this point. Um, so we were sitting in a cafe and I had it in, (so when I got there, I had explained to her, this is gonna stay in, ignore it). (Um, and this was really interesting because, this went off mid-conversation, which is what I was really hoping for.) So I've written, "I was mid-conversation and deep listening to Milly. There's no thought, just full attention." Um, [car horn] so she was speaking, the beep went off, and [car horn] I almost found it challenging to write down what my inner [chime] experience was at that point because it just was locked in.

21:26 JBK: So, so "full attention." Um, was that to a, any specific thing she said? Or just more general about...?

21:39 Mel: [Inaudible] On this? On this one, I haven't written down specifically what she said at that moment. But I was, uh, I had a singularity of... awareness/presence/whatever in terms of just being consumed by whatever it was she was saying. Again, I haven't written that down, but I remember that when I, when the beep went off, I was absolutely consumed by... [JBK: Mm-hmm.] whatever it was she was saying.

22:07 JBK: Do you think if you had written down a particular thing, do you think it would give us insight into the experience? Or do you think that it, it wouldn't have mattered, the exact content?

22:07 Russ comments: I think this question is a bad question because it invites Mel to theorize about a hypothetical situation (if you had...). Furthermore, this is a bad question using the DES definition of bad question (one that is followed by an answer that is not a description of the experience at the moment of the beep) because on the next (22:20) turn, Mel gives a generality about her experience ("That's me *all the time... whenever* I'm having a conversation..."). The good news is that Mel understands what DES is about and soon returns to experience at the moment of the beep.

22:20 Mel: No...Yeah, it wouldn't have mattered because, um, without, at risk of adding too much context, that's me all the time. Um, there's a singularity of thought whenever I'm having a conversation with someone, so like how somebody else might notice a flower behind them or think of that other thing they have to do or whatever. Like Milly was speaking and I'm listening, and that's my experience at that moment, and it always is. So I, it's not like she was saying something that was so pertinent that that meant everything else. Like, I don't think the content is relevant here. Um, yeah...

22:57 JBK: Okay. And it's not that, um, like being engaged, being attentive was maybe a broader part of this conversation, like a broader part of this experience with your friend? And that at this exact moment before the beep, um, may maybe something was something else, or, or what do you think?

23:21 Mel: So again, if I think back to it, like, y'know, and I don't know whether this is helpful or less helpful for you, but I find it helpful to rule things out. So like, I *wasn't* aware of other sounds in the cafe, even though it was probably busy (or like, it *was* definitely busy), but like, I wasn't aware of, y'know, noises of coffee being made or traffic outside or anything. I was, uh... I *wasn't*, I have no idea what I was doing with my hands at the time. I *wasn't* feeling cold, hot. There was probably music playing. I *didn't* notice it. Like the *only* thing that I've described as my inner experience is being consumed...by what she was saying. So listening to her and being fully attentive. Um, and I guess to take that perhaps a step further, that then is really closely linked with, um, like a kind of emptiness in my brain in the sense that my whole inner experience is just focused on sucking in *that*. So there's no feel-, there's no awareness of my state of being. There's no awareness of whether I'm hot or cold, all these things. It's just fully locked in and like I- listening.

24:41 JBK: So I'm curious, um, because you have this consuming quality of, of being attentive. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And you also mentioned, uh, emptiness. Is it, is it more one or than the other? Or could it, could it maybe be both at the same time? Like the emp- emptiness is how this consuming thing happens, or?

25:07 Mel: Yeah. Yeah. So I would, I use *emptiness* there in a way of like trying to describe sort of the vessel that I become in order to intake that information [car horn]. So like, I guess the way I'm using emptiness there is to say that I'm not *consciously aware of anything else*. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Um, and I'm just live listening to what she's saying. So to... y'know, use that computer term again, like processing, but that's sort of the what I'm doing. Um...

25:48 JBK: Is there... okay, so it's nothing else, but it is, y'know, you are experiencing this attention, this, this, y'know, focus on what she's saying. Are, are there other ways you could describe this, this kind of attention and focus concentration part?

25:48 Russ comments: "You have this consuming quality of, of being attentive" (at 24:41) and "You are experiencing this attention, this, this, y'know, focus on what she's saying" (at 25:48) are statements about Mel's meta-awareness, even though she has not given any hint of meta-awareness. She has clearly said she is attentive, but that is an entirely different thing as saying she was experiencing that attentiveness. I think JBK's mis-representation screws up the next few turns.

Julian comments: No, I never understood it as meta. If anything, the phrasing just isn't as direct as it should be. "You are experiencing" here just means "What's before the footlights of your consciousness is...." I'm not talking about a separate process of noticing/being aware of the attention.

Russ comments: In the “here just means...” case, the sentence would read: “What’s before the footlights of your consciousness is this attention, this, this, y’know, focus on what she’s saying.” But that’s not true. What’s before the footlights of Mel’s consciousness is the *conversation*, not the attention to it, not the focus on it. The attention/focus, in this metaphor, is *behind* the footlights, or perhaps is a characteristic of the footlights themselves.

I use “meta” to refer to any focus on the process of the experiencing, rather than on the experienced phenomenon. In the schematic at right, the experienced phenomenon (the conversation) is in red. The manner of experiencing (complete, absorbed, locked in) is in green. In this sample, Mel is focused on the (red) conversation; she is not at all, at the moment of this sample, focused/considering/interested in/noticing the (green) manner of that focus. Mel’s focus is *out there*, on Milly.



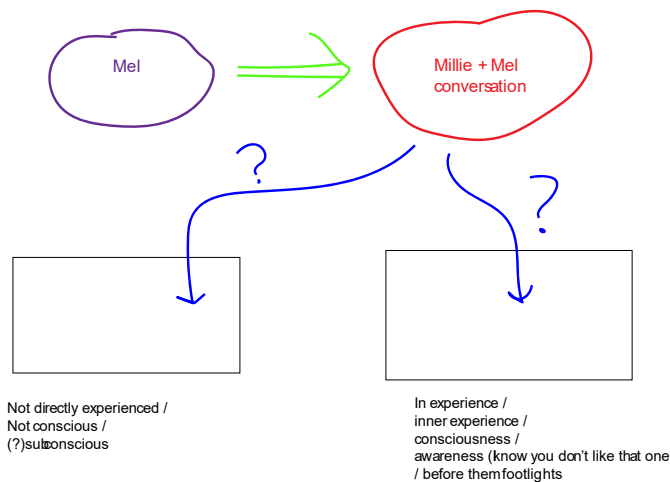
A consideration of the characteristics of that focusing, of the details of the green, is gold in the schematic and would be a *meta* focus in my lingo. At the moment of this beep, there was no meta focus.

Julian has every right to be interested in the characteristics of the focus—we have spent a fair amount of time trying to figure this out, trying to discern whether there is profit in distinguishing between autopilot, automatic, nothing, mostly nothing, and so on. But I think he confuses things when he asks about meta stuff as if it were directly apprehended (as in “you are experiencing this attention, this, this, y’know, focus on what she’s saying”).

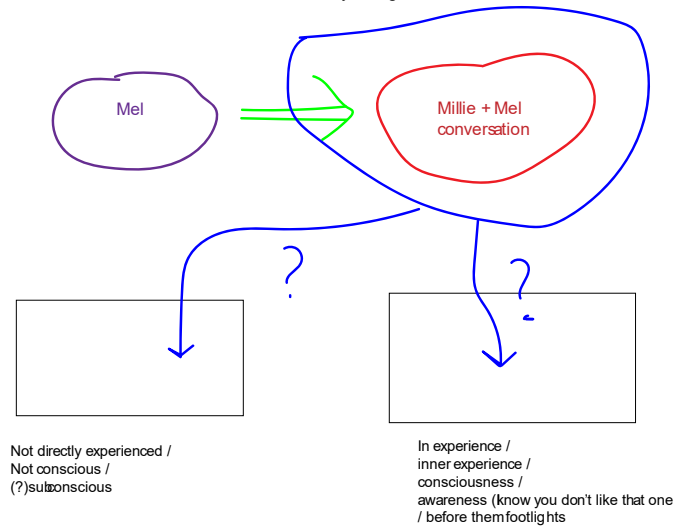
DES is worth doing when it distinguishes in high fidelity between what is directly apprehended at the moment of the beep and all else; if one fails to make that distinction, then all value in DES is lost.

Julian comments: I agree that my questioning is bad but for a different reason than you outline. I’m aware that the meta gold on your picture doesn’t exist. What I’m trying to do is find out if the red—the Milly + Mel convo is actually experienced/ before the footlights. There are some reasons why I’m doing this. Mel has described what the experience *is not* but details few about what it *is*. Also again the whole content-free debate—my presupposition that experience of being absorbed in a convo has to take on some flavor of what the convo is about. Not necessarily exact focus on details, but some kind of gist. So below is a drawing of what I’m trying to do. I’m trying to fit Mel’s experience in one of two buckets—experienced or not experienced:

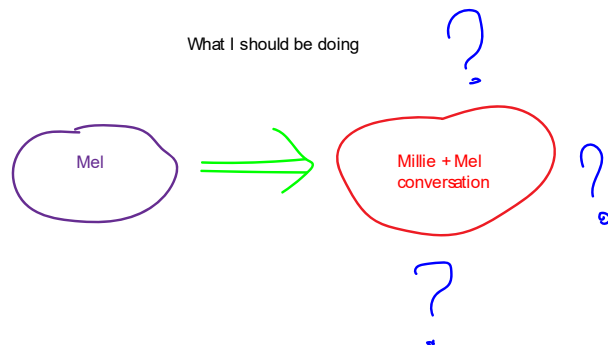
What I'm trying to do:



What I'm actually doing



What I should be doing



This is already risky territory since it's about categorization. I'm in bucket-sorting mode. The boxes I made for experienced and not experienced are separate categories. Creating clear categories where there may not be any is harmful. It's a bad way of conceptualizing it. But you do similar questioning too. If Mel reports looking at a phone, you've asked if this is a mere eyeballs-pointing fact-of the universe or if it's actually experienced.

But then there's the other issue, in that I'm not actually doing what I set out to. My unclear language is confusing the questioning. I'm not saying "was this conversation directly experienced"? I'm bringing in words like "attention" and "focus." These words belong to green arrow. And they're undoubtedly inadequate to the green arrow. Most of the words we have come from sloppy academic/conceptual/theoretical thinking. I'm fully aware that Mel doesn't have this yellow arrow pointing to the green. But I'm bringing in some of the green stuff anyways, when what I should be doing is inquiring about the red to maybe somehow get to the green. I think it was hard here because there weren't so many details about the red for me to latch on to.

But yes, I still am vehement. I don't have presuppositions that Mel's experience is meta! Never have. In all the other sampling I've done, I've had very few meta ones (none that I can remember). I still think this is just bad questioning and phrasing. In Day 5 transcript you criticize me for asking if *looking at the photo* is in experience. Instead of just if *the photo* is in experience. Maybe asking about just *the photo* doesn't seem technical enough to me. The photo itself—to be literal—is something out there in the world, as pixels on a phone. So I ask about looking at the photo thinking it's more precise/technical/proper or whatever. But yes, probably this is just an academia hangover. I've always prided myself on having clear language when I write (not when I talk) and thought I've been resisting how academia mangles language. Clearly not.

However, in the end I think even if I asked about *the photo*, I don't think that would be enough. Whenever you, RTH, ask if something was experienced or not, you usually redo the spiel about driving or sitting in a chair and not having that all the time conscious. You take it away from the realm of the theoretical to the concrete. People go: oh now I can feel the sensations of sitting in the chair, but it's true I've been sitting here this whole time and it wasn't on my mind at all before.

So yes, I do need to focus on the concrete. I do need to get rid of theoretical degrees of remove that pretend to add precision but only add a screen between us and experience. I need to not force things into categories (experienced vs not experienced). But meta is not the issue.

Russ comments:

RE "This is already risky territory since it's about categorization. I'm in bucket sorting mode. The boxes I made for experienced and not experienced are separate categories. Creating clear categories where there may not be any is harmful. It's a bad way of conceptualizing it. But you do similar questioning too. If Mel reports looking at a phone, you've asked if this is a mere eyeballs-pointing fact-of the universe or if it's actually experienced."

I do frequently ask if this is a mere eyeballs-pointing fact-of the universe or if it's actually experienced. But my intention is not bucket-sorting. "Eyeballs-pointing" is a grunt that I have found often helps subjects reflect on their experience, not in a categorical way but in a presupposition-clearing way. I could (and sometimes do) say, more pedantically, "I don't want us to fall into the trap of assuming that because your

eyeballs are open and aimed at your phone, you must be, directly-before-the-footlights-of-my-consciousness apprehending your phone—maybe you are, but maybe you're not—either way or any other way is fine with me, but I don't want us to just presuppositionally assume that." Instead of grunting that, which is pretty cumbersome, I often say "just eyeballs pointing?" But then I listen to what the person says, and if it seems that they are categorizing, then I admonish them about the risks of categorizing.

RE meta: I accept that I might use meta in a way that is confusing. Considering Julian's bucket-sorting comment suggests that I use *meta* in two somewhat different ways, one more-or-less universally shared and one perhaps-idiosyncratically-Russ.

