

Mel May
Mel Interview 5

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the November 14 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/UaHXaczN7vQ>. 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 RTH: Do you wanna do... start the, re start the questioning, Julian? Or would you rather just watch that happen today?
- 0:00 Russ comment: JBK has been and is somewhat sick.
- 0:08 JBK: Um, I can start, I guess I can still, we could still alternate until I, y'know, tap out...
- 0:15 RTH: [laughs]. Okay.
- 0:17 Mel: This is good. It might lead to some very interesting questioning [laughs], depending on how many painkillers you've taken.
- 0:23 JBK: [laughs] More, even more confusion than usual.
- 0:28 RTH: What kind of pain... Depends on what kind of painkiller. So, are, are we recording on, uh, Zen?
- 0:34 JBK: Uh, yeah, Zen is recording. [RTH: Okay.] By the way, when you do the transcripts, Russ, do you, you take the timestamp from the video I send, or is it always from, from the [inaudible] video?
- 0:47 RTH: I take the timestamps from the video that actually has a timestamp on the recording. So if you put a clock on, that's the clock that I would use for the timestamp.
- 0:57 JBK: Yeah, I think for one of them there's some...I gotta look into the time issues. I think on the first, on day 1 there were a couple... but I think for these later ones it's fine cuz the, the clock's on from the beginning. Alright.
- 1:12 RTH: I don't, I don't, I don't think I've had any difficulties with the clocks that I know of. Uh, it's quite possible that I haven't seen them.

- 1:20 JBK: So I think from day 1 you put the clock on later maybe? Maybe something got...
- 1:27 RTH: I think maybe I put the clock on later, but I, when I put the clock on, I matched it with the time that was on the video.
- 1:32 JBK: Yeah... I dunno. Yeah, I gotta look back into it. There was like-
- 1:36 RTH: So I don't, I don't think there are any issues. Let's put it this way. There aren't any issues that I know of.
- 1:41 JBK: Okay. It was like 15 seconds off in parts from the video I was watching. But yeah, I just gotta go through and make sure I'm watching the right video. Yeah.
- 1:50 RTH: Okay.
- 1:51 JBK: All right. Should we do beep, beep 1?
- 1:53 RTH: Yep.

SAMPLE 5.1 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 1:55 Mel: Um, okay. So I did them this morning. So first one went off at 10:13... um, and I was waiting for a coffee looking at a photo of a tote bag I'd bought recently on my phone. Um, and I was just looking at it. I've written, "I was kind of admiring it," but there was no like, like, um, thought process *per se*. I was just looking at it, admiring it.
- 2:20 JBK: Mm-hmm. Um, was this, uh, looking at the photo, was that in your experienced consciousness? Or was it the action that was, that happened to be going on at this time?
- 2:20 Russ comments: This is an unwarranted question about meta-awareness—it asks whether the *looking at* the photo was in experience, not simply whether the *photo* was in experience. There were extended discussions of JBK's presuppositions about meta-awareness in the interview and commentary throughout sampling day 4. The present question is evidence that presuppositions die hard. That is not an idiosyncrasy of JBK; delusions in general do not give up without a protracted, stubborn, repeated fight.
This presupposition throws the interview immediately off kilter. Mel's response indicates that she does not understand what he means.
- Julian comments: We've been through this so no need to rehash too much. But it's not a meta-awareness presupposition, it's unclear phrasing. What I mean here is the same as you do with your spiel—so fact of the universe your eyes are pointed here etc. etc. but is that experiential?
- 2:34 Mel: Hmm. I'm not sure. Like, what, what's the distinction there? Like I definitely was...

- 2:39 JBK: I guess if this is a nothing moment and that was just the current action? Or if it was actually something experienced?
- 2:39 Russ comments: That question suggests that Julian's 2:20 question may have been motivated by an interest in nothingness rather than by an interest in meta-awareness, as if he had asked "Um, was this, ~~uh, looking at the~~ photo, was that in your experienced consciousness?"
- 2:46 Mel: Yeah... No, I think the reason, like I put here, um, "admiring it question mark." So like this, I, I think it wasn't a nothingness sort of thing. Um, like I was looking at it and mulling something over about it. So I think that the... yeah, I was, I was think, thinking.
- 2:46 Julian comments: I am trying to ask only about the looking-at-photo part of Mel's experience at this moment. But in her answer, the alternatives she's considering seem to be a) nothing *at all*; or b) the looking and mulling/vibe. It seems she doesn't consider isolating just the looking. And quite possibly in her experience, they weren't separate. In our final description we collaborated on, we have merely: "She was admiring the tote bag" making no attempt to separate looking and feeling.
I could have asked more about the looking part, as you critique later [7:58]. I sensed it was hard for me to get an answer so chalked it up to: it's there but it's not particularly grabbing attention, it's not attention to any particular detail. I missed the possibility that I was too early on trying to separate the looking from the vibe, and in doing so, not finding out enough info about either one.
- 3:08 JBK: Okay. So before you, I think you said something like there wasn't a huge thought component but... or, or... So how would you characterize this, this mulling kind of admiring?

3:08



Russ comments: I said in my current comment to transcript 4 (25:48) that I had a "perhaps idiosyncratic" use of "meta" when JBK is in an "analyzing / conceptualizing / theorizing-about / bucket-sorting sense." I'm still trying to clarify why (or whether) that should count as "meta," and in so doing, I will conclude that this is not idiosyncratic to Russ; it is simply meta.

What Mel says here at 1:55 (in green in the schematic) is *not* meta—Mel is 100% experientially aimed at the tote. There is no aspect of Mel's experience that is aimed at Mel herself; she is not experiencing herself as the regarder of the tote—there is no aspect of her experience that could be even remotely characterized as being anything like *Looky here! Mel is admiring!* Mel's experience at the moment of the beep is *not* aimed at Mel; that is, Mel's experience is not meta. I think Julian and I agree about that.

But what JBK asks for at 3:08 (in goldenrod in the schematic) *is* aimed at Mel. JBK is asking Mel to describe *Mel's* mulling/admiring, and she will try to do so, will say it is pleasurable, vibe-y, not quite a feeling. This *is* a meta conversation because it is about *Mel*, not about Mel's experience at the moment of the beep. Her at-the-moment-of-the-beep experience is *not* of a mulling kind of admiring; it is of the *tote*, which she finds admirable.

So by nounifying "admiring" and then asking about it, JBK draws (wittingly or unwittingly) Mel into a meta view of her own experience, encourages her to talk about the process that leads to her experience, that lies behind her experience, rather than the experience itself. So it's meta not because Mel's original naturally occurring experience was meta, but because JBK's questioning induces both of them to take a meta point of view.

So there are two kinds of meta: naturally occurring at the moment of the beep and induced by analyzing / conceptualizing / theorizing-about / bucket-sorting. They

are both meta because they aim at Mel, not at Mel's experience at the moment of the beep.

3:25 Mel: Um...I would say, well, another... I put one other thing after that actually that I didn't read. I wrote, "I found the design soothing question mark."

3:37 JBK: Soothing. Okay.

3:39 Mel: So...

3:41 JBK: Do you think there was specifically something about the photo you were admiring or was like clear content? Not there?

3:51 Mel: I don't think clear content was there. I was definitely like looking at this image that I'd taken of the tote bag and then looking at the tote bag specifically within that photo. Um, but other than that it was just like, looking at that and yeah...like mulling that over. And I guess in terms of mulling that over what that, uh, could be characterized by was, I think those sort of words that I've tried to use, they're like admiring it or like finding something soothing about it. Like I was, I guess in a way sort of just looking at it and feel like.... It was pleasurable sort of for some reason. (Obviously that's why I bought this tote. I really like it.) But like, I wasn't, um... yeah, I wasn't like saying a sentence like, "oh, I like this tote," or, "I'm glad I bought that tote." It wasn't like that. It was like looking at it and mulling over. I think it goes kind of like last week when I was saying that sort of vibe-y...experience? Like that.

5:00 JBK: So a sort of vibe-y thing? ...[Mel: Mm-hmm.] Would you call it...? I guess it doesn't matter. I was gonna ask if you would call it more a vibe or a feeling, but I guess it doesn't matter what you call it so long as...

5:11 Mel: But yeah. In that realm definitely of like, that's an important distinction here. Like this wasn't a nothing, there was a, me looking at something and then, and the mulling that over is, I think when I'm in that category of like, feeling vibe-y, yeah, the state-of-being-y... Something almost emotional, but not, but that using the word emotional, like I was saying last week with feeling perhaps feels too, um, too, like consciously present. I would say it's like a rung down below that.

5:11 Russ comments: The "it" that they are talking about (e.g., "I was gonna ask if you would call it more a vibe or a feeling") is still the induced meta process—they have diminished it from a "mulling kind of admiring" to a "vibe-y feeling," but they are still treating it as if it was a thing separate from the tote.

5:44 JBK: Okay. Below feeling. So a bit maybe less present. Um, could, could I just get some context? It's like a tote bag. [Mel: Mm-hmm...] Is this a picture you took or it's like a...

5:56 Mel: It's a picture. I, I, I took, do you wanna say the tote bag? It's really nice.

5:59 JBK: Sure. [laughs].

6:03 Mel: This is a tote bag. Leon's Bagels in New York. [fetches and holds up the bag]

6:06 JBK: Leon's Bagels. Never been there.

6:07 Mel: So I'd just literally just taken a photo of it on my phone and sent that picture to my sister yesterday. And so when I was standing at the coffee shop this morning waiting for my coffee...sometimes when I'm waiting for a coffee (this bit to con, much context now), but sometimes I'll just look at my camera roll when I'm just waiting. Um, and I was just looking at that photo and just thinking... Hmm. [laughs] I was just kind of admiring it.

6:33 JBK: So kind of a... okay. So you're looking at this photo, there's kind of an admiring, soothing, pleasurable... [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Would, would any of particular of those descriptions be closest to describing it? Or is it kind of just vague and vibe-y or...?

6:51 Mel: Mmm. Vague. *Vague*. That is a word that I haven't been using, but that is correct. All all these vibe-y experiences that I'm trying to describe are vague, sort of emotional, sor- vague feelings, like *vague* feels nice there to describe what that feels like.

7:09 JBK: Okay. Because it's not specific content. It's not...[Mel: Yes!] specifically. "Oh, I like this about that."

7:15 Mel: Yes.

7:16 JBK: Um, and it's not a super strong feeling. It doesn't have a bodily location.

7:16 Russ comments: It's not vague. It's not vibe-y. It's not a feeling. It's not describable because it does not exist. The tote is apprehended in an admiring and soothing way. To think that there is a corresponding feeling/vibe/whatever of admiration or soothed is to reify a nonexperienced (induced) meta-awareness.

7:21 Mel: Yes. And it's not...yeah, there's not like a I'm...

7:23 JBK: So sorry. I mean, I, I actually didn't ask about that. You could correct me if I'm wrong.

7:26 Mel: No, no, I, I I really like it. I, I think that this is nice, cuz it's not, um, there's not a sharpness to it, so vague feels like a nice descriptor.

7:37 JBK: Okay. This kind of soothing, pleasurable. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, was, was there anything else in experience?

7:48 Mel: Not that I can recall.

7:50 JBK: And, um... I think I'm good.

7:58 RTH: So I wanna make sure that I've got the distinction between "I'm, I'm looking pleausurably soothingly at this picture," or "I'm looking at this picture and I am sort of separately noticing it as being pleausurable, soothing."

7:58 Russ comments: RTH misspeaks here: he intended to say something like: “the distinction between ‘I’m looking pleasurable, soothingly at this picture’, or ‘I’m looking at this picture and I am sort of feeling a pleasurable, soothingness’.” However, the second side of the distinction came out as meta-awareness of the first (naturally occurring) kind rather than of the second (induced) kind, and he elected not to try clear up the issue.

The interview never really identifies the target of Mel’s experience: Was Mel admiring the tote (that happens to be displayed in the photo)? Was Mel admiring the photo (that happens to display the tote)? Was Mel pleasurable, soothingly admiring the tote? Was Mel experiencing a feeling/vibe of pleasure/soothing as she admired the tote? Those distinctions are never really clarified.

Julian comments: Re: misspeaking. So it is possible, even for a skilled interviewer, to ask a meta question without meta presuppositions! Comment intended not in a *gotcha I’m not meta way* but to demonstrate that it can be hard to be clear about experience. Sometimes my language may be unclear, sometimes my thinking may be unclear, sometimes it may be unclear in the straight-forwardly meta way, and sometimes it may be unclear in the broader meta way. My aim going through these transcripts is to try to untangle my own unclear thinking and most importantly to get another stab at figuring out Mel’s experience.

Re: never really identifying the target. I agree, I didn’t get clarity on that. That goes back to my 2:46 comment. I went in assuming seeing the photo and vibes were separate. This caused confusion finding out about Mel’s seeing the photo. Lack of clarity here meant other distinctions later weren’t clear either.

Russ comments:

RE “I went in assuming seeing the photo and vibes were separate.”

To my ear, that is saying “I went in with a meta presupposition”: it is not hearing simply that Mel was admiring her purse; it is asking about the features of the admiring as if the admiring was a separate faculty that could be applied to the purse, which, in my view, is meta.

8:18 Mel: Uh... no, I’m not noticing it at the time. When the beep goes off and I’m trying to reflect on what it was like, then I can identify that. But at the time there’s not that meta level of *I’m looking at this and, and noting what I’m feeling pleasure*. Yeah.

8:32 RTH: That’s the way I understood it. But...

8:33 JBK: That’s how I understood. I dunno if I conveyed it more meta or like sometimes when I talk, like it can maybe come across more meta.

SAMPLE 5.2 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

8:42 RTH: Number 2.

8:43 Mel: Okay. This one's [laughs], like a little bit, um, embarrassing and makes me sound like a, a fan girl. But [laughs], this went off at 10:28 and I was walking back home from getting coffee. Um, and I was walking down Ludlow Street in the Lower East side thinking [laughs] about what I would say to Matty Healy if I ran into him before his concert tonight [laughs]. Um, and I've noted this because the thought was specific, so there was a specific thought... I thought, I was thinking, like, *what would I say to him if I ran into him on the street?* And the specific thought was, like, when the beep went off, I was thinking, I would say, "I love the performance art and cultural commentary you're doing at the moment." And I've written, "I wasn't visualizing meeting him, but I was definitely midway through considering what I would say if I met him. And it wasn't my voice saying the words though. It was conceptual, but it was a really distinct thought." [laughs], It's a bit embarrassing. So for context, Russ, um, this guy is like the lead singer of a band.

8:43 Russ comments: That Mel would tell us about an experience that she finds embarrassing is (a) a sign that Mel is willing to be genuinely forthcoming about her experience; and (b) an honor that I will try to deserve.

9:48 RTH: Okay. And, and so the thought was something like, "I love the performance art that you're currently doing." Is that right?

9:56 Mel: Yeah, I, the, the exact sort of... yeah, the *thought* was, "I love the performance art and cultural commentary you're doing at the moment." That was the exact thought I had when the beep went off.

9:56 Russ comments: Note that RTH misquotes Mel's original (omits "and cultural commentary") and Mel corrects him. Good! She's paying attention; she doesn't let RTH slide through a rough approximation.

10:09 RTH: So that's a pretty specific thing.

10:11 Mel: Yeah!

10:12 RTH: And do you mean it to be that specific? That it, it was that specific at the moment?

10:17 Mel: Mm-hmm. Because I was really in the process of like genuinely kind of, um, articulating exactly like... (I was in this embarrassing fantasy land), but I was really like articulating [gestures air quotes] what exactly what I would say to him if I m, if I met him. So when it went off, I was like in the process of like, working out [phone chime] the exact words that I would say. (Sorry, my thing just went off). So as the beep went off, that was like the conceptual sentence that I was sort of gonna... that I would say [laughs].

10:56 RTH: So I, I would like to understand the why... what, what *conceptual sentence* is. Is that in, is that in some way different from just a regular sentence?