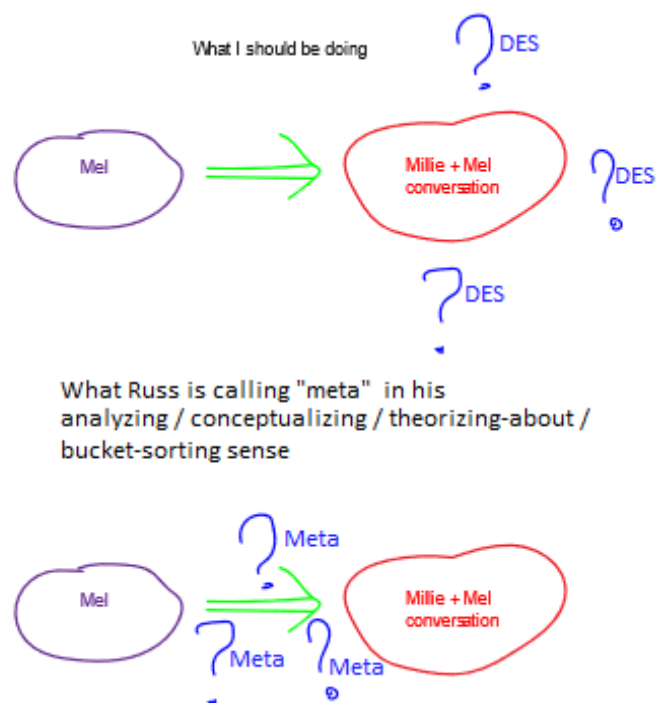
The *universally shared* way is the Mel-about-Mel kind of meta I depicted in the gold arrow in the figure about—Mel thinking about the way she is looking at the photo.

The *perhaps idiosyncratically Russ* way concerns where *Julian's* interest is aimed. The figure at right illustrates this, starting at the top by reprinting Julian's figure from above—what Julian and I agree is what he should be doing in DES: apprehending Mel's experience (not meta).

The bottom portion schematizes a meta-interest in the analyzing / conceptualizing / theorizing-about / bucket-sorting of her experiential process way. In the analyzing /.../bucket-sorting process, he is not directly considering Mel's experience; he is considering the processes that lie behind Mel's experience. Nearly all psychology/philosophy is meta in this second way of understanding. So when Julian tries to sound academic/precise/technical/proper/whatever, I hear him as sounding (and perhaps being) meta in the second way.

It seems to me that both ways merit being called "meta": they are both focusing not on experience but what is behind experience. They differ in that in the usual meta reference, it is *Mel* that is focusing on Mel's manner of experiencing (not on her experience itself), whereas in the second way it is *Julian* who is focusing on Mel's manner of experience (not on her experience itself).

Mel does not fit into academic/precise/technical/proper buckets. Good science should recognize that and try to apprehend Mel, one experience at a time, each with as high fidelity as can be mustered, with no within-Mel or within-Julian meta distortions. Then, later, it might be of value (actually I have my doubts about this) to



define academic/precise/technical/proper buckets and to say something about those buckets, perhaps using Mel's experiences as instances. But the important time stamp in that sentence is *later*.

Julian Comments: I find your admonitions against bucket sorting of over-theorizing incredibly useful. That being said I think you did *almost always* use meta in the more straightforward sense. Your original drawing for instance did depict something straightforwardly meta.

I see the case for how the straightforward meta and the broader definition are related. But usually in my original replies I was reacting against the straightforward definition you attributed to me. I think you were attuned to some blockages in my thinking. But you didn't 100% diagnose them correctly. And to retroactively apply this now-agreed-upon version of meta as if that's what you meant all along is to shift the goalposts when we're mid-game.

This is our most argued-over transcript. I did have to confront certain presuppositions. But I don't think this is the only issue. This isn't the first time I've encountered experience very different from my own and which I hadn't previously imagined possible. I do think there was some need to grapple with what exactly my presuppositions were, since none of us pinned it down on the first try. This has been an incredibly rewarding process.

RE "I think you did *almost always* use meta in the more straightforward sense."

I doubt that that is true; more importantly I think it is probably impossible (or nearly so) to determine whether it is true (because it will be difficult or impossible to specify with precision the order of the conversations we have had); and even more importantly, I think whether it is true is mostly about the words, and focusing on the words is largely misguided. I happily accept that our conversations about meta has helped me differentiate my thinking about meta. When that differentiation took place, and how it affected what I said and how you understood it, is probably impossible and counterproductive to determine.

RE "shifting the goalposts when we're mid-game."

A fundamental aim of DES is indeed to shift the goalposts mid game; DES is iterative all the way down. The main goalposts of interest is fidelity to Mel's experience, and at the heart of the iterative method is to do whatever it takes to move those goalposts (hopefully) closer and closer to fidelity to Mel. Part of what that takes, as best as I can (imperfectly) see, is to try to help you remove impediments to that fidelity.

RE "I do think there was some need to grapple with what exactly my presuppositions were."

I think you have the tense wrong, and that there is no possibility or desirability of exactness. So I would say: I do think there *is* some need to grapple with what ~~exactly~~ your presuppositions *are*, and I do think there *will be* some need to grapple with what ~~exactly~~ your presuppositions *continue to be* for some extended period of time, probably measured in decades or longer.

26:08 Mel: Yeah, it's really challenging because it's, it's, um, it's kind of like observational, reactive. Like it's not, um... like now I'm trying to think about whether, like... okay, how does listening to this conversation differ from me doing the vacuuming?

26:40 JBK: Mm-hmm.

26:43 Mel: I am not necessarily sure it does differ.

26:47 JBK: Okay.

26:48 Mel: Even though what I'm engaged in is so entirely different, y'know, I'm listening to Milly tell me a story. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Uh, inner experience-wise per, perhaps it, I think it's kind of a similar thing, of, there's nothing that I'm like super aware of...I'm just like wholeheartedly listening.

27:17 JBK: Mm-hmm.

27:18 JBK: So, that's very interesting to me because the vacuuming one... just from the descriptions before it seemed like it was much less present, much more autopilot.

27:33 Mel: Hmm.

27:33 JBK: And here, from the descriptions, it, it seemed like it would be more present, but...

27:42 Mel: Yeah, but present as in how, because my version of present, like when I'm vacuuming... yeah, I'm on autopilot, but my version of autopilot is not like, then my, my brain just disappears into some universe. Like I'm physically present and my inner experience, my brain is like, is, was like present slash not present as is normal. Like, I think that's just my base of like this quietness and this nothingness. And I feel like the link there with, y'know how I've described that with autopilot is like I'm doing a thing where it's like factually correct that I'm doing a thing, I'm vacuuming, or in this instance, like it's factually correct that I'm doing a thing, and by *that* thing, I mean listening to my friend.

28:33 JBK: Mm-hmm.

28:34 Mel: But there's nothing that I can really put my finger on that differentiates that experience for me, I don't think.

28:49 JBK: Okay. So we had the vacuuming, we also had a, I dunno if you remember now, um, maybe like, it is just more in *my* head because I was doing the sample descriptions, but this sample where you were emailing someone? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] It was still pretty autopilot, but, but you said maybe a little something more, something more concentration because it was emailing. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So I dunno, between... so you, you say this sample with the conversation that we're looking at now is, is it could be pretty similar to the vacuum experience?

29:31 Mel: Yeah. So I feel like now that you remind me of that one, then again we've come to those degrees of nothingness. Right? This probably fits in with that sort of emailing one... But it's really tricky because...it, I'm, what I'm trying to do is remove my...uh, remove the link between like what I know to be like, sort of physically true in the sense that like, *I'm listening, therefore I must be like, y'know, like trying to just really focus in on...* [JBK: Mm-hmm.] At that exact moment before the beep went off, does that feel the same as when the beep goes off when I'm mid writing an email? Yes, it does, it does. Exactly the, exactly the same. If it's when a beep goes, like if the beep goes off mid email and I wasn't thinking ahead of what to write or whatever, which we've had previously of, oh, it just went off and it interrupted me and I wasn't consciously aware of like the sentence I was about to write or like whatever. This feels exactly the same as that.

29:31 Russ comments: This conversation is off the rails, that is, it is not trying to describe experience at specific particular moments. In my view it is a mélange of faux generalization ("This probably fits in with that sort") explanation ("*I'm listening, therefore I must be like*"), hypothetical experience ("when the beep goes off when I'm mid writing an email") from my point of view, and I have no confidence that Mel and JBK are talking about the same thing, whether Mel is giving generalities or specifics, and so on. As a result, I wouldn't credit anything that Mel has said here.

DES is not about trying to speculate why things go off the rails. Its object is to ask questions where things don't go off the rails. But, with the caveat that I am no mind reader, and with the understanding that part of my job in the Mel interviews is to try to explain why DES does what it does and why it works, this is my take on what has happened.

1. Mel says clearly that she was absorbed in what her friend is saying.
2. JBK says Mel was experiencing that absorption (that is, he unwarrantedly states an meta-awareness)
3. Mel resists that by saying it is similar to vacuuming, which she means as a comment on meta-awareness—there is no meta-awareness in either the conversation-absorption or in the vacuuming.
4. JBK hears that as Mel's saying the two experiences are the same.
5. Neither one understands that they are talking past each other, so they veer off into generality and ambiguity.

Julian comments: I can agree that it got off the rails. But I disagree about the reasons. However awkward my phrasing, I never meant anything meta and don't see evidence that Mel took it as such. Early on my default was to think that in paying attention to conversation, something about that conversation would be salient. Maybe Milly was talking about a good movie she saw or a fight she had with a roommate or who knows. Nothing is jumping out to Mel though. A few questions are spent with me probing that.

After that I am interested by Mel's descriptions of emptiness and her comparisons with the vacuuming. I don't *think* this was Mel's way of dispelling notions of meta-awareness. I think she was pointing to something else—the singular focus of experience, for instance, where there is *nothing else* besides this conversation. Another possibility is a kind of minimal nature with simultaneous absorption and lack

of direct experience—a deeply absorbed flavor of nothingness. This possibility is what some of my questions were awkwardly probing.

It's maybe true that I have at times taken Mel's describing experience as being "the same" too literally. This could be an issue for further samples here.

- 30:46 JBK: Interesting. Um, well, I, I think there are a few more questions to ask about this, but I'm curious what, what, Russ, y'know, what's on Russ's mind.
- 30:57 RTH: So let me, when I, when I'm, what I'm understanding basically is your friend's talking, and you're absorbed in what she's saying, and that's basically it.
- 31:06 Mel: Mm-hmm.
- 31:07 RTH: And, and it seems to me that the distinction that we're, that we're *worried* about here is to what, whether you're, whether this absorption in conversation has some active listening, reaching out, whatever. And I'm gathering that the answer to that is *No*, [Mel: Mm-hmm. (nods affirmatively)] that, that she's talking and I'm absorbed in it. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And that's not too different from I'm vacuuming and I'm absorbed in the vacuuming. [Mel: Mm-hmm. (nods affirmatively)] It's different in that my friend is talking and that's, y'know, it's a different context and whatever. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But basically I'm ab- I'm absorbed in it and I'm, there's no meta stuff in about it. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]. There's no *I'm noticing that I'm absorbed*. I just, she's talking, I'm soaking it up. There's nothing else going on.
- 32:06 Mel: Yeah. Yeah. It's that simple.
- 32:10 RTH: Sounds good to me. And the, and the, the, the fact that we're not talking about exactly what she was saying...
- 32:20 Mel: Mm-hmm.
- 32:22 RTH: ...I think probably indicates that I'm not...it's not that I'm just hearing the words that she's saying. It's that I am soaking up this...whatever it is that she's given out, I'm soaking up or, or whatever, which is partly words and partly some other...parallel, [Mel: Yeah!] para- paralinguistic stuff.
- 32:45 Mel: Like, I think the, um, thing that I'm trying to make clear there, which I think you've got, is I'm not listening to what she's saying and then, y'know, like third-layering on that of like, oh, that's an interesting thing that happened to me one time. Like, there's not that sort of process going on in my head while she's talking. None of that. It's just the, she's talking and I'm listening. There's no other layer.
- 33:10 RTH: Then I think I'm good.
- 33:12 JBK: I, I think I understand. I'm still quite curious. I feel like we ended up in a similar place but had very different ways of getting there. Like the vacuuming experience [Mel: Mmm.] was more autopilot. And here we talk more about like absorption or being consumed. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, but still end up that a lot of it is maybe something

that you're not directly conscious of or directly focusing on. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And I, I'm still curious about why the descriptions are in a way very similar and also so different.

33:56 Mel: Yeah. I think my first thought to that is just perhaps to do with me trying to get better at describing or like, whatever, y'know, I would, I would, I would say that more than anything of, I would lean towards me trying to articulate things more accurately or in a way that feels better to me, more so than like, if it's a really important distinction between the activities, I think that I'd lean towards, it's just me getting better at, or trying new language or whatever to articulate the, the thing.

34:38 JBK: Because... yeah, I, I think I also need to just get better at understanding it because it seems like almost paradoxical, paradoxical that you could be very absorbed, but still, um...

34:38 Russ comments: To my ear, that sounds like JBK is working against his presupposition that it is not possible to be absorbed and yet have no meta-awareness. Good! But he will need several (probably many) more such workings. That's not a personal criticism of JBK: Presuppositions are delusions, and it takes a lot of work to overcome (or bracket) them.

Two other things: (1) JBK's use of *also* (in "I think I also need") suggests to my ear that he is endorsing Mel's responsibility—she has said it's her fault, and JBK said it might *also* be his fault. I think the fault is almost always entirely the interviewer's (in this case, JBK's).

(2) When you feel something arising in you, like a sense of paradox, or curiosity, I recommend interpreting it as a sign that a presupposition *in you* is operating in the vicinity. It is something *about JBK* that is paradoxical, *not* about Mel. So I recommend honoring those feelings but redirecting them: What is it *about me* that makes Mel's experience seem paradoxical? Not: what is it *about Mel's experience* that is paradoxical.

Julian comments: If we use your broader definition of meta as including all bucket-sorting / theoretical distraction, then you're right. Although I do think you meant something more straightforward when you first wrote this comment. That doesn't matter so much. I'll take the lesson that my presuppositions are getting in the way. To clarify what those presuppositions are here, I think they concern the *aboutness* or *content-free* discussion we've had. And also doing away with subconscious / conscious distinctions.

34:55 Mel: But also not.

34:57 JBK: Yeah. Also not also in consciousness. There's not that much. Um...yeah.

35:03 Mel: So on that, then, I would say how it feels for me is the, like, if it's the absorbed or not, it's actually kind of the *not*. But that's what's like... that's my version of... like how I was saying before with the mood and the state of being, and then how a feeling feels really intense. So like, if I'm doing something, um, then like to be really absorbed by it

feels like a really intense thing, but to be like doing it and on autopilot and like consumed by it, but it's still this, it does, it lacks that intensity though.

36:00 JBK: Mm-hmm.

36:02 Mel: Y'know, none of this makes any sense. Cuz we've gotten to a layer where this is, so all of this today feels the most accurate version of my inner experience. Um, so like anything that's not clear, definitely keep asking questions about, because this feels like [car horn] the closest we've gotten to it.

36:30 JBK: Yeah. I think, um, maybe, maybe other beeps will like add more to being able to see these distinctions?

36:38 Mel: Mm-hmm. Um...

36:43 RTH: So I'm ready to go, ready to go forward to number 4.

SAMPLE 4.4 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

36:46 Mel: I'm looking at them and I'm not sure if they will, Julian! Um, so [laughs] the... Yeah, next one I've got went off at 11:00 AM and I was mid-conversation with Milly again. And I've written, "we were talking about dating in New York, and I was very present in the conversation." That's it. That's all I wrote.

37:12 RTH: And is "present in the conversation" the same experience as the absorption/whatever we were talking about last time? Is this the same deal?

37:23 Mel: Yeah. Absorbed, fully attentive, no other thoughts... A singularity of absorption.

37:34 RTH: And, and so this... the experience on the fourth beep and the experience on the third beep seemed like pretty much or exactly the same thing?

37:42 Mel: Yeah.

37:43 RTH: Okay. In *this* beep you gave us the content: you said we're talking about dating in New York. And the previous beep you didn't. Is that an artifact of the descriptive process? Or is there something different that leads you to be able to say about this one *It's about this content* and about that one, *I don't even have any content*.

38:04 Mel: Good question. Let me think. Yeah, I don't know. Um, part of me wants to speculate that this conversation about dating in New York elicited more, um, more emotional responses in me. And therefore I...but, but I'm getting dangerously speculative there, I reckon.

38:38 RTH: So let me put into words what I understand about this beep, and that is: my friend Milly is talking, I'm soaking it up. I'm absorbed in it. And this is not an active process.

This is not a... it's not a *hugely I'm being consumed by*, it is a, *I'm absorbing what she's saying*. There's nothing else going on. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And that's it.

39:06 Mel: Mm-hmm.

39:08 RTH: Yep. And I think I'm good.

39:12 JBK: But this absorbing is still experienced?

39:12 Russ comments: "this absorbing is still experienced?" is a question about meta-awareness, which I take to indicate that the presupposition is not dead.

Julian comments: No, it's about the possibility (still left over from last question but that I didn't work up to get to directly) that absorbing could have been a process happening out of direct consciousness / outside the footlights of experience.

Russ Comments: Maybe the issue is not so much the definition of "meta" as the definition of "experienced." In DES, "experienced" refers to "directly apprehended before the footlights of consciousness," and to nothing else. If one blurs that reference, then all DES is lost. So if your 39:12 turn translates as: "But this absorbing is still ~~experienced~~ taking place as some inferred process that is not at all directly apprehended?" then I agree that the question is not about meta-awareness. However, to call that "experienced" is to confuse DES beyond recognition.

Julian comments: No, I'm not trying to find out the characteristics of subconscious absorption. I'm trying to leave open the possibility that this absorbing something might not have been experienced. Like someone could be driving a car but that's not before the footlights at certain moments. Potentially the same could be true of absorbing a movie or conversation or whatever.

But if I did judge this to be likely, then I wouldn't ask follow up questions to try to get at the characteristics of this. Just like if you decide that car-driving isn't directly experienced, you don't ask follow-ups on what it was like.

Russ comments: First, I notice that even when Julian is explicitly trying to avoid the topic of meta-awareness, he writes this meta-awareness sentence: "I'm trying to leave open the possibility that this absorbing something might not have been experienced." Perhaps he means "this *something* might not have been experienced," or "this *absorbed* something might not have been experienced." Neither of those are meta in the universal sense. But to write or ask about whether the "absorbing" is experienced is square in the middle of meta-awareness.

Second, granting that he intends a non-meta sense, this question seems confused in a different way. Mel has never left room for doubt about whether the conversation was experienced: she wrote in her notebook (see 20:29) "I was mid-conversation and deep listening to Milly. There's no thought, just full attention," and amplified it a moment later by saying that her "experience was at that point ... just was locked in." The conversation is *not* like the usual car-driving—one wouldn't typically say that their car driving had their locked-in full attention.

So either way, there is something amiss here. This kind of confusion is, in my view, likely evidence of a presupposition. What exactly that presupposition should be called (whether *meta* is the best name for it) is up for grabs.

39:17 Mel: Well, experienced in the way that, that's the only, that's that, like...that's how I experience stuff. So like, I don't really know how else to...if that is... when I'm having a conversation with someone, that's how I experience it. So I don't really know how it could be anything else.

39:17 Russ comments: To my ear, this is the way a person sounds when they can see no possible satisfactory reply: false start followed by false start followed by false start followed by "I don't know." This is not mind reading; Mel just cannot say *Yes* and she cannot say *No*, so she is stuck.

39:39 RTH: So I'm, I was worried about your question, Julian, because that's a met, your, yours was a straightforward meta-awareness question: I'm asking about whether I noticed myself to have been absorbed. And I don't think there's, I don't...

39:54 JBK: I don't think I meant it in that way. I, I don't think that at the time you would be noticing yourself being absorbed.

40:00 RTH: That was your, that was what you *asked*, though. And that's why she had trouble answering it, I think.

40:04 JBK: Yeah. I'm trying to think of a way to rephrase it. Um...

40:08 RTH: So you can't, you can't ask whether she was noticing her absorption or whether the absorption was in experience. I think that's maybe what you said: "is the absorption in your experience." [JBK: (inaudible)] That's not really true. What was in your experience was a friend's conversation, and that was...

40:22 JBK: Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Was... I, I asked, "was the absorption experienced?" [RTH: Right.] Okay. But, um, that's...

40:32 RTH: That's the meta, that's the meta-awareness question.

40:34 JBK: Okay. So the friend's...

40:37 JBK: Hmm. So, so, but this is not like, um, it's not a nothing, but with the, with the physical act, the physical thing you're *in* may be occupying a different kind of subconscious state that makes it...

40:39 Russ comments: I don't understand that question at all, which suggests to me that a presupposition is operating.

Julian comments: A tongue-tied way of trying to ask if being absorbed was something that was going on subconsciously but wasn't conscious.

Russ comments: DES doesn't ask about any that is subconscious; it is interested only in what is directly apprehended.

40:59 Mel: My physical self is not relevant [BK: Yeah.] at, at this point. Like, there's no part of the location or my physical body that is within my inner experience during this. [JBK: Un hmm.] No.

41:17 JBK: Um, and... um...yeah... I, I think I'm good, actually. [laughs] I think I'm good. Yeah.

41:17 Russ comments:

Q: Why do you insist on calling these things presuppositions (which for you is the same thing as delusions). Why don't you use something more neutral, like "ignorance," for example? Why not just say that JBK doesn't know how to ask a non-meta question?

A: Because ignorance has a different trajectory. If I am ignorant about, say, how to make chocolate-chip cookies, I contact a competent baker and say, "I don't know how to make chocolate chip cookies; can you help me out?"

By contrast, our experience with meta-awareness is a pretty good case study of the operation of presuppositions and the difficulty of overcoming them:

- People adamantly believe they have no presuppositional issues ("I still am vehement. I don't have presuppositions that Mel's experience is meta!" [25:48 comment]).
- People change the topic, often reversing roles (e.g., "But you do similar questioning too" [25:48 comment])
- When a presupposition is mentioned, it is not resolved.
- If a presupposition is repeatedly mentioned, it is denied or misinterpreted (when I pointed out [39:39] that Julian had asked a meta-awareness question, he denied that that is what he meant).
- If an example of a presupposition is so clear that it cannot be denied, people shut down (when I pointed out that that is what he *asked* [40:00], JBK was pretty stuck).
- Presuppositions are wily, and seek to defend themselves in all manner of ways. One main way is to stick to generalities (and avoid specifics).
- The whole process has to repeat, likely many times, before a presupposition can actually begin to be resolved (if ever).

That sequence is not simple ignorance—I don't tell the baker that he doesn't know how to make cookies; I don't tell him that he just *thinks* that I *don't* know how to make chocolate-chip cookies, fight with him at every step, and so on.

And I wish to emphasize that this is not peculiarly JBK-ish—that's the way presuppositions always go.

Q: Suppose I accept that presuppositions are delusions. Any experienced clinician would tell you that it is pointless to try to talk a person out of their delusions. Aren't you on a fool's errand to try to talk JBK out of his delusion?

A: The experienced clinicians are right: if I try to talk a patient out of his delusion (of grandeur, for example), I will not be successful. Why not? Because my talking-out-of-attempt is the pitting of my own non-specific generality (my own world-view) against

the patient's non-specific generality (the patient's world-view). A generality (no matter how logical) cannot defeat another entrenched generality (no matter how obviously a conspiracy theory).

But DES is a different situation because at its heart it *avoids* generality. It tries to get at one specific, particular instance with fidelity; and then on another specific, particular instance with fidelity; and then another; and another; and so on. Each *with-fidelity* attempt is an effort to get to one specific experience as it is, *not* as it is *according to my world view* pitted against how it is *according to the other's world view*.

Each DES sample is its own little bit of specifically particular hard reality that has a little bit of potential to grind away a little bit of non-specific generality. By contrast, there is no possibility for a generality to grind away another generality.

That is, *unlike* the pitting of generalities, I think it is *possible* for the DES series of particularities to grind away a delusion. That happy result is by no means *certain*.

Perhaps a main reason that DES is not more widely accepted is that people recognize that to do DES well (or at all), one has to bracket their presuppositions, and their presuppositions are wily. Presuppositions try to avoid confrontation if possible, but if confrontation is to occur, presuppositions will try to make the confrontation into generality vs. generality (because there is no possibility of defeat there). Presuppositions don't generally try to win, they just try not to lose.

The good news is that presuppositions do have a vulnerability: small, nearly neutral, specific details. If we can live for long enough in the land of small, nearly neutral, specific details, presuppositions may be abraded away. However, there is no guarantee of success or even progress.

So if Julian and Russ can aim at diamond-hard experience after diamond-hard experience, these may abrade away Julian's presuppositions, whatever they are, and may abrade away Russ's presuppositions, whatever they are, like the rocks in a tumbler polish each other. Russ has a 40-year head start in the tumbler, but both are vulnerable to change. There is nothing easy about it on either side.

Q: You have never really said how or where a presupposition exists. You seem to write as if it were a separate entity within a person.

A: I don't know how or where or if presuppositions exist. I currently think of a presupposition as a useful fiction, that it is useful to act *as if* a presupposition were an existing enemy.

Q: Maybe JBK is right—it's *your* delusion, not *his*.

A: I happily accept the likelihood of my own presuppositions—I'd literally be the last person on earth to know about the existence of my own delusions. So what should Julian and Russ do in this situation? To the extent that Julian aspires to fidelity, he would do well to inquire what it is *about Julian* that leads Russ (to the extent that Julian thinks that Russ is operating in good faith) to sniff out what Russ takes to be Julian's presupposition. Julian should not presume that Russ is Right with a capital *R*; nor that he's Wrong. But Julian *should* accept that to the extent that Russ is right, Julian will firmly believe that Russ is wrong.