- 11:06 Mel: Yeah, the, what I was trying to articulate there is that it's still not audio. Like, it's still not *my voice* saying that, but I know that I'm forming that sentence, if that makes sense.
- 11:20 RTH: And that *exact* sentence, not just the concept that could be put into words. That would be something like, well, *I love the performance art and conceptual, whatever*. I can't read it cuz my eyes are dilated. But, but whatever it is that you said, what I wanna know is, are those *specific words* present to you? Or is it just a concept that is so tight that that's the only way that you could put it into words?
- 11:20 Russ comments:
RE eyes dilated:
RTH started this interview just after a visit to the ophthalmologist.
- 11:43 Mel: Hmm. That's a really good question. Um, and a hard distinction to make because at first I was like *super sure* of that, of like, no, it was definitely the *words*. But then if I'm thinking about like yeah... really, really the inner experience of how that sentence was being formulated, then I guess I *am* leaning back towards more like a *really tight concept* rather than the words... maybe. But this feels really gray.
- 12:13 RTH: And does that grayness seem to come from, I'm not, *I just can't be sure. At the moment it seemed like it was words, but now I've lost my nerve about that?* Or is it that as best I can tell, I just don't, I don't really know.
- 12:13 Russ comments: It is possible for an experienced thought (a) to have no words in the original experience and yet be every bit as specific as *I love the performance art and cultural commentary you're doing at the moment*—for that phrase to be understood as being exact, so that alteration of any single word in the description (e.g., ... that you're doing *currently*) would be felt as unfaithful to the original experience. It is also possible for such a thought (b) to be experienced as being in words, even though those words are not articulated in any experienced way. It is also possible for such a thought (c) to be apprehended as spoken, or (d) as heard, or (e) as words somehow existing in some other way. All those are possible. Sometimes the discrimination is easy, e.g., they were words spoken in my own voice as if aloud. Sometimes the discrimination is difficult.
RTH's question should *not* be understood as necessarily seeking an answer—Mel was not skilled at making these discriminations at the only time that such discriminations are possible, namely, immediately following the beep. RTH's question is iterative training, aimed at *next time*. Then, Mel might be ready to make the discrimination among such experiential alternatives (if such a next time occurs).
- 12:26 Mel: Yeah...no, I, I think it's more, um, coming down to what my inner experience sort of looks like and how to sum it up. So I think I get like, I'm like, *oh, this was a distinct thought that I was having. I was formulating this sort of sentence and playing out this scenario in my head. Okay, well what was that specific words?* Blah, blah. But, but like, then that's where that vagueness and the, and the gray sort of comes in because then I go back to, well, all those really *simple* descriptors don't actually fit the experience

right? Like, it wasn't me saying that sentence out loud, even though I'm sure of the content of that concept and, y'know, so that's where the confusion comes in.

13:11 RTH: Well let, let's set aside the, the, uh, let's set aside the fact that if it were in words, it would *have to be* in a voice or something like that. Because I think words can be present by *themselves* without a voice; or they can be in a voice and the voice could be spoken or heard, or a lot of other, any other combination you could probably imagine. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So the question is, at the moment of this beep, *as best we can say*, [Mel: Mm-hmm] were those specific words present *somehow*, even though they might not have been spoken or heard? [Mel: Yes...] So the... so we are confident that *the words were there*, these are the words. [Mel: Yep.] And where we, and where we *lose* confidence is about the *manner in which* those words are present.

13:11 Julian comments: It's interesting here, Russ, that your comment is not "content neutral" as they say. You give Mel possibilities: that words can be present with a voice, or without a voice, etc. These come from past sampling you've done. So in a way, you're presenting results of past sampling to Mel. I would *seem* to be good scientific practice not to bring in any past sampling to figuring out Mel's experience.

By the way, this is not in any way a criticism. I think your comment was helpful. I'm trying to think out loud why. For one, it's the 5th day. It might be risky on day 1 to say: "it's possible this, it's possible that." But I think you also do that too. Very early on you say stuff like: "it's possible to be driving a car skillfully but not have it directly experienced at all times."

It's important to note that what you're doing is giving Mel possibilities. You list some things and then say "any other combination you could probably imagine." That's important for sure. You don't imply a favorite possibility.

You see that she's struggling with presuppositions and offer her alternatives. I think that's better than "content-neutral" interviewing that lets interviewees and interviewers stay in their presuppositions but is then able to say "see we did everything right?"

I'm curious if you have thoughts on when and how much info about other DES sampling to dole out.

Russ comments: For the reasons that you say in your penultimate paragraph, I am *not* in favor of content neutral interviewing. I'm in favor of skilled interviewing, which is to say, interviewing that helps the process bracket presuppositions, reduce misleading talk, and so on.

I think good interviewing strives to level the playing field. If I think the playing field is tilted in one direction, I will try to tilt it back to level or perhaps slightly beyond level. Then I will watch to see what happens—if it looks like the person has over-responded to my correction, then I will tilt it back. Usually I do that out in the open, explaining what I am doing and why, etc.

A critic might say that I am leading the witness. Indeed I am, but the alternatives are worse. I am leading the witness in the direction (as best I can discern it) of fidelity, *not* content. I am *not* (to the best of my ability) leading the witness in the direction of some preferred content or other. I don't care whether words are present or not; I don't care whether there is a voice involved or not; etc. I *do* care that if words are present, we say that words are present; and if not, not; etc.

The content-neutral strategy is, in my view, scientific. It gives the appearance of truth-seeking without doing the necessary personal work. It makes it seem that the best science can be done by anyone, because science will employ a procedure to keep the scientist's proclivities under control. I think that is misguided, at least in the realm of exploratory science.

RE "These come from past sampling you've done."

No and *Yes*, mostly *No*. Mostly they come from Mel, because *Mel* (independent of any past sampling of mine) is (as you point out) struggling. She has been ambiguous in her descriptions: for example, in her opening salvo (8:43) she said "specific thought," "I would say," "I was definitely midway through," "it wasn't my voice saying the words," "it was conceptual," "it was a really distinct thought." This, to my ear, is *Mel* saying *I need some help here making a distinction about my experience*. So *No*, I am not primarily responding to my own past sampling. I am responding to Mel, and have a warrant to do so because of the things that she has said and how she has said them.

Certainly the things that I say are shaped by my past sampling (that's the *Yes* part), but they are also by my past teaching, and my past guitar playing, and my past hiking, and my past everything else. The important issue is that the warrant to say those things comes primarily from Mel, not from my own personal history, favoritisms, theories, sensitivities, etc.

The warrant issue is a big deal. I am *not*, to the best of my ability, imposing my own proclivities onto Mel, and that is an important aspect of the DES skill. I *am* trying to help Mel describe her experience as she experiences it. I am *not* trying to use Mel to try to validate or invalidate some theoretical position of mine. In short, I'm trying to bracket myself out of Mel's descriptions. Doubtless I am less than perfect in that regard; viewers can decide for themselves.

13:51 Mel: Yes. Yep.

13:52 RTH: It seems like it's... the words are there, but it's less than my *speaking* them and less than my *hearing* them, even though all (and all this we're talking about innerly), we [Mel: Mm-hmm... Mm-hmm.] There's no, no question about, I, I didn't say these words out loud. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] These words were somehow *present* to me. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Okay.

14:13 Mel: Yeah, because it was really specifically like the, the exact way, like, y'know, saying "performance art" before "cultural commentary" and all like that. That's exactly what was happening at that time. Like structuring it that way.

14:29 RTH: Okay. And, and by structuring, do you mean in some sort of semi-auditory way, that like there's articulation and intonation and, [Mel shakes her head negatively throughout here] and pausing, p- p- pausing stuff?

14:45 Mel: No, I just mean more the phrasing.

14:50 RTH: Okay. So the *phrasing* is very specific. *The manner in which it is apprehended* is not specific.

14:58 Mel: Yeah. Yeah, I think so.

Julian comments: I was a bit confused going back to the description. From the transcript, it actually seemed like you and Mel concluded that words were present in some way (not auditorily heard but somehow present). Russ, your 13:52 turn gave me this impression. But in my original description I wrote that words were probably not present. You intensified this and wrote in the comments that you *do not think* words are present. So you took away some of the waffling to make it clear from your perspective that this is unsymbolized thinking. I agree with you and this is the impression I got. But in editing the transcript it was hard to see how you arrived at this.

I see it now in Mel's 14:50 turn and your 14:50 turn. Mel says the Matty Healy conversation is structured only in the sense of phrasing. You say "Okay. So the *phrasing* is very specific. *The manner in which it is apprehended* is not specific." Is this the point where you concluded on unsymbolized thinking?

It's interesting that transcript editing (which involves word-by-word fixing of the errors in the AI-generated transcription) can make it difficult to see the full picture. Also interesting that it cannot be taken literally. Yes, Mel did reply Mm-hmm to you saying "These words were somehow present to me." But you later overturned this.