And the same for Russ.

Q: Suppose that Russ is wrong about his impression of Julian's *meta* presupposition. Won't he just be wasting everyone's time.

A: Probably not. It is unlikely that Russ is *entirely* wrong—he's been around the block a few times, and is likely onto *something*. He doesn't have to be *entirely* right for the exercise to be useful. He has to be partially right, and he has to be at least to some extent open to discovering his limitations. Julian's profit does *not* depend entirely on Russ's adequacy.

Julian comments: Of course I do think you're somewhat on the ball. But I've never denied that. I've often said, *yes I have presuppositions, but they're a bit different from what you diagnosed*. I also do still think you've done some goalpost changing, retroactively applying a broad definition of meta when I think often in our conversation, you meant something more straightforward. So I think some points in your laundry list of my delusion are debatable. But I don't so much care about debating them so will say that yes, you sniffed out *some* kinda of mental blockage I had.

I think for me this mostly concerned the aboutness of experience—our content-free debate. It initially struck me that for 4.3, Mel was absorbed in conversation but didn't find the topic of this conversation especially relevant to note. I should say that even now, I still haven't cleared up for myself this content-free debate. Is it just that nothing particular is jumping out? Or is there something about Mel's absorbed-in experience here that is particularly unattached to whatever she's absorbed in?

Then Mel's comparisons to autopilot-y shades-of-nothing experience got me wondering if Mel's absorbed experience was even conscious. Maybe it was subconscious. (Or in a realm where there's no distinction).

I may have been led too hard in that direction, and this could have been from my difficulty imagining listening to conversation without the topic being experientially important.

Russ comments: I think my take on meta-problems did in fact presume that you made a clear distinction between directly-apprehended-experience and all else; now (as mentioned in my reply at 39:12) it seems that that presumption may not be correct. DES does not ask about the subconscious, or the unconscious, or states because (if they exist, and if anyone knows what they are talking about) they fall in the *all else* category in the philosophy that *DES discriminates between directly apprehended experience and all else*.

DES is simple: try to converse about sampled experiences in a way that you know what you're talking about and avoid conversing in a way that it *seems* that you know what you're talking about. Here, we're talking about the subconscious, and there's no possible way that we know what we're talking about there. And for much of today we have talked about the experience while vacuuming as if we knew what that was. But we don't. The vacuuming sample was first-day talk (sample 1.2), and there is no reason to believe that we understood each other at that time, much less that we remember it clearly now. As a result, what perhaps seemed today like a comparison of experiences was actually more a comparison of today's experience to some theory or faux-generalization about a supposed class of experiences, that is, a comparison of something that we know what we're talking about to something that

we *don't* know what we're talking about. Hopefully we will eventually learn to avoid such things.

Julian comments: I do make a distinction between directly apprehended experience and all else. The point would be not to find out features of subconscious experience. It is to determine whether something is (probably not) directly apprehended and then to *stop* trying to determine its features.

Russ comments: Going back to your previous comment, RE “for 4.3, Mel was absorbed in conversation but didn’t find the topic of this conversation especially relevant to note.” And RE “is there something about Mel’s absorbed-in experience here that is particularly unattached to whatever she’s absorbed in?” and RE “listening to conversation without the topic being experientially important”: My take on Mel’s experience is far different from what you say here. The conversation is *entirely* relevant; she is *hugely* attached to it; the topic is *totally* experientially important. What is not relevant/unattached/unimportant is anything *extraneous* to the conversation.

RE “I may have presuppositions but it’s not the meta kind” [This was from an earlier draft of Julian’s comment that Julian revised since Russ substantially revised his first comment] I think it likely that we are both right, and that it doesn’t matter. (a) Julian is right, Mel does not have meta-awareness in these samples. I agree with that, and always have. (b) Russ is right, Julian has presuppositions in the ballpark of meta-awareness. Julian calls it the content-free issue. Russ thinks that if Julian were confidently clear, all the way down, about the possibility that Mel does not have meta-awareness, that that would be the same thing as being confidently clear, all the way down, about how it is possible to have nothing jumping out to Mel about experience. And so (c), it doesn’t really matter whether we call it meta or content-free: the aim is to be aligned with Mel’s experience, which was totally absorbed in the conversation.

Julian Comments: I think you’re right that there’s some kind of link between meta in your broader definition and experience being *about* something. To be honest I’m *still* not entirely sure about Mel’s experience here. I’ve had past samples with other participants where they’re absorbed—in a conversation or a movie or whatever. In these samples, they’ve told me what the subject/topic/action was. E.g. *I was really engrossed in a movie. A hand had just reached out to grab a pigeon by the neck and snap it.* Is it common in your sampling that people are absorbed but don’t feel the need to note down topic/content/whatever? For Mel this was pretty consistent (not 100% but often), be it during a movie, song, or conversation. Of course, she wasn’t singularly focused on one thing, or the color of a character’s hat. I’m not expecting this. But she didn’t even feel the need to tell us the general gist of plot or topic.

What is your explanation for this by the way? According to you Mel is absorbed and the topic is totally important. But when the beep comes, she doesn’t jot down this topic because: a) she is so absorbed that once she snaps out it’s hard for her to remember or access it? b) she simply doesn’t think of mentioning or jotting down the topic? c) something else?

The way I came to understand it was that she was absorbed but in a very holistic way. You were right, it didn't make sense to call her absorption "content-free." The content/topic/whatever shapes it. But it is also so holistic that the content doesn't jut out as the essential thing. If she's absorbed in a conversation, her experience includes her friend, their dynamic, and the topic just doesn't jut out.

I'm really curious if experience like Mel's is common in your sampling? Again as I asked before, do many people respond in a similar way? Even after 15 days (!) of sampling, Mel didn't feel a need to tell us the topic. To me this seems experientially *different* from other people I've sampled with. You said at one point that all experience of absorption might actually be pretty similar. Is this what you meant? Is this a common thing you've observed?

To me it *seems* noteworthy, idiographically salient, somehow worth touching on in our sample descriptions. Beyond just saying that she was absorbed in a conversation. I've given up on wanting to insert "content-free." I think you're right about that and that came from a meta-ish angle. But it still seems to me that Mel's absorption is somehow so holistic that it transcends content in a straightforward way.

I also can't shake the impression that it's somehow cousin to her nothingness moments. Not to say that she's not experiencing anything. But that the no-topic-jutting-out holistic totality of her absorption is somehow the flipside. It just seems too coincidental that she had so many nothingness moments and also that her absorption moments were so devoid of other descriptors she could give.

Possibly I'm drawing too many lines. Possibly I haven't shaken off all my presuppositions/ delusions. I'm sure you'll let me know.

Russ comments:

RE "I've had past samples with other participants where they're absorbed—in a conversation or a movie or whatever. In these samples, they've told me what the subject/topic/action was."

Perhaps because for them the subject/topic/action was important. Perhaps, on the other hand, you wittingly or unwittingly suggested to them that the subject/topic/action was important (as, to my ear, you do here). I don't know.

RE "According to you Mel is absorbed and the topic is totally important."

(This is in the it's-not-about-the-words category) There is a sense in which that sentence is true, and that sense is if by "topic" you mean something like "that with which Mel is absorbed." In that case, the sentence reads "According to you Mel is absorbed and that with which Mel is absorbed is totally important," and I agree with that. But if you mean by "topic" something like "theme" or "subject matter" (as you apparently do in your sentence "But she didn't even feel the need to tell us the general gist of plot or topic"), then I do *not* agree with "According to you Mel is absorbed and the topic is totally important."

The difference there is that Julian apparently supposes that there is a general gist of plot or topic that Mel *should be* ("she didn't even feel the need to tell us the

general gist of plot or topic”) absorbed in, and I see absolutely no reason to believe that. I think it entirely possible for Mel to be absorbed, and for that absorption not to be channeled into some easily identifiable thing or set of things.

RE “The way I came to understand it was that she was absorbed but in a very holistic way. You were right, it didn’t make sense to call her absorption “content-free.”

You have started to give up the content/content-free perspective. Good. But I didn’t hear Mel say anything about her absorption being *holistic*. Mel is smart and articulate, and if she wanted to describe being absorbed as being holistic, she could have done so. So I think *holistic* is an invention of Julian.

RE “If she’s absorbed in a conversation, her experience includes her friend, their dynamic, and the topic just doesn’t jut out.”

That presumes there is a topic, but that is Julian’s construction, his nounification, his presupposition. I suspect that Mel doesn’t tell us the topic because there isn’t a topic. It is possible for Mel to grasp what Milly is saying without their being a topic. (If that’s difficult to get your head around, try this metaphor: a good musician will tell you, correctly, that in her performance there are no notes, there are no themes, etc. Twenty years ago, when she was learning to play, she worked at getting the notes right. Ten years ago, when she was learning music theory, she worked at getting the themes right. Now, when performing, she makes music. There are no notes or themes.)

The DES skill is to be happy to hear Mel tell us about a topic if there be a topic in her experience, but not otherwise; and for her to tell us that her experience is holistic if it be holistic, but not otherwise; and for her to elaborate what she means when she says she is absorbed to the extent that that elaboration is meet, but not more or less.

RE “But it still seems to me that Mel’s absorption is somehow so holistic that it transcends content in a straightforward way.”

You take an adjective (absorbed), nounify it (absorption), and then speculate about the characteristics of that thing—that it is holistic that it transcends content. I think Mel was absorbed. I don’t think being absorbed was holistic, or transcendental, or about content. I think she did not particularize in any of those ways.

RE “I also can’t shake the impression that it’s somehow cousin to her nothingness moments.”

When she was absorbed, she didn’t particularize. When she was vacuuming and not experiencing anything, she didn’t particularize. If that’s what you mean by “cousins”—that Mel’s inner experience does not always (or perhaps often) particularize, then I agree. Don’t fall into the trap of presuming that because two things have the same predicate, they are the same.

RE “I’m really curious if experience like Mel’s is common in your sampling?”

First, it doesn’t matter. The aim of fidelity is to be in tune with Mel’s idiographic experience, regardless of whether it is common or she is the only person on the planet like that. Second, this is a major difference between fidelity and validity. Valid methods predict the mean, unless there is good reason to the contrary. Type I errors are worse than Type II errors. Fidelity tries to get it right, knowing that it will fall

short. There certainly are cases where Type II errors are worse than Type I errors. Third, Mel's kind of (non-particularizing, as it seems to me) absorbing is rare in my sampling.

[I might say that my objections to the nounification of adjectives and the objectification of descriptions is not confined to Julian—those are huge (in my view) mistakes made by much of psychology at least since Freud, who unwarrantedly transformed (for example) observations of defensive behavior (very perspicuous descriptions) into theoretical but probably not existing objects (egos). And there are countless other examples in modern psychology.]

41:29 Mel: Alright. Um, yeah...

41:36 RTH: Number 5.

41:37 JBK: Number 5.

SAMPLE 4.5 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

41:37 Mel: Well, I've got, this went off seven minutes later. [laughs] So I've written "mid-conversation. Same thing." Now, interestingly, this went off as I was talking [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Um, *but* the inner experience felt the same. So I was mid-sentence, couldn't tell you what the sentence was...Doesn't... it didn't feel relevant. It literally interrupted me. And if I reflect on what I was doing, this *felt* exactly the same as the inverse, as when I'm listening. Um, like, like my brain is quiet and I'm just doing the thing.

42:29 JBK: So you're quiet, you're just doing, and it felt the same as, as the previous two beeps. And I guess also in the vacuuming, if, I mean, I, I don't necessarily know if I want to go back to such a early beep and compare to something then... but... [Mel: Yeah.] Um, but I, I guess I'll do it anyways. Like, how, how would you compare that?

42:29 Russ comments: This is a bad question (by my usual definition of bad—leading to generality or non-specificity of some kind—that is, the judgment of bad comes from observing Mel's 43:02 and later responses). But while I am in the mode of observing how presuppositions work, I would observe that one way a presupposition defends itself is by asking bad (that is, encouraging generality) questions. Presuppositions exist in the realm of generality; a presupposition knows that it can't lose in an argument about generality. A good question might help Mel clarify a specificity about experience, which might be deadly for the presupposition. One might say: DES interviewers ask bad questions because bad questions serve to defend their presuppositions.

43:02 Mel: Well, I think that this is perhaps where it gets challenging and it can get frustrating for me as well in that I really feel like this is my experience *so often*, um, that it's... um... I don't know how to describe this nothingness and that cuz...Yeah. So me being mid-conversation, talking to Milly, did that feel different to when a beep goes off and I was doing the vacuuming?

43:46 RTH: So can I interrupt this and bring us back to a little bit more to the present here and ask about the experience between this beep and the previous beep? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So we don't have to get lost in, cuz I, I seems like we were trailing into not really know what we were talking about in there.

44:03 Mel: Yeah.

44:04 RTH: So *this* experience and the previous experience seems like the same thing, as I understood it.

44:11 Mel: Yeah.

44:12 RTH: In the *real world*, in the previous beep or two, *she* was talking, and in this beep *you* are talking. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But the experience seems *exactly* the same? Is that right?