A takeaway for me is that "it's not about the words" becomes just as pressing when editing and analyzing samples. In a way there are even more traps to avoid, since it's easy to get caught up in the words on screen.

Russ comments:

RE "I was a bit confused going back to the description."

You are right to be confused because I was not adequately clear in my original comments on the description, and as a result, our understanding of my original thinking morphed across time. Now, several months later, it is probably not possible to try to be confident about what actually happened, but here's my take:

1. Russ originally thought that whether words were present in Mel's experience was ambiguous, and that the conversation was mostly iterative training (see the comment at 12:13).
2. Julian wrote a description that included "There weren't any auditory qualities to these words." Russ took "these words" to imply too strongly that words were present...
- 3a. ...so he responded "I think that is far cleaner/more worded/more elaborated than her experience warranted." Russ was trying to say that he thought it was ambiguous whether words were present.
- 3b. But Russ's response also included "'There weren't any auditory qualities to these words' irretrievably implies that there were words present, which I don't think is true." Russ meant that in the same manner as 3a (that is, Russ was trying to say *I don't think we should irretrievably imply that words were present*), but the sentence was badly crafted and could easily be understood to mean *I don't think words were present*.
4. In their subsequent backs and forths, Russ and Julian incorrectly came to understand (probably based on the second interpretation in 3b) that Russ originally thought words were not present. That is, they lost track of the original

ambiguity that they really didn't know whether Mel's experience included or did not include words.

In short, the sequence seemed to be a morphing something like:

Maybe words were present

Words were present

Words were present is not true; that is, it was not clear that words were present

It was clear that words were not present

I don't want us to get into a debate trying to figure out what happened—that's water over the dam. The moral of this story is that it is difficult to keep ambiguity alive, but keeping ambiguity alive is necessary if the aim is fidelity.

In this situation, a main contributor was the fact that the first description and its reply were not written (11/17) until three days after the interview (11/14), where Russ generally requires writing and commenting within 24 hours (see *ninth* in the comment below). Furthermore, the first careful look at the transcript wasn't until two weeks after that (12/5), and that transcript editing apparently lost track of the description editing. That is, at that time there were inadequate short-term guardrails for the process. We are now (months later) relying on long-term video and transcript inspection to get us back on track.

The good news is that the iterative training that was intended during the interview did not depend on the descriptions or the transcripts.

RE "it clear from your perspective that this is unsymbolized thinking"

This is *not* in the center of the target of what I would call unsymbolized thinking. (a) Whether I would call it an instance of unsymbolized thinking is a very difficult call—this example is far too close to being worded to be easily an instance of unsymbolized thinking. (b) The distinction I was trying to make is whether there were words present, or whether the concept was so well defined that even though there were no words, only one set of words would suffice. (c) I don't have a specific label for this phenomenon—it is on the border between unsymbolized thinking and words present. (d) It doesn't really matter to me what you call it—the point is that there is something like a continuum about the presence of words and their understood meaning. And (e) Mostly I want to advance the iterative process, so that Mel in the future will not try to Procrustean her experience into one or another categories, but instead will describe the phenomenon as it occurs to her.

RE "transcript editing (which involves word-by-word fixing of the errors in the AI-generated transcription) can make it difficult to see the full picture."

I agree that much is lost in a transcript—part of what appeals to me in the present project is the care with which the video is available and cross-linked to the transcript.

Julian comments: My main point was that this kind of attention to detail can make it possible to miss a broader, more holistic impression that could be gotten in the initial interview, or by rewatching the recorded video without editing the transcript but while paying attention to facial expressions and gestures.

Do you always transcribe interviews by the way? When I first started doing research, a senior researcher told me that the field (qualitative research) was moving away from demands that all interviews had to be transcribed. There was more 'quick coding' done right after interviews when data is 'fresh in the researcher's mind'. I adopted this approach for some research. Namely because it spared a ton of time and if a senior researcher says it's okay then I can get away with it.

I would write a first sample description immediately after the interview. I would later relisten and adjust this, taking notes and transcribing sections but not editing a full transcription. I did sometimes later regret this, wishing I had a full transcription to examine my methods. Although I did find it interesting that my immediate descriptions usually did not need adjusting on my 2nd draft relisten. But perhaps transcribing would have given me more exposure with my interviewing and chances to question my approach.

So do you always transcribe? And do you find that transcription often changes your impression of a sample?

Russ comments: First, nearly all qualitative research is *not* interested in fidelity. It is mostly a validity exercise. The transcripts that are prepared in most qualitative research are aimed at reliability of coding, not fidelity of apprehension.

Second, no, most of the DES studies that I have published do not have complete (or, often, any) transcripts.

Third, DES is not about the words, so the fidelity of DES does not fundamentally depend on the accuracy of a transcript.

Fourth, I personally find the preparation of a transcript (correcting the AI errors, etc.) to be a very useful, fidelity enhancing exercise. If you can imagine being in a frame of mind where you really are trying to bracket presuppositions, really are trying to get it right rather than explain it, then the slowing down required to correct the errors allows additional processing time.

Fifth, I would say that in my experience, it has little to do with the AI aspect. Sometimes I make transcripts myself direct from the video; sometimes my students make transcripts and I edit them; sometimes I start with an AI transcript. It doesn't seem much different to me. I'm listening to the interview and correcting what needs to be corrected, regardless of the source.

Sixth, I would say that in general (as here), transcripts are useful more in what they reveal about interviewers than about participants.

Seventh, I don't require transcripts because there are often more important avenues toward fidelity.

Eighth, facial expressions, body language, and so on are important clues to meaning, but probably not as important as the sounds, prosody, and paralinguistic features that are *heard*, not *seen*. Fixing AI errors often requires playing the same passage multiple times, which enhances the auditory avenue. It's probably before your time, but Harry Stack Sullivan, widely thought to be one of the best interviewers in the psychoanalytic tradition, sat next to the patient, looking in the same direction as the patient, so that he could focus on what he *heard* without being distracted by what he *saw*. (Freud's couch placement had a similar effect, but Freud didn't emphasize it, as I recall.)

Ninth, in situations where I have more control (unlike here), we aim for fidelity (in part) by requiring that one interviewer write descriptions and circulate them to the

other interviewers before sleeping. All other interviewers are required to respond to all descriptions, ensuring that every sample is characterized adequately according to their sensibilities, passing the corrections/commentaries as tracked changes before the next sleep. Usually, we operate faster than that. Disagreement is valued and made explicit, as one step in the bracketing of presuppositions. Of course, a main fidelity tool in DES is the iterative method (always aimed at new samples).

Tenth, even if I don't transcribe, I always videotape all interviews, and often, as part of the circulation process described in the previous step, we as a group go back and watch, together, portions (usually just a few minutes) of an interview, often within hours of the original. I find that is often the most effective way of slicing through presuppositions because it is the best way of noticing what actually took place when we can still more-or-less recall the context and the history, etc. (You and I have not availed ourselves of that opportunity.)

Eleventh, you and I have fallen short of that before-you-sleep ideal pretty regularly. The careful transcript is a pretty good substitute.

Twelfth, the procedure you describe in the "I would write a first sample description immediately..." paragraph is not adequate, in my view, because it does not provide an adequately principled method of bracketing presuppositions. Regarding "Although I did find it interesting that my immediate descriptions usually did not need adjusting on my 2nd draft relisten," I didn't find that interesting—I found it worrisome because it is consonant with "Whatever presuppositions I had immediately were still there on the 2nd relisten." In the *I'm not a mind reader* department, and also in the *it's not about the words* department, that paragraph, to me, sounds like it was written by someone who needs to cultivate an appreciation for recognizing the grip delusion has on him and an acceptance of the inadequacy of his own devices for recognizing his own delusion.

- 15:02 RTH: And this is, [coughs] excuse me, this is an *imaginary* conversation. This is, I'm imagining saying.... what's, what's the guy's name?
- 15:11 Mel: [laughs] Matty Healey.
- 15:13 RTH: Matt, Matty?
- 15:14 Mel: Yes. [laughs]
- 15:15 RTH: [laughs] Matty Healey. And, and so I'm imagining saying it *to him*, this is a words *directed to him*. Is that right? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] As opposed to, for example, I'm telling my sister, this is what I might say if I met him [Mel: Mm-hmm. (shakes her head negatively)] That would be a conversation somehow aimed at my sister, even though it's about him. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] This is somehow... these words are aimed at him [Mel: Mm-hmm.] in your, in your imagination.
- 15:42 Mel: Yeah. It was very much like, *Hmm, if I ran into him on the street while I'm walking, what would I say to him?* And that's the sentence that I was going to say to him.
- 15:53 RTH: And, and are the, is the lead up to that? *If I ran him, ran into him on the street, what would I say to him?* Is that in words as well? I realize that's before the beep, but had

that been in words or was this.. at the moment of the beep I can't really tell you what was going on before that? At the moment of the beep, all I can say is I'm articulating in some way, creating these words aimed at him.

- 16:18 Mel: Um, the concept was there, um, like... in the same way that I was mulling over looking at my tote bag in the earlier beep, I would say that like... yeah, prior to the beep I was like mulling over the idea of like what I would say to him. But were the, was that like, um, fully formed words or whatever? Not necessarily, but there was definitely like, that then led to when the beep went off and I was in that thought process. Do y'know what I mean?
- 16:51 RTH: Okay And is there anything else in your experience other than the, this, this worded stuff?
- 17:05 Mel: Um... I don't think so. Like, I'm trying to... there wasn't like really much feeling associated with it for one, which is kind of interesting for me, cuz often a lot of my inner experiences quite vibe-based on stuff that we said before. But that wasn't really relevant. Um, the, y'know, I know I was outside and walking home and stuff, but my environment wasn't really experienced. Um, and then I guess you're like probably half alluding to whether there was any like, visual aspect within my mind about this sort of imaginary scenario, but I don't think there was.
- 17:44 RTH: Okay. And, and we've talked about embarrassment and, and whatever. I'm gathering that embarrassment is in the context today, now, while we're having this conversation. It wasn't present at the moment of the beep. Is that right?
- 17:57 Mel: No! [laughs] No, no, because that's inside my head. I was living my best life! But then when went off, I was like, well, this is gonna be fun. [they laugh]
- 18:03 RTH: Okay. That's, that's the way I, that's the way I understood it, but I wanted to make sure. Then I think I'm good.
- 18:09 JBK: Um, I have a couple of other questions. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So you say you don't think there's a visual aspect of like, seeing him and talking to him? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Is there still some aspect of it being a conversation scenario? Or, at this moment, is it more about the, the words present?
- 18:30 Mel: Um, no, I...yeah, that's really hard to answer. Cuz like, I'm definitely thinking about the moment of like, *oh, if I ran into him and I, y'know, would interrupt him and say this* or something like that's... But there's no...it's, it's really hard to explain, but like, that's just conceptual.
- 18:53 JBK: Okay. And my other question is, um... kinda mentioned being in the process of articulating. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Was it something that happened over time? Like maybe you were articulate, like, "I love the performance art and cultural commentary," and then the beep comes and then it's like [Mel: Mm-hmm.] "you're doing at the moment"? Or is there not kind of this... Is it like, is it linear? Or no, or like, all at once? Or you don't know?

- 19:24 Mel: Um, as in, if I think I understand your question correctly, like this sort of happened over, y'know, a period of, I dunno, 45 seconds or 30 seconds or something as I'm walking, I was in the middle of, y'know... so the first, y'know, I guess thought in this direction was like... *Hmm, I wonder if I ran into him what I would say.* And then for the next 30 seconds, I kind of am just like, my brain's just firing off sort of phrases or whatever. That's all happening quite intuitively, but that's the process that I'm in. So it wasn't necessarily like the beep went off and that was the first thought I'd had about this. Like, I was in the process of sort of mulling over what I would say.
- 20:08 JBK: Okay. I wanna stick just to this specific phrase at the moment. [Mel: Okay.] Because if you said it out loud, like it would be something that takes place over time. Like, "I love the performance art, that blah, blah, blah." And maybe a beep could fall at any one... like between a word or at any word, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] or after everything finishes. And in your experience at this moment, is this something that happens over time? Or is it...?
- 20:41 Mel: Oh, I see what you're saying... Yeah.
- 20:42 RTH: So I, I, I would say that question... I think it's a great question and I would ask it by, Does it seem like this, these words unfold over time? Or does it seem like they're all present at the same time at once? It's...
- 20:52 JBK: That's definitely an easier way to, to ask it [laughs].
- 20:55 Mel: No, but I understood what you meant eventually. Um, good question. I think...um... Wait, let me actually think before I speak there. It's [exhales] it's tight. Like I think that they *do* unfold over time, but really quickly. But I think that there is like cadence or something there, but it's not at the same... it's not like at a rate of if like— cuz as you pointed out, if I say that out loud, that sentence takes quite a while to say. That, it happens quicker in my brain, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] but I think it does unfold a little.
- 21:36 JBK: So quicker and you, you think it does take place over time, but it still sounds, if you're not like a hundred percent sure how, how it happens.
- 21:44 Mel: Like a lot quicker. Like it's, it's, if anything, it's closer to all being there at once compared to the rate of speaking.
- 21:52 JBK: Okay.
- 21:53 Mel: But, but I, I think there's a slight unfolding. Yeah...
- 21:53 Russ comments: Inner experience does not follow the rules of physics. It is possible for words to be experienced either all at once or unfolding over time, or both all at once and unfolding over time (even though that would be impossible in the real world).
- 22:00 JBK: Okay.

22:00 RTH: So what I would say about that is that the fact that you're unsure about it is a good deal from my point of view. And no matter what you said, I was, I'm not gonna believe you about it because you weren't, you weren't prepared to make that distinction at the only time that you could have made that distinction, which would've been right at the moment of the beep. But *now* we've *had* this conversation and if you have this kind of quest... this experience, next time we sample or whatever, then I'll, I might be in a position to be to, to be saying, well, Mel knows what she's talking about here and she can, she can answer that question.

22:00 Russ comments:

Q: You are very critical of Mel here ("No matter what you said, I was, I'm not gonna believe you about it."). How can you expect Mel to be cooperative with you if you criticize her like that?

A: I think I was not in the slightest critical of Mel. I stated a genuine truth about my own belief (or lack thereof). Furthermore, and at least equally importantly, I communicated to Mel my desire to get her experience with fidelity, that I am not satisfied to slide by or pretend understanding. So I think that communication is a straightforward invitation to genuinely personal cooperation.

As usual in DES, it is not about the words. The question is *not* whether the words I spoke could be understood one way or another; the question is how they landed with Mel. So of course (as always) I will be attending to Mel's reaction to the words I use. When I watch Mel's reaction, I see no sign that she is at all stung by my words, but instead is touched by them. I'm no mind reader, but she looks like someone who genuinely appreciates being taken absolutely seriously, which is to say, not being believed any more than she is believable. So I think what could be said to be criticism (which I would prefer to conceptualize as genuine acknowledgement) draws Mel closer to me rather than pushes her away.

For a description of inner experience to be believable (at least to me), the participant has to have available, at the moment of the beep, an understanding of any discrimination that might be required. (That is why the iterative procedure is a necessary part of any exploration of inner experience.) Mel did not have that discrimination readily available at the moment of the beep. Our conversation made it evident that she had not had that discrimination readily available, and I think she appreciated that we were going to work toward having it become readily available.

Julian comments: I am interested in how experience unfolds over time. Here for Mel, even if a thought isn't in words, it can unfold in some way. It could have some articulation. It could gradually form and arise. It could come along all at once. Or it could also stay constant throughout.

Rather than impose possibilities and force a choice I think your approach of leaving it to the iterative process is a good one. On subsequent days, there were a few other times when I asked about change over time. And eventually, much later [Day 10 19:00] we have a chance to discuss time more and re-clarify the moment before the beep.

I don't think DES ignores time, but because of how it's set up it can be sometimes difficult to remember to look into time dynamics within a sample. I could ask the question "does it unfold over time" about many (maybe even most) things in

experience. A vibe could change over time. A physical sensation could get intense. Its locations could slightly change. Even autopilot-y experience could conceivably flicker in and out of direct consciousness.

But often it's difficult enough to pin down basic features of experience. It can be hard asking further about these time nuances. And the best approach is iterative training so that if change over time is experientially important, Mel will report on it.

I did write my MSc thesis about time and experience and slightly lengthened the target experience that DES beeps examined. It's interesting doing this project and thinking about that work. Obviously, I've learned a lot about how to do DES right and there were some mistakes there. I'll put some more thoughts on Day 10 when talk of time comes up again.