44:24 Mel: Mm-hmm. Yes.

44:29 RTH: And so does that mean that when we had said in the first, in the previous beep or two, *I was absorbed in Milly's talking*, that, that isn't really true. It was, I was absorbed in the *conversation*, and at the moment of the beep it *happened to be* Milly; and now I'm *still* absorbed in the conversation and at the moment beep it *happens to be me*. Is that right? That it's...

44:56 Mel: Well, yeah, I don't think there's any distinction for me because I think a distinction would suggest a level of like meta sort of thing. Like...yeah, I'm just engaged in, there's no difference between engaged in conversational [inaudible], engaged in the listening. You're like, it's all the same thing, isn't it?

45:15 RTH: Well, that's what we're trying to find out! [Mel: inaudible, smiles broadly] That's what, that's what's interesting about it. So there...

45:20 Mel: Yes.

45:20 RTH: So it, it would've been reasonable to have understood the previous beeps to have been about, *I'm absorbing what Milly is saying*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But that apparently is a little bit too broad! Or too narrow, I guess, maybe.

45:32 Mel: Narrow, yeah.

45:32 RTH: Because it's more I'm absorbed in what *we* are saying, now, it seems. Something like that. Is that right?

45:40 Mel: Well, yeah...I guess, but I d-, ye- yes... I suppose so because it doesn't feel any different for me... So that distinction. So yeah... I guess.

45:51 RTH: So. It's not, so what I, what I wanna be as clear as we can be here. It's, it's not that at the previous beep, my absorption was *out there* (aimed at Milly). [Mel: Yeah.] And that *this* beep my absorption is aimed *here* (at me). [Mel: Uh huh.] It's that I'm absorbed. And at *that* beep, Milly was talking and at *this* beep I'm talking...

46:13 Mel: Yeah.

46:14 RTH: Is that, is that right?

46:15 Mel: Yeah. Yeah. There's no difference.

46:16 RTH: So the absorption *doesn't* have a *direction* to it. It has a...

46:22 Mel: I like that [inaudible].

46:23 RTH: I'm present here in this conversation.

46:27 Mel: Yep, yep.

46:31 RTH: Okay.

46:34 JBK: Um, I'm still trying to understand this absorption. So... um...so like it's absorption but it's still not so present in, in awareness, right?

46:53 Mel: Yes.

46:55 JBK: So it's absorption, it's present in the sense that nothing else is present. No. [Mel: Yes.] No sounds or this or seeing or this or that. What is present is, is this absorption.

47:07 RTH: So that whole line of questioning [he means turns 46:34 and 46:55] was a meta-awareness question. And I think she's denied that. This is not, [car horn] there's no *meta* in here.

47:16 JBK: Wait, wait, wait. Meta as in, so what's present is this absorption. So, okay, so what's present is this conversation is...

47:16 Russ comments: Good! JBK is battling his presuppositions. This illustrates (a) that the battle has to take place over and over and over again; and (b) that behind the presupposition things don't make sense—take away the presupposition and it is a struggle to put anything into words.

Julian comments: I still just think it's a phrasing issue here. Admittedly there's some unclear thinking behind unclear phrasing.

Russ comments: In the most fundamentally important way, I don't care whether we call it a meta-presupposition or unclear thinking, as long as we lessen its impact. But the downside of calling it "unclear thinking" is that "unclear" is diffuse, non-specific, pan-general, could refer to anything. Julian has, I think, again and again made

statements that are meta where there is no meta warranted (as at 46:34 and 46:55). My guess is that when Julian clears up his unclear thinking, he will stop making unwarranted meta-statements; or vice versa: when he differentiates adequately about meta-experience, his unclear thinking will clear up.

47:25 RTH: That's right.

47:26 Mel: Okay. Yeah. The presence of...

47:28 RTH: Itself, it's, it's *not* present to her that she's absorbed in the conversation. It is present to her that, that... it is the *conversation* that is present to her.

47:37 JBK: The conversation is present.

47:39 RTH: The *absorption* is, is another way of saying *the conversation is present*.

47:46 JBK: The conversation... But, um, there's still maybe... is there something specific about this *conversation* that makes *this* kind of absorption *special*?

48:02 Mel: No, this is my normal level of absorption. [laughs]

48:07 JBK: Okay. Maybe that's why I'm defaulting to absorption. Cuz I'm, I'm thinking of it in terms of like the vacuuming absorption and emailing.

48:07 Russ comments:

Q: You have said before (41:17, 42:29) that generality is a way of defending a presupposition. Why do you think that?

A: Because genuine understanding inheres only in particularities. Either Mel had a meta-awareness of her absorption when beeped at 10:21 this morning or she didn't. A presupposition about meta-awareness has difficulty with such a particularity. But the presupposition has no problem with a generality about events such vacuuming, absorption, emailing. *Of course* her conversation experience is like vacuuming, because everything is like everything else in some way—her conversation experience is *in some way* like a Cadillac Escalade, and like Fermat's last theorem, and like the war in Ukraine. So as long as a presupposition can keep the conversation going about non-specific things, there is no risk to the presupposition. Mel's conversation experience is also *not like* vacuuming, *not* like a Cadillac Escalade, *not* like Fermat's last theorem, *not* like the war in Ukraine, and so long as we debate whether it *is* like this or *not* like that, we will never face directly what is. Remember that the presupposition is fighting for its life, and it wants to avoid any mortal risk.

48:17 Mel: Um, this is my present state of being like that...[JBK: Yeah.]

48:17 Russ comments: I think we have not resolved the experiential difference that leads Mel to say absorbed vs. autopilot vs. nothing. Those may turn out to be the same kind of thing, or maybe not. Either the iterative method will reveal the heart of those distinctions or it won't. What we *have* done is to become pretty clear that the

difference is not one of meta-awareness. Perhaps that accomplishment will allow us to be clearer about other aspects.

CONVERSATION AFTER SAMPLE DISCUSSIONS

- 48:26 JBK: So, [pause] okay. [laughs], I think I am, I think I'm still, I, I feel like today by, by getting more details and more different nuances, it's like... and by adding different layers of describing things and make [laughs], it makes it a bit harder in a way because...um, I dunno...
- 48:54 Mel: *You seem more* confused than ever Julian. Whereas *I* feel sort of, I feel *less* confused...
- 48:59 JBK: You feel less confused. [laughs]
- 49:02 RTH: So it, it, it, it, this is the way it is, if people are being honest, I think. Because I think what's happening is Mel's being more honest and it's, and Julian is being confronted with his own presuppositions, which confuse him, because he wants it to be a meta-awareness kind of a thing. And we're telling him it's *not* a meta-awareness thing. And then, but, but his presuppositions say, "well, it's gotta be a meta..." or something. I'm not, I don't wanna put his presuppositions into words [inaudible].
- 49:30 JBK: No, I dunno if I want it to be meta-awareness... but... I'm still, so what I'm struggling with is, y'know, absorption and autopilot. Um, and for me, absorption is something that's very present.
- 49:46 RTH: That's, that's meta-awareness right there. So, so I don't, I don't want to, I don't wanna put a word on this, but the struggle that you're having is in the *ballpark* of... there's gotta be something mental [he probably misspeaks, intending "meta"] here. That's, that, that's, that's that process, it seems like to me.

Julian comments: Funny that you chalk this up to misspeaking here. "Mental" is much clearer to me at getting where my presuppositions are. Talk of "meta" was just confusing me before and tripping me up. I *don't* think that there's Mel's absorbing conversation and then a separate process of noticing this absorption. That to me is what "meta" conjures up.

But it is difficult for me to wrap my head around being involved in a conversation and the topic not being experientially important. It's difficult for me to imagine a sample where talking and listening are the same. To me, that is more about "mental" than "meta." Notice that I don't fight this characterization. Whereas I did fight the "meta" characterization.

Russ comments: RE "it is difficult for me to wrap my head around..." The basic presupposition there, I think, is that talking or listening (or speaking) involves consciousness, and that presupposition rests on the presupposition that one knows what *consciousness* is. Both those presuppositions are widely, nearly universally perhaps, accepted. The way out of both presuppositions is to accept that people are multiprocessors, that the processing is skilled (including of words), and that processing (including of words) does not necessarily have directly apprehended aspects. The

processing can be important (including of words) and not necessarily directly apprehended at all. And there is no necessity that words that come into your ears or out of your mouth are directly apprehended—words can come in and be skillfully processed or be skillfully processed and go out without being directly apprehended at all, or partially apprehended, or completely apprehended.

None of that means that I can define specifically what a processor is and what it does.

Julian comments: I agree that the presupposition of knowing what consciousness is what made this day difficult for me.

Talking and listening being experientially 'the same' is part of it. The biggest part is different moments being experientially the same even with different stuff they're talking about.

One approach I had was to see if maybe Mel's carried along by the convo was not conscious. I asked about this awkwardly and indirectly though.

I wish I inquired more in the direction of what “the same” means to Mel [one example of this is with my 42:29 response to Mel’s 41:37 turn]. It occurred later that maybe she didn’t mean it as literally as I do. There’s the version where *the same* means: experientially exactly the same, indistinguishable, carbon copy. Then there’s the version where *the same* means: experientially the same in the major facets, but with slight differences that Mel takes for granted (from different samples being at different points in the convo, different points in a movie etc. In the future this is a line of inquiry I would go down.

Russ comments:

RE (in the 49:46 comments): “I wish I inquired more and in the direction of what ‘the same’ means to Mel. It occurred later that maybe she didn’t mean it as literally as I do.”

Exercise for the reader: RTH would say that that is too much about the words. What could JBK have asked that would focus on Mel's *experience*, rather than on her *words*? Does it matter? (RTH's answer is below, but **no fair peeking** until you have committed yourself here.)

[illegible]

(helping you not to peek)

●

RTH's answer to the exercise: JBK could have asked something like “What is it about your experiences that leads you say they are in some way the same?”

Second, an attempt to define “the same” uses ambiguously grasped experiences in the service of the attempt at refining word definition, when I think it would be better to use ambiguously defined words in the service at refining experiential apprehensions.

In short, you can use the ambiguity of a descriptor to clarify the ambiguity of an experience, but you waste the opportunity to clarify the experience if you try to clarify the word.

Julian comments: After reading your response, ["What is it about your experiences that leads you say they are in some way the same?"] I agree, this is in the vein of what I was thinking. I would *not* have asked "what does *the same* mean to you?" I may have asked something like "so do you mean those experiences are identical, exact carbon

copies, or are there maybe slight differences?” The risk with that is that Mel could think *differences*, *hmm*, *let me look for differences*. So your question avoids that risk in that it gets Mel to compare different experiences, and potentially some differences would pop out anyways.

Russ comments:

RE: I may have asked something like “so do you mean those experiences are identical, exact carbon copies, or are there maybe slight differences?”

That is still far too much about the words for my taste. It still asks Mel to discriminate between words (between “identical, exact carbon copies” and “maybe slight differences”) when it is likely that Mel meant something far different from that. Yes, she grunted “same.” Yes, she was trying to tell you something about her experience, and in the service of that effort grunting “same” was (or at least seemed at the time to be) in some way useful. But you should think of it (all words, really, but this is a good example) as a gesture, a pointing (*look over there*). Your task is to look where she’s pointing (tell me more about your *experience*), not to inquire about the accuracy of the pointing (when you said “same” did you mean *exactly* or *approximately*?). So your new questions, to my ear, are still looking south when you should be looking north. They hem Mel in, constrain her, rather than providing her the freedom of blossoming out, revising, extending, abandoning, correcting, embroidering.

This is a reprise of the Jain lecture [see 20:08 comment]: I think Mel should be understood as saying about her experience, “it is *syāt* the same.” Or task is not to define away the *syāt*, but to ride along with it in the direction of Mel’s intention—to describe her experience.

50:07 JBK: Something mental. So that experience has to be something mental...Yeah. I mean, that’s probably it. I probably do have presuppositions about it that I’m... y’know, I’m trying to understand it. Um...

50:22 RTH: And, and what I would say I, so I, I, I think this is a, a *great* example of, of why the iterative process is, is a really good deal. Because the, this discussion about beep 5 here, Mel started out by saying, well, this is the same as before, but it turned out... well, it was really quite a bit different than before because this is *her* talking rather than *Milly* talking. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] And so we get a chance to refine what our understanding of Mel’s experience was, [Mel: Hmm.] that it *wasn’t* aimed at Milly. [JBK: Mm-hmm.]

51:01 Mel: I’m really happy with... (by the way, I only got five beeps then it never went off again before midday). [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Um, I’m really happy with these samples today because they... yeah, they feel really, um... like I was doing my life. And so they feel like really, uh, accurate examples of my inner experience. They feel really authentic. And s-, um, I enjoyed that it’s gone off in a conversation with someone, and that that has *to me*, felt pretty similar to like other... y’know, there’s [inaudible] similarities there. So it’s, I dunno, it gives me like, um, like reassurance, but like I think that this is how my inner experience is more often than not. And I challenged that sort of thing today by like, doing the sampling in a *different* version or like a *different* part of my life. And it still sort of checks out. S- so it make, it makes me feel like I’m on the right

track with trying to explain it. I dunno...I don't think any of those words were helpful, but I feel good about today.