22:33 Mel: Interesting. Yeah, that's a good question, Julian.

22:33 Russ comments: Many, perhaps most, of Mel's previous samples have involved little or no inner experience. On those bases, a skeptical observer (such as I) might have wondered whether Mel's experience really is emptyish, as those samples imply, or whether, instead, that she has an idiosyncratic way of reporting about experience that somehow downplays the more differentiated features of inner experience. The present sample provides an important piece of evidence in this regard, showing that Mel is capable, and apparently not reluctant, to describe differentiated, detailed experience when it occurs. (See Mel's comment at 57:51.)

22:37 JBK: [laughs], Thanks. Um, yeah, but those are all my, my questions on this one.

22:42 RTH: Number 3?

22:44 JBK: On to number 3.

SAMPLE 5.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

22:46 Mel: Um... okay, I've got 11:04 AM and I was, uh, back in my apartment and I was on Twitter (or X whatever, but I still call it Twitter). I was on Twitter just looking mindlessly at my feed. Um, and I've written, "I would say things were pretty empty here. Nothing particularly noteworthy. I was looking at my phone, aimlessly scrolling," not really aware of anything that I was consuming.

23:15 JBK: So you're scrolling, um... It's a bit mindless and empty and, and so it sounds like... or or do you think something *was* there? Or something *very minimal*? Or nothing?

23:30 Mel: This feels like, um, autopilot-y. This doesn't feel like the earlier one, one with the tote bag where I was mulling something over and there was like a vibe and a vague sort of feeling. None of that was present for this. This felt more like that autopilot emptiness.

23:47 JBK: Okay. More of the emptiness. And I take it your eyes are visually pointed at, at the screen. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But do you think that, is you're experiencing that at all? Or it is just kind of a fact of what's happening?

24:00 Mel: Yeah. Like not super consciously. More I would put it in the fact category.

24:06 JBK: Okay. Um... and... hmm... those are, those are all my questions about this one.

24:19 RTH: So would you say that, that you are *in any way* getting *any* of the content that's coming by? These are, I presume words going by, or pictures going by, or whatever. [Mel: Yeah, I want....] Is that stuff make, making its way at all into your...

24:35 Mel: I mean, they have to, to a degree, but, um...

24:39 RTH: [interrupts] They don't have to. [Mel: Well...] They don't have to. Whether they do or not is the question. [Mel: Well...] So it, so it's possible. So the distinction I wanna be making here is that it's possible to be scrolling [Mel: Uh-huh.] and, and skillfully scrolling (y'know, you're doing what your hand has to do in order to make things go by). [Mel: Yeah.] And in some way processing the whole scene. I mean, you're holding the phone, you're scrolling in the right place on the phone, your eyeballs are tracking whatever. But none of that has to be in awareness *at all*. Or it could be that I got a sense that this is Twitter from, y'know, Greenwich Village and this is Twitter about Hamas and this is Twitter about whatever. Or not!

25:17 Mel: I think the distinction... like, I think the first, the first bit that you said is more accurate, but, um, the distinction that I found, found challenging when I was like writing this down straight after the beep was whether it was just to do with like... none of the content was particularly interesting to me. So like nothing was really sticking. So in terms of like the inner experience element of that, like, I found that a little bit challenging to sort of decipher because it's like, well, I'm just not really interested in anything I'm seeing. Or am I like fully glazed over and doing just the action? Do y'know what I mean?

25:56 RTH: Well, something can be processing at, at a very low level, and when it's interesting, then it would, it would grab you or whatever, however wanna say that. And then you might read it. So it's sort of like the, the cocktail party and name phenomenon. Y'know, I'm not listening to anything, but then if somebody says my name, then I can, I can hear that. So obviously there's part of me that is auditorily processing the cocktail party. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And so there can be *in the same way*, uh, some kind of visual semantic processing of the..., but not making its way into consciousness. So in the cocktail party, I would never say, well, I didn't hear my name there, and I didn't hear my name there, and I didn't hear my name there—that that isn't the way that stuff goes. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] It's that I'm doing the processing, but it's *outside* of my direct apprehension.

26:43 Mel: Mm-hmm. Yes. Very much that.

26:45 RTH: And so is that what we're saying here? Is that my sense is that I'm somewhere *below* the footlights of my consciousness (out of the lights of my consciousness, processing this stuff) and, and it isn't making its way in.

26:58 Mel: Mm-hmm.

26:58 RTH: At all?

27:00 Mel: I think so. Yep.

27:02 RTH: Okay. Then I'm good.

27:06 JBK: I'm good. I do have a, a meta question. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So we kind of, uh, talked about it a bit in the transcripts, like different terminology and kind of speculating what you understand by that. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And I'm curious from your perspective, Mel, if we say like "before the footlights of your consciousness," like what do you understand by that? And if it makes sense or just kind of makes sense?

27:06 Russ comments: (this is another in the *it's not about the words* series) If you detect, when you pay exquisitely close attention to Mel, that she understands something different from what I intend (when you pay exquisitely close attention to Mel) when I say "footlights of consciousness" (or anything else I might say), then you have a warrant to worry about whether we are miscommunicating. That is, you should always be paying exquisitely close attention to Mel, to the words she grunts, their inflection, her gestures, her hesitations, her enthusiasms, her discomforts, and so on, and the same for me and for you. And if something in those channels seems inconsistent, then you should follow up and try to figure out where the seeming inconsistency arose.

But if you're worried about my words as abstract entities, or how my words comport with one or another theory, then I think you are not paying exquisite attention Mel (or to me), and I feel compelled to say "It's not about the words."

For my part, I see no warrant for being particularly concerned about what I mean by "before the footlights of consciousness." In my present use, I am adding no new sense by my grunting "footlights." I have already made clear what we are talking about—several whole paragraphs about skillful scrolling and cocktail conversations—and whatever I said at the time I grunted "footlights" would have been understood as a reference back to that—I think I could have said at 26:45 "And so is that what we're saying here? Is that my sense is that I'm in the slackenhiemer madlix (out of the lights of my consciousness, processing this stuff) and, and it isn't making its way in." Had I said that, Mel probably wouldn't have asked what a slackenhiemer madlix [for the record, that is a made-up nonsense expression] is because she already knew what I was talking about.

So for example, if I grunt "Was X before footlights of consciousness?" and Mel were to reply, "No it wasn't. X was very clear to me," then you would have every warrant to worry and to inquire further—you would have detected a discrepancy between your understanding of my question and your understanding of Mel's answer. But the important part of this is that your attunement there should be to *understanding Russ and Mel*, not to examining Russ's word choice. (And I will always be doing the same thing. Whenever I utter anything, I then examine whether Mel's reply seems to indicate that she understands (or doesn't understand) what I have said or asked.)

Said another way, the issue is much more about the distinctions that are being made than about the words that are being used to make them. Get the distinctions right and the words will eventually follow.

Julian comments: This is helpful. Though to be clear I wasn't being critical of the word or implying that Mel didn't understand you. It was more to see how Mel understood it. To refine my own ability in the future to convey these things and if an unfamiliar term like "before the footlights of consciousness" can be useful for interviewees. But yes, I see again that it's not so much about which terms are used. What's more important is gestures that concretely call into play these distinctions—the backside in chair spiel, the driving example, the cocktail party example. As you say, terms can then attach to these concrete examples as a way of calling them back. That's the opposite of these examples being used to clarify terms.

In that sense, I think the unfamiliarity and strangeness of "before the footlights of consciousness" is actually useful. You could also use standard terms like experience, inner experience, direct experience, awareness, consciousness—but these might carry other connotations. Whereas a less familiar phrase really just points back to the clarifications you made. Like slackenhiemer madlix. (That could make a good band name, by the way.)

- 27:29 Mel: Um, I think that I understand that as when [laughs] , when I use the layman's terms of like, and doing this [laughs; gestures with her hands on two different levels] ...Yeah... I feel like that's the same sort of thing. When I'm going *it was kind of like below that level*, I feel like that's the same sort of—you just say it better—but like before the footlights of your consciousness of like yeah. When there's sort of some sort of presence, but you're not like hyper aware of it or something. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] that right?
- 27:59 JBK: Um, so [laughs], that sounds good to me. Yeah.
- 28:04 Mel: It's not very like articulate, but y'know...
- 28:07 JBK: I guess *before the footlights* can mean if something's out of the footlights, it's, it's not even there at all, [Mel: Yeah.] really, in your experience. Like, as Russ says, you might... somebody says your name at a cocktail party, you might pay attention. But before that, like paying attention to people saying your name isn't, isn't at all experienced. [Mel: Yeah.] I think the gist of things being like, I think this visual representation of, of things being like lower [Mel: Yeah.] or higher in consciousness is, is pretty much...
- 28:39 RTH: So the way I use that term, that term I think is a little bit different from what Mel, Mel said. And that is that I would say once, once it's in the footlights of your consciousness, it can be all the way up to be brightly in the footlights of your consciousness. Mel: Mm hmm.] So I would say, for example, *I love your performance art* or whatever that sentence was, that was clearly before the footlights of my consciousness. I was... it had somehow made its way into, into my direct apprehension [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Centrally, not just, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] not just a little bit, but pretty darn centrally, as I understood it.

28:39 Russ comments: Now that I've had a chance to think about it, I think my usage is probably *not* "a little bit different from what Mel said." I suspect it is not different at all. Mel's *stated definition* was at the low end of clarity, whereas my *stated definition* included the brighter end of the spectrum. But I don't, on reconsideration, think that reflects a different definition of the term *footlights*. I think it reflects a different range of convenience of the term's application. Mel *applies it to her own experience*, which is usually at the lower end of distinctness. I apply it to a much broader range of experiences, not only Mel's but hundreds of others, at a broader range of distinctness.

This is a good example of why the stated definition is not the most important desideratum in understanding the grunts that people make. DES is not about the words, but about understanding each other, and being careful about that understanding at every step of the way.

29:17 Mel: Yeah. Yeah. That one was, I mean, we haven't had too many of those, um, examples where I'm very confident in a really distinct thought. So that was kind of interesting.

29:29 RTH: And I would say the tote bag was in f, before the footlights of my consciousness. I was, [Mel: Yeah.] I was somehow apprehend, apprehendingly involved with my tote, tote bag stuff.

29:42 Mel: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

29:44 RTH: But not as brightly as in the...

29:44 Russ comments: RTH mischaracterizes here. The tote bag was entirely brightly before the footlights of Mel's consciousness at the moment of the beep.

29:47 Mel: Mm-hmm. Yep.

29:51 JBK: Should we do number 4?

29:54 Mel: Okay. Yes.

29:55 RTH: Okay.

29:55 RTH: Number 4...

29:56 JBK: Russ take it away.

SAMPLE 5.4 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

29:57 Mel: Um, this went off not long after, at 11:12 AM and I've written, "I was putting washing away (so I'm in my apartment still). I was putting washing away. Very much lost in the action of doing that. I had music on in the background, which was *definitely* part of my conscious experience."

30:16 RTH: So there's, there's the action and the hearing...

30:19 Mel: Mm-hmm.

30:21 RTH: And are the action in the hearing both, as we might say, before the footlights of my consciousness or...?

30:27 Mel: Mm-hmm.

30:29 Mel: Uh...the... I think the mu, the music moreso. Like the music was on in the background, I was very aware of that. And then more like the act of putting away my laundry was just like autopilot what I was doing sort of thing.

30:29 Russ comments: RE the discussion between 27:06 and 29:51: Mel's response at 30:29 is entirely in accord with RTH's intention at 30:21, so there is no reason to be worried about whether Mel understands "footlights of my consciousness" in the same way Russ does.

30:44 RTH: So 60/40 ? Or 90/10? Or 99/1? Or doesn't that make sense?

30:48 Mel: I don't know. I can't remember.

30:51 RTH: Okay. And so about the music is the most prominent thing in my experience. Is that, is that true?

31:01 Mel: I...yeah...but I still think that this whole thing falls a little more in like a bit autopilot-y. So I, I don't think anything was super-super sharp. Um, like I was definitely, I definitely felt the need to write down that the music was experienced and part of the experience when the beep went off. But, and, and likewise with the action of the putting the washing away. But, but... like, I like the phrase that I wrote where I was very much *lost* in the action. Um, so it's kind of not as...I wasn't necessarily mulling over each of those sorts of things. I was like going about my, this sort of A to B category a bit, y'know?

31:55 RTH: So I could interpret *lost in the, in the action* in a variety of different ways. So lost in the action *could* mean to me, I'm just not attending to it *at all*. I'm totally autopilot-engaged in it. The action is coming out of me... And so it's *lost* in the sense that I'm not, am not consciously (whatever that means) processing it. [Mel: Yeah.] Or lost, it could mean I'm absorbed in it. I'm, I'm actually examining the washing or around I'm fe, feeling the texture of the clothing or whatever, and... [phone rings]

32:31 Mel: I think it was... [pauses for phone to stop]

32:34 Mel: I think it was slightly more the latter. Like I, I think I was, uh, I think I was like aware of the textures and things like that, but getting hazy.

32:51 RTH: And, and texture, texture was my word or my, my suggestion. There's other ways that you could be into the, into the washing action. I could smell the detergent, or I could,

[Mel: Yeah.] remember when I wore this thing, or I could remember that I need to use Woolite instead of whatever. And, uh...

- 33:10 Mel: No, none of that. I think like the physicality of it was, was an element. Um...yeah, I think like I was *absorbed* in the action. There's, but there's not, there was not a meta awareness of like, *I'm aware of myself being aware of the washing*. Like, not, not that. But like... I'm, I was definitely like, present in what I was doing, I think.
- 33:36 RTH: But I'm gathering not, not really strongly.
- 33:41 Mel: I think, I think...yeah.
- 33:44 RTH: So in, when I said 90/10 or 60/40 and you had trouble with that, maybe if I had said 6 and 1 or 6 and 2 or something, then that may have been better. [inaudible]
- 33:53 Mel: Yeah...Yeah. I think that for most of the times when I'm, um, y'know, if the beep goes off and I'm in the middle of doing an, an like a, a physical activity, then I often describe it as autopilot. And this wasn't full autopilot. Like, I think there was sort of an awareness, but yeah, a low level, cuz it tends to be low when I'm doing something or whatever.
- 34:17 RTH: And the music moreso than the washing, but not much?
- 34:23 Mel: I think so. Yeah.
- 34:25 RTH: Okay. And are, and are you specifically aware of the, of the music? That, that, as you would say, that I was listening to... y'know, Beyonce or whoever it was that was, was on? Or is it just there's music and I'm somehow in sync-y with the music, whatever it is?
- 34:47 Mel: Uh, no. I know it was relevant, cuz I was listening to Matty Healy's band, the 1975s, who we were talking about earlier, because I'm going to that concert tonight. So it's all, and clearly you can see my brain's thinking about that. Um...so yeah, that the actual, the music that was on was, yeah, part of my conscious experience.
- 35:12 RTH: Okay. Then I think I'm good.
- 35:14 JBK: Hmm. Was it a specific part of that song at the moment?
- 35:20 Mel: I haven't written that down. Um, it's like, I couldn't even tell like... I can't remember what song it was now. [JBK: Okay.] Um...yeah...
- 35:29 JBK: Do you think if theoretically you did remember and got to that specific, y'know, 5 or 10 seconds of the song, do you think, um, we would know more about your, your experience at this moment? Or do you think the actual content of the music was not what mattered?

- 35:48 Mel: No, because I would put it in the category of like, it just being more holistic than the specific content of that exact time. It's just like a holistic, like, y'know, layer beyond that of like a vague vibe feeling bluh. So it's not like...
- 36:09 JBK: Was it a vibe-y feeling-y part present too, or was more just about the music?
- 36:15 Mel: I'm not sure...Yeah... I just, I just definitely, I just wrote that the music was definitely part of my conscious experience. I think like if I, at risk of overthinking, but if I did speculate, I would say there's like a, um, there was like a, a lightness and a, and a happy sort of vibe as a result of the conscious experience of the music, but... y'know.
- 36:41 JBK: Okay. So as Russ said before, since you're not sure that's something that, um, however he phrased it, if on a later day you report that, um, yeah. I remember when we first started, I would phrase that wrong. Like, it's something you could pay attention to.[Mel: Mm-hmm.] That's [laughs], that's something. Not to not say [laughs]...Um, okay. Um...yeah, I might... I don't have any more questions about this.
- 36:41 Russ comments: "So as Russ said before" refers to 12:39 in sampling day 1.