- 52:21 RTH: I, I think that's true. I, I, but I wouldn't, I wouldn't say that it's better to be doing the sampling in this kinds of contexts. I think it's, I think it is interesting to do the sampling in a lot of different kinds of contexts. I don't have favorite contexts.
- 52:36 Mel: Yeah. It's more just for comparison, but I just am curious to try and catch myself about what, yeah. Wh- is my inner ex- / I think that I'm like this all the time, but all right, well, let's try and catch myself of like, when I'm *out* with friends, or when I *am* alone, or doing a task, or *not* doing a task. Like, what, what is it? So to try and catch that and describe that is really interesting to me.
- 53:00 RTH: ...Yeah. Should we do it again?
- 53:03 JBK: Can I rephrase um... rephrase my confusion or presuppositions or whatever. [Mel: Yeah.] Um, I guess I'm most confused because a lot of these samples seem like quite a bit more than nothing, but, but you still compared them to samples that, before, we had kind of tied to as like, a little bit more than nothing, y'know?
- 53:27 Mel: Yeah. I think that this whole...that, that conundrum is exactly at the core of my inner experience. [JBK: Yeah.] Because I think that sort of paradox is exactly my inner experience. Like, is this deeply nothing and there's nothing going on and you are just on this autopilot? Or is it like this deep absorption in the present moment that's somehow different to that? Like, I, I don't think they're worlds apart, Julian. And I sort of think it's...[JBK Yeah.] somehow the same thing.
- 54:00 JBK: I think that's what I'm trying to understand. [Mel: Yeah.] Um, and I'm open to like, there being paradoxes in consciousness and the fact that like a little bit more than nothing [Mel: Yeah.] could somehow also be very absor- absorbing, y'know, which seems to be what you're describing, right? [Mel: Yeah.] Okay.
- 54:21 RTH: So I, I agree with all, with, with all that. But what I would say is that the, the, the question, that question can't be answered in *retrospection*. It has to be answered in *prospection*. [JBK: Okay.] So, so to the, part of the reason that I interrupted the line of questioning (back in the last beep that I were, where I sort of took over in midstream or whatever [he refers to 43:46]), was it looked to me like we were trying to... we were trying to make more of a fairly ill-defined set of experiences that were sort of ill-defined in the past. And I, and I didn't want us to do that. [Mel: Mm-hmm.][JBK: Yeah.] But *going forwards*, if she happens to be vacuuming, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] and *now* armed with this discussion about ab- absorption, *then at that time in the future* we will be able to say, *maybe*, something really quite differentiated between nothing and what we call *absorption* here. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] We *can't* do it looking backwards because, because back then, first off, we can't remember, and second off, we're not sure we're talking about the same beep, and third off, we didn't have the practice when that beep occurred to know what we were talking about. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Going forward's a different deal. Going, going forwards... we, we might, we, we might find out something. But that's, that requires a sort of a *patience*. We'll have to find

out, y'know, well that now... we have... we have...we have raised the issues of nothing, absorption, consumption, whatever, in a deeper way than we could have on previous days. And maybe that'll help us out in the future and maybe it won't.

- 4:21 Russ comments: That is, of course, a description of the DES iterative procedure and why it is necessary.
- 56:09 JBK: Mm-hmm.
- 56:11 Mel: Can I ask you... oh, sorry, you go. No, Julian...
- 56:14 JBK: You go first.
- 56:15 Mel: I was gonna completely change the direction, so you go.
- 56:19 JBK: [laughs]. Okay. I guess in that direction, I was gonna say, I, I realized a lot of my questions were, uh, not the best ones because they were, uh, making you, Mel, kind of answer in a way where you were generalizing or like, "my experience is *usually* like this." [Mel: Mm-hmm.] "*I feel like I'm often...*", which, um, I mean it's, it's not a bad thing to theorize about your experience. I just think my...yeah, my questions weren't like... I, I guess I ran out of ways to try to ask about this specific moment or about my own confusions. Um, so yeah, I think that's what I, I was struggling with for this session.
- 57:01 RTH: So the insight is, is totally important for DES. If you ask a question and you get a generality, then you asked a bad question. That's, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] [JBK: Yeah.] it's just the way it is...Because experience is *not* about generalities. It is *never* about generality.
- 57:19 Mel: Hmm. And that's challenging because *I* want to link everything together all the time and come up with some grand thing. So that is a, like an ever-present challenge. [laughs]
- 57:32 RTH: *Everybody* wants to do that!
- 57:34 Mel: Yeah.
- 57:38 Mel: Umm...Now I've forgotten what I was gonna say. Oh, I know! The, the question I wanna ask, but I know you're both gonna say, "don't care." Too bad, but I'm gonna ask it anyway. Like, is what I'm describing very different to how you experience conversation?
- 57:57 JBK: Yeah. [laughs] For me. [laughs] Should, should I... maybe I'll go. Um, I did a bit of DES where I had the beeper in and I had a friend and colleague in my Master's program interview me. So it wasn't like experienced DES. Um, but, but I think the samples were... the- the- they were different. Um, there was more, I can't remember specifics, but I don't know if it's a good scientific practice to talk about your own samples, but I mean, for me, there was a lot of kind of adjusting from one thought to the other. So I

was kind of caught in the middle of things where I was almost waiting for something to come. That's, that's what I remember of a lot of my samples. But yeah, I think, um, from conversation samples that I've seen from other people, like everybody, everybody is different.

59:02 RTH: And I would answer it sort of the same way. First, I don't know about my own experience because I have studiously *not* worn the beepers in the last 40 years. (And we can talk about why that is, but, but I haven't.) And, but I would say that I've got a lot of beeps in conversation, and *very often* the beeps are, uh... beep in conversations. *I was carried along by the conversation and that's it.* Whether that's what you're describing here, I'm not exactly sure yet. But, but there's also a lot of beeps where people are in conversation and they feel like they're waiting for their turn to say something, and they, they wanna say something and it's sort of on the edge and it's, they're waiting for the... Or, or they're in conversation and thinking about something entirely different, y'know, the noise in the next room or the, or whatever. So I think there's, there are lots of different ways of being when people are talking.

59:02 Russ comments: RE whether it is good science to talk about these things with Mel: Had she asked this question on the first day, I would have said that I would prefer to answer that question later, so as not to raise any expectations about what she should or shouldn't expect to find. But this is Mel's fourth day, and we've put pretty secure pins into (1) her experience of being absorbed in conversation; and (2) her genuine interest in describing her own experience with fidelity (as opposed to trying to satisfy us, or present herself positively, etc.). *Now*, I'm happy to answer Mel's question (a) because she is a co-investigator and I would like to be as candid with her as I can be; and (b) because suggesting alternatives may *now* serve to drag our feet a bit about the absorption phenomenon—may now cause her to recognize that not everyone is like she is, cause her to wonder a bit about whether her descriptions are accurate. That's good, because it will help her to examine more closely, to work out anything that might be confusing her apprehension.

RE my characterization of DES participants' typical experiences while in conversation: I'm happy with what I said, but I wouldn't want it to be taken as an exhaustive or even as the highlights of inner experience in conversation. For example, I didn't list that people are often thinking about some event related to what the speaker is describing, or are innerly seeing a scene related to what the speaker is saying, or are somehow explicitly processing the words that the speaker is speaking, and so on.

1:00:00 Mel: Hmm.

1:00:01 JBK: But, Russ, didn't you, uh, write or say somewhere that your students recently kind of convinced you to, to try out DES as a...

1:00:11 RTH: Yeah. I, I, I have, I have *said* that I would not wear the beeper, because I didn't really wanna know about my own experience. I wanted to know about other people's experience. But I had a lab where I had like seven students all at the same time, which was sort of unusual for me. And they ganged up on me and said, you gotta wear the beeper!

1:00:28 JBK: [laughs].

1:00:29 RTH: And so I wore the beeper for one time and, and I, it was difficult for me for a variety of different kinds of reasons. But, uh, mostly unsymbolized thinking and sensory awareness, as I recall. [JBK: Same] [Mel: Hmm.]...But I'm not sure I'm a good DES participant, cuz it's... well, for a variety of different reasons.

Julian comments: My quiet "same" above refers to unsymbolized thinking. I had this in over 80% of samples, if I remember. I could speculate that some of my presuppositions come from this being a common type of experience for me and why your "misspeaking" characterization of my presuppositions—[50:01] "well there's gotta be something mental here"—spoke to me.

1:00:54 Mel: Did you find that wearing it helped you... like, do *your* side of things better or just confused you more?

1:00:54 Russ comments: Students who are entering my lab typically wear the beeper, and are interviewed by the entire group, for several sampling days. It's sort of an initiation ritual, and I do think it helps all the lab members be better interviewers because the interviewee learns that it is indeed difficult, and the others deepen their appreciation for the fact that others, even those in similar situations, are different from themselves.

1:01:06 RTH: Well, back in the day, and that would, we're talking 1976, I wore the beeper for a year, nonstop.

1:01:12 Mel: A year!?! [looks incredulous]

1:01:12 RTH: Every day for a year, back when I, when I was trying to figure out what to, what, what to do. So I, I had built the first beeper in 1974, 3, 1973, the end of 1973. [Mel: Yeah.] And then used it in the way that people are nowadays, mostly, using beepers (except that I was ahead of them), I wh- but giving questionnaires at the moment of beeps. And, and, uh, and by the time 1976 ca- rolled around, I was pretty sure I didn't really know what a questionnaire Likert scale 4 on some question meant. And it didn't matter whether you delivered it as a written questionnaire or whether you delivered it as a moment-of-the-beep questionnaire, you *still* didn't know what you were talking about. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

1:01:55 [RTH continues] And so I spent a year wearing the beep...Cuz I thought the beeper was a good idea, but giving questionnaires *wasn't*. [Mel: Hmm.] And so I wore the beeper for a year trying to figure out, well, what, what might one do if one weren't, wasn't gonna give questionnaires. [Mel: Hmm.]

1:02:15 [RTH continues] But the, but, and, and out of that came the beginnings of Descriptive Experience Sampling. It's of course morphed somewhat over the years, but, but, but the heart of it was there at the end of that year. And out of that came a conviction that I shouldn't really be interested in my own experience anymore. I, I should... I don't want to have a favorite... Part, part of my criticism of most

psychology, I guess, is that people wanna put their own opinions onto other people... and validate their own theories. And so I studiously avoided trying to do that.

1:02:15 R-J&M: That somewhat compresses the actual history. I did wear the beeper all day every day during the 1976-1977 years. But it took a couple more years before the necessity of simple description became clear. During that period I was also studying the early Introspectionists (Titchener, Külpe, etc.), the phenomenologists (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, the Duquesne school), the meditative traditions, the humanists (including Fritz Perls, who had a lot to say about moments and experience), the behaviorists (including B.F. Skinner, who had a lot to say about the risks of mentalisms, and although he is generally given credit for holding that inner experience doesn't exist, that's not at all what he actually thought). Grind all that together (compost it might be an apter metaphor) with the potential of the beeper as a new tool and you get (or at least I got) DES.

1:02:56 Mel: Interesting. Interesting.

1:02:59 JBK: Do you think you got stuff out of your year of beeping though?

1:03:07 Mel: What?

1:03:08 RTH: Probably.

1:03:09 Mel: [inaudible] Russ, yeah, in your...

1:03:12 RTH: I would, I I'm sure I did, but, but I don't know what, I don't know how to answer the question.

1:03:20 Mel: Do you feel like you, um, spent so much time thinking about your own thinking that you went a little bit insane? [laughs]

1:03:27 RTH: Well, I was probably insane before that. So...[they all laugh] What, what, what I, what I think, I, what I think I, I think sort of the *main thing* out of the whole deal is, is an, an interest in, in what is *really going on*, *not* in generalities about it... And, y'know, this moment is different from that moment is different from that moment. This person is different from that person is different from that person. You gotta, you gotta see this person at a moment. You gotta see Mel at this moment. You gotta see Mel at that moment. You gotta see Mel at that moment. And at the *end* of the time, after a half a dozen days of those kinds of things, *maybe* we could say something interesting about Mel. And, *and* I would, and *I think* that what, that, that we would end up knowing something about Mel that would be tough to find out in any other way.

1:04:30 [RTH pauses and continues] And, and, and it's, it's the difference between what I think I wrote (you all may have looked at or whatever) [see the comment at 0:10 in transcript 1] about the di- the diamonds and glass deal. That the glass is, the *glass* is Mel saying "this is the way I usually am." And that's interesting enough. It's, y'know, like it's shiny, it's a shiny bit of something and we can talk about that. But it's not as interesting as Mel being at this beep and Mel being at that beep and Mel being at this beep [those are what RTH calls *diamonds*]. And then when we accumulate 24, 36 or

whatever diamonds, what Mel is *actually like*, then we can make a generalization, which I would call a *true* generalization, about Mel, based on 36 observations. And that is more interesting than a...Mel saying, even honestly enough, "y'know, well I'm, I'm, I'm *always*, when I'm talking in conversation, I'm listening to the other guy." That's just... it's *not possible* to understand what Mel means in that situation without having bit by bit by bit by bit.

1:05:41 Mel: Mm. I'll ask you one other question on this, um, more broad thing. Do you think it's like nature or nurture or some sort of like: Are we genetically like this? Or did I become like this?

1:06:02 RTH: I don't know the answer to that. I would guess it's both, some of both, but I don't really know. You would *think* that psychology would find that a very interesting question, but apparently it doesn't. It should. It should.

1:06:15 Mel: [laughs] I find that *very* interesting! You...

1:06:18 RTH: And you *should* because it is, it *is* interesting! But to, but to *know* about that, what we would have to do: to, to know the answer to that question, which is an important question, we would have to beep people when they were 10 years old and 12 years old; and we would've to find identical twins and beep them. And y'know, we have to do all those kinds of studies. Those would be totally interesting studies to do. Y'know, if you had an identical twin, we should be sampling with that identical twin, particularly if you happen to have been raised in different situations, we could separate those apart. But you've got... but y'know, there's lots of identical twin studies, but they're all questionnaire studies or exterior observation studies... which I find difficult to credit. Uh, they're, y'know, they're interesting enough; people spend a lot of time trying to track down identical twins, but then they ask them questions which are crap [JBK laughs], which is too bad.

1:07:20 Mel: Because I think it's really interesting to wonder like why we evolved like this. Like why my, the way I experience life could be so vastly different to how somebody else experiences life. Like, in just having started this with you all, this conversation seems to come up with people a *lot*. And I'm just learning through friends or like anyone, my gosh! *How they think!!* And I understand like we take that with a grain of salt cuz I haven't done the sampling or whatever, but how they think their inner experience is compared to how my, I think mine is or whatever is *so vastly* different. It's like we're all speaking different languages. So like what, what, what's that about!?! [laughs] Like what evolutionary thing has made that, y'know?

1:08:14 RTH: I think that's totally the most interesting question in the universe (or one of, [Mel: Yeah.] one of one of the most interesting questions in the universe). But the only way you can answer that is to go through the kinda stuff that we're doing now with sort of a lot of people. And, [Mel: Yeah.] and *so far* in *our* culture, we have not...we have not spent the time.

1:08:39 Mel: Yeah, true. Because then like...cult, if you did like age variety or cultural variety or like, y'know, my God, you could get some interesting stuff, Russ.

1:08:51 RTH: Absolutely. [JBK: Mm-hmm.]

1:08:53 Mel: Anyway, sorry I took us on a tangent, but I just find it very interesting. Okay.

1:08:57 JBK: It's a nice tangent. I, I'm curious because when you first emailed us, Mel, you said, um, that you didn't have any anxiety, and that was a particularity of your experience. And I was like, *okay, interesting, but, y'know, bracket it*, as, as we say, and let's look at your samples and, and, and not think too much about how you characterize yourself. Um, but I mean, from the, from the samples, I, I guess I could see why you, you say something like that. Like, do you, do you understand, um, that characterization of yourself differently now?

1:08:57 Russ comments: Good for JBK for waiting four days to ask this question, but it is still, in my view, a problematic question for two reasons. First, it asks for speculation when the aim of DES is to *suppress* speculation in the service of faithful description. But worse, it interjects into DES something that has not at all appeared in Mel's sampling. It conveys to Mel: *JBK is interested in what I said about anxiety*, and that has the risk of polluting subsequent sampling, potentially twisting Mel's upcoming sampling descriptions to consider anxiety not because anxiety was a feature of the particular sample but because JBK has suggested that we talk about it.

Q: Didn't you do the same thing in answer to Mel's question about others' experience of conversation (57:38)?

A: No, I didn't, for two fundamentally important reasons. First, *Mel* initiated that conversation, not me, whereas here JBK initiated it. Second, the answer I gave was, schematically, *there are lots of things, X, Y, Z, and so on, none of which I am particularly interested in and none of which are particularly relevant to Mel*. Here, by contrast, JBK has said *there is one thing, X, which is particularly interesting to me and presumably important to Mel*. Mine is a level-playing-field answer; JBK's is an invitation-to-collusion question.

I suspect that Mel is strong enough to resist the ramifications of this question, but it was an easily avoidable risk: JBK could have held on to that question and asked it at the conclusion of sampling with Mel.

1:09:39 Mel: Uh, not differently, but I think I can under... and again, this is all just like, y'know... I'm not a doctor, I'm, but, but for me, like, I think that it's definitely linked in terms of, y'know, the sampling that we've come across has shown that my experience is quite often very quiet and yet this nothingness. And I think that that is directly linked to my lack of anxiety because...y'know, I think people that *do* experience a lot of anxiety would describe their inner experience quite opposite to mine in terms of it's really loud and it's a thousand places and whatever. So just in a purely, not [laughs], not, um...not a doctor, not a psychologist, [JBK laughs] sort of blinking way *to me* that seems super relevant. So yeah... I think that this sort of quiet mind that I use as shorthand, I think that's definitely linked to that.

1:10:35 [Mel continues] And then I just have so many other questions about, y'know, like, I'm incredibly creative, or like all these sorts of things. So my, y'know, next layer to all of this in terms of curiosity is about well, what, what is and isn't linked or,

y'know, I've mentioned before, but like I have a really terrible memory. Like, is that linked to my inner experience? And I think that going back to the anxiety thing, like, because I have a really bad memory, I, I don't... my quiet mind doesn't stew over things that have happened because it's sort of in and out and it's gone. And I'm always this consciously present thing. And then *also* I don't really project into the future or overthink the future because my mind's quiet. It doesn't, it doesn't *do* that.

1:11:20 [Mel continues] Now, the other part of that, too, is whether I have always been like this and I was born like this and this is genetic and or this is some sort of nature-nurture thing, or whether at some point I did things that trained this muscle to be quieter. Like these are all sorts of questions that I have about the whole thing. [JBK: Mm-hmm.]

1:11:45 JBK: Mm-hmm...Yeah. I, I think, yeah...it's hard. You can get these DES samples and then to extrapolate from that and answer these broader questions is always hard. And the, the nature-nurture stuff is super interesting. But yeah, it's, it's hard to even answer that. But, um, because the only time I've heard descriptions in psychology of people without any anxiety is in terms of psychopaths [Mel laughs], which is usually has like a negative connotation, of course. Um, so [Mel and JBK laugh], [Mel, while laughing: So are you saying I'm a psychopath?] I know, it's, it's just very interesting to me, this thing. I mean, I'm a quite anxious guy, so [laughs]. [Mel: Yeah.] I wouldn't mind a bit of nothingness sometimes. [sirens]

1:12:35 RTH: So I, I would point out that this line of questioning was a, what I would call a *glass* line of questioning...

1:12:42 JBK: Yeah...

1:12:43 RTH: And...

1:12:44 JBK: But, um...

1:12:45 RTH: You're free to make glass kinds of questionings. But what I, what I want you to know, may I want you to be exquisitely clear about the distinction between a *glass* kind of question and a *diamond* kind of question. From *my* point of view, you ask a glass kind of question and I go to sleep, because I'm pretty sure Mel's gonna give a glass kind of answer, which she did, and she's not gonna know what she's talking about and neither am I. And it, it's *not* going to be as interesting as a diamond kind of question. *Later on*, if we can accumulate enough diamonds, maybe we're gonna be able to answer something about that. But in the meantime, it's...

1:13:19 JBK: So you wouldn't prematurely jump. Because I do think there's a desire to like...to kind of link and understand ourselves and form broader narratives.

1:13:31 RTH: There totally is. But when, when, when we do that, we don't know what the fuck we're talking about. [Mel laughs] [JBK: Hmm.]

1:13:31 Russ comments:.

RE [1:11:45] “You can get these DES samples and then to extrapolate from that and answer these broader questions”: A mixture of diamonds and glass is glass. Less metaphorically: If you corrupt DES with speculations, theories, and special interests, you no longer have DES, not even a corrupted version of DES. You have speculations, theories, and special interests that masquerade as DES.

In an important way, a mixture of diamonds and glass is worse than glass by itself. If you corrupt DES is speculations, theories, and special interests, then you will conclude that DES did not provide anything of value (because diamonds + glass = glass), and then you will conclude that DES is not of value. You have to do DES pretty darn right before it is worth doing at all.

RE [1:11:45] “the only time I’ve heard descriptions in psychology of people without any anxiety is in terms of psychopaths”: I think there is almost no chance that what Julian means by *anxiety* (the kind of thing that psychopaths don’t have) is the same as what Mel means by *anxiety* (whatever that is, probably something like lack of stage-fright). That is, Julian and Mel are using the same word, but really they don’t know what they’re talking about. Certainly I don’t know what either one of them is talking about, which is why glass questions are not interesting to me.

The alternative is to be patient, bracket away your speculations, theories, and special interests, do DES in a high-fidelity kind of way and let it discover whatever it discovers. *Then* it might well be informative to ask whether DES provides any evidence that enlightens your speculations, theories, and special interests.

1:13:36 Mel: [laughs].

1:13:36 JBK: Mm-hmm.

1:13:41 Mel: Interesting. Okay. Um, so..

1:13:45 RTH: So we gon’ do this again?

1:13:47 Mel: Yes.

EMAIL EXCHANGES AFTER THE INTERVIEW

ABOUT SAMPLE 4.3 AND THE META ISSUE

After the interview, Julian wrote this first draft of the 4.3 sample. The conversation afterwards (conducted by email) relates to this description:

Sample 4.3: [Mel was in a café having a conversation with a friend Milly. Milly was talking]. Mel was absorbed in the conversation. (While the conversation absorbed/consumed Mel’s experience, it also wasn’t so strong in experience. There was not any content of the conversation present. The experience was indistinguishable or nearly indistinguishable to Mel from other experiences she described as autopilot, for instance sample 1.2 vacuuming. The absorption

quality came from Mel not experiencing anything else—no cafe sounds, no bodily sensations. Mel’s experience was simultaneously empty and absorbed).

Russ comments:

RE: While the conversation absorbed/consumed Mel’s experience, it also wasn’t so strong in experience.

I think that sentence is entirely misleading, and I suspect that the misleadingness comes from Julian’s hyper-(in my view)-interest in meta-experience. The conversation *was very* strong in Mel’s experience—it consumed/absorbed her. What was *not* strong (or, in my view, experienced *at all*) was any meta-experience of the conversation (that is, there was nothing like *oh I am really absorbed in this conversation*, whether innerly spoken, thought in any way, felt in any way, etc.). The interest in meta-experience comes entirely (I think) from Julian—Mel didn’t imply it in any way whatsoever, and meta-experience is rare (certainly it does happen sometimes) in DES.

Julian comments: No, I don’t think there’s a meta aspect. I notice you quite frequently attribute my thoughts and questions as being meta when they’re not. Maybe this is a presupposition of yours—that I’m too meta a sort of guy. What I mean is I’m intrigued by her characterizing this as being similar [I believe she actually said something like “exactly the same”] to her autopilot experiences. I would like to try to describe this in some way because I think it’s important for understanding the experience. Granted, it may be premature and we should trust the iterative process. But I’m trying to get at how a next-to-nothing kind of thing can also be completely absorbing. I don’t want to attach too strongly to this next-to-nothing description. It may not be so accurate here. But basically I don’t want to leave the description at Mel being absorbed and end it there. I think there’s something experientially particular about Mel’s absorption that I would like to describe in more detail.

Russ comments: In the description you write “There was not any content of the conversation present.” To me, that seems to translate as “Mel did not have a meta-awareness of the content.” I think that is a true statement, but is that what you mean? If not, what did you mean?

In the previous comment you write “I’m intrigued by her characterizing this as being similar [I believe she actually said something like “exactly the same”] to her autopilot experiences.” Based on long, mostly painful personal experience, I would say that it has generally been useful to notice my own reactions (such as intrigue, curiosity, thinking-I-understand, wanting, confidence, disbelief, anger, etc.) and to understand that those reactions are always (or maybe almost always) best understood as being inside out or backwards. That is, I have learned, through hard experience over the years, that when (say) intrigue arises in me, it says more about *me* than about *Mel*, and then to follow that feeling in the *opposite* direction to what seems natural. Mel’s experience is *not* intriguing. It is truly Mel-personal, and that she would struggle to describe it to us is truly a gift. But to the extent that there is intrigue, it comes from *Julian*, and (I think) signals the operation of a presupposition in the vicinity. (This is not about the word *intrigue*; it is about whatever the feeling is that arises, about which Julian grunts *intrigue*.)

Here, if I had to guess, the intrigue is an inverted sign of Julian's too-strong interest in the words. His sentence ("I'm intrigued by her characterizing this as being similar [I believe she actually said something like 'exactly the same'] to her autopilot experiences") 100% targets the words she uses (her characterizing, her use of "exactly the same") rather than the experience itself. For comparison sake, he did not write "What is it about her experience that would lead her to grunt something about similar or the same?"

Q: Now *you* are quibbling about words. Those two sentences mean the same thing.

A: No they do not. It is Julian's preoccupation with the words that leads to "But I'm trying to get at how a next-to-nothing kind of thing can also be completely absorbing."

Broadly speaking, there are two ways of approaching the effort to grasp Mel's experience. One is to ask, *What is it about Mel's experience that makes it hard for me to grasp Mel's experience?* And the other is to ask, *What is it about me that makes it hard for me to grasp Mel's experience?* I think the second way is generally preferable, as well as almost always avoided.

Mel's experience is *not* a next-to-nothing kind of thing, and it is not a completely absorbing thing; it is something about which Mel grunted something about nothing, and about next to nothing, and about completely absorbing (that is, she said syāt next to syāt nothing in syāt describing her syāt experience and also syāt said that syāt it syāt was syāt completely absorbing.

Julian comments: Maybe we're talking about different levels of meta.

If Mel's experience of talking is the same to her as her experience of listening, and it's the same at different points in the conversation, then that's not a question of meta-awareness to me, that's a question of awareness.

Meta-awareness for me would be something like a thought like: *oh now I'm listening to my friend talk about spaceships.*

Awareness could be, for instance, your friend is talking about spaceships and you have a mental image of a cartoon spaceship floating with stars behind.

I don't want to limit awareness to that though. It could be that you're absorbed in your friend talking about spaceships, and there's something space-shippy about that absorption that makes the experience *different* from a few minutes later when your friend is talking about their love life.

When I say that the content was not experienced it means I'm taking Mel's word that there was nothing different about her absorption when she's talking from absorption when Milly's talking. It means that whatever Milly happened to be talking about did not color Mel's experience at the time. To me, that is not meta.

Of course, there's the possibility that we shouldn't take Mel's word for it that experience was exactly the same for these different moments. Maybe they *were* different in some way and the content of the conversation had something to do with that. Is this what you think?

Agreed that words like "awareness" give it a Cartesian flavor. I mostly use it interchangeably with "experience."

Russ comments:

RE: “there’s something space-shippy about that absorption that makes the experience *different* from a few minutes later when your friend is talking about their love life”

You take an adjective (absorbed), nounify it (absorption), and then speculate about the characteristics of that thing—that it’s different in one case from the next. As I have said, I think that is Julian’s-meta-interest. I don’t really care what we call it; I happily accept that it is different from Mel’s-meta-interest, which would be something like *at the moment of the beep I was noticing how attentive I was to what Milly was saying*. We agree, I think, that there was no Mel’s-meta-interest.

RE “I’m taking Mel’s word that there was nothing different about her absorption when she’s talking from absorption when Milly’s talking”

Mel (I think—you can ask her) and I don’t want you to take Mel’s word for anything; we want you to understand what Mel is trying to tell you (it’s not about the words). Mel said she was absorbed (adjective) when Milly was talking. She said she was absorbed (adjective) when she was talking. We asked whether there were difference in those experiences, and she said something like “no—they seem the same.” So far, so good—we’re trying to describe Mel’s experience. But when you say “there was nothing different about her absorption when she’s talking from absorption when Milly’s talking,” you are talking about something that *you think* lies alongside or explains Mel’s being absorbed: that is, this absorption thing (noun) is meta to (lies alongside or explains) her experience process (verb described with adjectives). That lying-alongside or explaining comes from Julian, so I think it is reasonable to call it Julian’s-meta-interest (but there may well be a better way to talk about it).

The point here is that it’s okay to ask whether Mel’s experience at time A seems the same as her experience at time B, *as long as you are not asking her to speculate about some non-experiential thing*.

RE “there’s the possibility that we shouldn’t take Mel’s word for it that experience was exactly the same for these different moments. Maybe they *were* different in some way and the content of the conversation had something to do with that. Is this what you think?”

No, that’s not what I think. I think we should help Mel describe, with as much fidelity as we together can muster, what she is capable of describing, and we should not push her into “describing” things that she is not capable of describing. She can describe her experience—we should help her do that. She cannot describe her absorption because it doesn’t exist—we shouldn’t go there.

Later, on the basis of Mel’s (and perhaps others’) descriptions, someone might be in a position to speculate (perhaps productively) about this thing called absorption. I have said that it is desirable to firewall the speculator away from the describer. The reason for that desirability is what is at stake here: I think you confuse description and speculation, which warps your description and therefore probably torpedoes any speculation.

ABOUT THE USE OF PSEUDONYMS FOR SAMPLE 4.3

Julian comments: Should we use a pseudonym for Milly (if I even remembered that name right)? Or avoid names altogether?

Russ comments: This is, in my view, a seriously misguided question. If your interest is in high-fidelity apprehension of Mel's experience, any reference to this apprehension *has to be* of Mel's conversation (and Mel's absorption) *with Milly*, not with Mel's conversation with some abstract person. Later, after additional sampling, we may discover that Mel has similar or different absorption with other of her acquaintances, and there is no possible way that we will be able to keep track of who's who, or what the details of each of those absorptions were (or if we can keep track, it will require keeping track of some cast-of-characters'-alias table, which will distract us from the trying to keep track of Mel's similar or different experience across those individuals).

There may come a time, if we want to publish something about this, that we will want to change "Milly" to a pseudonym—I'd have no problem with that. But *then* the task will not be apprehension-with-fidelity, it will be translating-the-already-apprehended-something-to-something-ready-for-public-consumption. That is a very different task.

Julian's comment is (to me) a major issue because it suggests that Julian is worried about some entirely extraneous factor rather than about how to apprehend experience with fidelity. I think one will never get to experience with fidelity unless one is focused on getting to experience with fidelity.

So I think Julian's interest in pseudonyms signals Julian's disinterest in fidelity. I accept that he has been trained well in that regard (that is, this is not a personal failing of Julian), because objective science and qualitative science stress/preach the importance of pseudonyms. However, in my view, such stress should be recognized as being part of science's coverup of its failure to be concerned with grasping inner experience with fidelity.

Q: Why do you use the extreme "Julian's *disinterest* in fidelity"? Wouldn't it be more accurate (as well as kinder) to say something like "Julian's imperfect grasp of fidelity" or "Julian has not yet freed himself from the customary conventions of psychological science"? After all, he has sought you out for these conversations about inner experience—doesn't that demonstrate his interest in fidelity?

A: I don't know what would be best for Julian or for any other reader (that would require an omniscience that I do not have). But what I *think* is that if Julian is to be genuinely interested in fidelity, he has to use an ever finer and finer sieve to screen out impediments to fidelity. That means that at every step of the way he has to accept that he is not now adequately focused on fidelity. There is no *this is good enough* in any step of faithful apprehension; there is only *how am I falling short* now.

Julian comments: It's true, I don't like the phrasing. "Interest" to me is something experiential and I don't think you have the omniscience to make those kinds of statements. Or that they're inconsistent with our approach to the scope of experience in DES. That being said, I do 100% agree with your prior argument. I'm curious, do you have something non-experiential in mind when you say interest or disinterest? Or is it a statement about broad experience?

Russ comments: It is a corollary of what I said above at "over the years, that when (say) intrigue arises in me, it says more about me than about Mel, and then to follow that feeling in the *opposite* direction to what seems natural." When I head in that

opposite direction, I have also found it useful is to be as negative about myself as I can be: so *intrigue* becomes something like *self-absorption*, and *not adequately focused* becomes something like *disinterested*, and so on. The logic: presuppositions are delusions, and delusions are self-protective, so any emotion that is created by a presupposition (intrigue, for example), will be far too positive than it deserves. So any attempt to counter a presupposition has to deal with more negativity than the presupposition allowed.

Julian comments: What motivates you if not curiosity? You've spoken many times about people's experience being the most interesting thing there is. Or do you mean just curiosity in the wrong things? The glass?

Russ comments: Without making it too much about the words, *curiosity* has implications of shallow self-interest: I can be curious about Trump's relationship with Stormy Daniels. But I don't *really* care about it—I'll never know about it, it is not possible to know about it, there's no real value in knowing about it. And curiosity has the connotation of erratic whim—today about Stormy, tomorrow about butterflies in Mexico, and so on.

As I have said, it's iterative all the way down. I concern myself today with what I really care about in the professional world, more than mere curiosity. And tomorrow, I try to refine what I really care about in the professional world today more than I did yesterday. And so on. Rather than curiosity, it's closer to value, or worth, or contribution. I don't know what any of those things truly are (I'm not omniscient), but I can try to align myself with them (to try is within the ken of mere mortals), and I can try harder today than I did yesterday. You could call that curiosity if you like, but that undersells it substantially. And yes, it is basically the same distinction as between diamonds and glass, between knowing what we're talking about and not knowing.

ABOUT SAMPLE 4.5 RE: EXPERIENCE BEING "NOT-MUCH-MORE-THAN-NOTHING"

After the interview, Julian wrote this first draft of the 4.5 sample. The conversation afterwards (conducted by email) relates to this description:

Original: 4.5 [Mel was still mid-conversation with her friend. This time she was talking.] Mel was still absorbed by the conversation. (This experience was indistinguishable to Mel from the previous two, even though here Mel was talking. Again content was not experienced. The experience was both not-much-more-than-nothing and fully present, occupying Mel's awareness at the time.)

Russ comments:

RE: "The experience was both not-much-more-than-nothing and fully present, occupying Mel's awareness at the time."

The statement "The experience was...occupying Mel's awareness" is a statement of meta-experience. Mel's experience was not at all meta-experiential.

Julian comments: No, I don't mean it in a meta way. I don't know the best way to phrase it so let me try out a bunch: It was the only thing in Mel's consciousness. It was

the totality of Mel's experience. Nothing else was in Mel's experience competing with it. It was the only thing there, and as such, fully absorbing. It was all of Mel's conscious experience. Mel's consciousness was fully contained in it.

I still think there's some particularity about Mel's experience that would benefit from further qualification. Absorption is another word kind of like "processing". It's maybe a bit less empty but still a pretty empty word. It seems to me there are a million and two ways to be absorbed. How to understand Mel's particular absorption at this moment?

I think recognizing that the absorption doesn't change based on who's talking is part of it. To me, the comparisons to vacuuming and autopilot experience are hard to ignore. Maybe you're right and we should put it aside for other sampling days. I just wanted to get at it for these samples because I do think it's compelling. And there's no ability to say we'd get similar samples.

I understand your perspective that it's too risky to compare this to very early sampling days. And we shouldn't take Mel's generalizations at face value (for instance that all her autopilot-y moments could be the same). I just think these descriptions could get closer to Mel's actual experience. Saying too little is also a risk and could distort as much as saying-too-much.

Russ comments: In the new description you write "Again content was not experienced." To me, that seems to translate as "Mel did not have a meta-awareness of the content." I think that is a true statement, but is that what you mean? If not, what did you mean?

In the first paragraph of your response, all your alternatives are meta-experiential (including denials thereof), in my view.

Julian wrote	Russ comments
It was the only thing in Mel's consciousness.	This presumes you have access to Mel's consciousness and its contents
It was the totality of Mel's experience.	This presumes that you know how Mel's experience operates—that it has a totality
Nothing else was in Mel's experience competing with it.	This presumes you have access to Mel's experience and how it operates (that things compete)
It was the only thing there, and as such, fully absorbing.	This presumes you have access to Mel's what's there and how it operates-if there is only one thing there, it is absorbing
It was all of Mel's conscious experience.	This presumes you know how Mel's conscious experience works—that there is a maximum content.
Mel's consciousness was fully contained in it.	This presumes you know what Mel's consciousness is and how it works

Any Cartesian-theater reference is meta-experiential—it implies there is an experienter that is different from the thing experienced.

RE: "I still think there's some particularity about Mel's experience that would benefit from further qualification."

I think that would be desirable if there were a good way to further qualify. We could say, “Mel did not have a meta-awareness of the content.” That’s a true statement, but it implies some kind of importance of meta-awareness, which I think is undesirable. In parallel, we could say, “Mel did not have an image of a Cadillac Escalade.” That’s a true statement, but it implies some kind of importance of images and Escalades, which I think is undesirable. I don’t see any more warrant for mentioning meta-awareness than for mentioning images or Escalades. I think there might be warrant to add a bracketed sentence such as “[Even though Mel was talking, she did not experience what she was saying—the words just came out.]” That is a statement about meta-awareness, but (a) it is bracketed, so as not to be confused with description; and (b) it is slightly remarkable in that most DES descriptions of speaking have more than nothing awareness.

RE: “Absorption is another word kind of like ‘processing’.”

First, we said that Mel was *absorbed* the verb; we did not invoke “absorption” the noun. Second, it seems to me that “Mel was absorbed in the conversation” is a pretty good description (if you have a better one, I’d like to hear it). Third, “processing” is generally a hypothetical inference about a mental state, rather than a description of experience, so when I refer to processing, I generally undermine it in some way.

RE: “there are a million and two ways to be absorbed”.

There are a million and two *things to be absorbed in*, but I’m not sure there are many experiential ways to be absorbed.

Julian comments: I agree with everything. Except when it comes to the last bit. I’m confused. I would expect different ways. Do you have many other absorption samples?

Russ comments: You are asking about a noun / thing, about which I know nothing. I suspect there are different experiences where the adjective *absorbed* is useful, but I don’t have a catalog.