SAMPLE 5.5 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 37:08 RTH: Okay. Number 5.
- 37:11 Mel: Um... oh yeah, this went off not long after, um, 11:18 AM and I've got, "I was singing along to the song that was on while packing my suitcase." ...Um, I wrote, "My inner experience was happy as I bopped along. This was not empty. (Um, that this, oh... I've written what) This was, this was not empty. Definitely had a vibe present." Good notes! [sarcastically furrows her brow and shakes her head]
- 37:42 JBK: Hmm. So you're packing your, your suitcase?
- 37:45 Mel: Mm-hmm.
- 37:46 JBK: Um, and is that at all, um, apprehended?
- 37:54 Mel: Like not... not more than just doing. Just, yeah, running through the motions of doing that.
- 38:02 JBK: Okay. And you're still listening to music?
- 38:05 Mel: Yep. But on this occasion, [siren sounds] I was singing out loud along to the music.
- 38:11 JBK: Singing out loud. And was the singing just an action? Or was it also an action that you experienced before these footlights of consciousness?
- 38:22 Mel: Um, no, I'd say it was like reactive. [siren sounds] So like, it was just happening.

38:29 JBK: Okay. So the singing and the suitcase were just happening. [siren continues] Um, but the happy vibe-y feeling thing, um, that was there [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, is it, are there other details you could give about it?

38:48 Mel: Um, [pause] this just that this felt very, um, uh, emotional. Not emotional but like, yeah... this was definitely a very feelings-based experience. Um, like I, I remember when this went off that that was the overwhelming [car horn] takeaway that this was...[car horn] [gestures with hand shaking] ...that.

39:18 JBK: Was, was it strong? Maybe a bit stronger than earlier beeps?

39:23 Mel: Yeah. Yeah. Um...

39:26 JBK: Is there a way you could describe this, the strength or, or does that, would that not make sense?

39:34 Mel: I feel like I can't quite remember properly, but, um, I feel like we had one like this last week when I was saying that...y'know, trying to sum up like my, when I have the vibe-type experience, feel like this felt like that... of, um, yeah, that same thing is like, it's not like a beep goes off and I go, *whoa. I was feeling like so clearly distinctly, sharply happy, or optimistic, or anything.* But I think that there's a bunch of those descriptors that would be really relevant in that layer down, [gestures with her hand horizontally] everything covered with a sort of veil.

40:17 JBK: Mm-hmm. So, but in terms of intensity, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] what, what I'm hearing or understanding is kind of like beep number 1 with a tote bag that would be less intense. And this one was, like stronger, but maybe not full, like clearly, specifically...boom...

40:37 Mel: Yeah.

40:38 JBK: Is that apt?

40:40 Mel: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Definitely stronger than the tote bag and stuff. And definitely a...definitely feelings present and, um, whatnot. But still not like super...still not like sharp, sharp, sharp. But I'm not, I'm not sure if I ever... I dunno. It would be on a rare occasion that I would feel something that sharply, probably.

41:05 JBK: Is there a kind of content to it, like happiness about seeing the concert later? Happiness about [inaudible]?

41:15 Mel: No, no. Just a overwhelming like mood. Um... yeah, I feel like there was one...yeah... like this last week when I was trying to sum that up of like, it's just when it catches me in a, in that vibe state, a state of being that feels happy and it felt optimistic and it felt light and it felt sort of a bit fun, but, y'know... no, none of those descriptions feel like overwhelmingly the exact one.

41:46 JBK: It, is the music experienced at this moment or is it more about the, the, the mood?

41:54 Mel: I think the, the mood is a little more accurate, probably like... the, the, the, the singing along and the music that's playing is definitely like, what is impacting that. But like, ultimately, like the, the main experience is that feeling/mood/emotion/vibe moreso than like the specific notes of the music or whatever.

42:21 JBK: Okay. And I'm, I'm curious cuz a few times you mentioned, uh, being overwhelming or something, and then, but you also mentioned it's not super strong and articulate, so, so is there a way to understand that? Is it...because we also had samples before where, um... yeah, it was the previous sampling day. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Where the, something was overwhelming or consuming or whatever because there wasn't much else in experience and that was the only thing there. Could, could you compare it to those or do you mean it in a different sense? Or maybe *overwhelming* was just a word you used and, y'know, we don't have to stick to that word?

42:21 Russ comments: (this is another in the *it's not about the words* series; see 27:06) This is an example where JBK *does indeed* have warrant to inquire about a word. When most people use *overwhelm*, they intend it to mean something *powerful* (and correspondingly inflect it in such way as to demonstrate that power). However, Mel's usage does not have that inflection or suggestion of puissance. JBK should indeed try to figure out what Mel means here.

This is a very different situation from the *footlights* example of 27:06, because (as it seems to me) JBK's worry about *footlights* arose from his concern about the word itself (as if it occurred on some inner-to-JBK list of potentially problematic words), whereas his worry about *overwhelm* arose from Mel's idiosyncratic inflection (or lack thereof). That is a huge difference, one aimed *away* from Mel and the other aimed *toward* Mel.

[Mel uses "overwhelm" frequently, and has a quite idiosyncratic usage of it. See the discussion on sampling day 4, 18:19.]

43:11 Mel: I think. No, I think you're right when you say like it just, um, yeah, there are two different ways that I could use that...um, word. Like sometimes yeah, an emotion can be like, so strong, it's *overwhelming*. And then, but another way that I have used it is *overwhelming* in the sense that like, blocking out any other thing that's experienced, but the intensity of that emotion whatever still might not be like t- *overwhelming*. So I think that's, that's a good pickup there. I think that this was, um, if I've used *overwhelming*, then this is in the sense that it's, um, drowning out any other experience. So like that that vibe is the, the, the, [gestures with her arms circling around] the thing being experienced and nothing else aside from like, y'know, the, the, the music, but not the specifics of the music. Just the overall ex, [JBK: Yeah.] experience.

44:14 JBK: And not the suitcase packing itself, and not the singing along to it [inaudible]

44:19 Mel: Yeah, no, like the, the, if there was like layers to what was experienced, then it's like the, the mood vibe, whatever, probably then the music, and then probably then, if at all the like, physical action of packing my suitcase.

44:37 JBK: Okay. If at all the, the packing, the suitcase.

44:39 Mel: Mm-hmm.

44:40 JBK: And... from what I understood it, the, the listening to the music was present, maybe present, and the singing along to the music you put kind of on the level of suitcase. So maybe, probably not there or only there a tiny bit?

44:40 Russ comments: Note that “the listening to the music was present” is a statement of meta-experience because it says the *listening* was present (compare “the music was present” or “you heard the music,” both of which would be non-meta). Mel’s experience, to my ear, was not at all meta. The mis-characterization is perhaps problematic (either because JBK thinks her experience was meta, or because JBK doesn’t clearly enough distinguish between meta and non-meta, or simply because it throws a bit of sand into the bearings of future discussions) but RTH apparently thought it better to let it slide.

Julian comments: I can agree that the phrasing was meta, even though the intention wasn’t. When I say present, I’m thinking more in terms of what buckets to sort it in. There are things present and things not.

It occurred to me that a problem is me taking a frame of reference outside of Mel’s experience to describe it. I’m not saying that listening to the music is what’s present to Mel. I’m saying that looking from the outside at Mel to there are things that are present and things not. Listening to music is present. This outside frame of reference doesn’t mean that I don’t understand Mel’s experience or am bringing presuppositions. But it does mean that there’s another layer that can add confusion in terms of talking to Mel about her experience.

Russ, you get around this by *frequently* using first person. Instead of saying “listening is present” you would say “I’m listening to the music.” I think first-person forces you into a frame of reference closest to Mel. I started using first-person in the descriptions because I found them easier to write that way. It’s unnatural to me to switch to first person when describing Mel’s experience in front of her. But I think if difficulties and misunderstandings arise it could be a good exercise to clear that away.

Russ comments: Years (decades, really) ago, I started using the first person in interviews as an organic, natural, gradual process—I found myself doing it, with no plan or rationale. Over time, it has continued to seem like a good idea, but I’ve never really applied myself to figuring out why. I suspect you are importantly right: taking the first-person view probably does make it easier to avoid meta-speak of both the first and second kind.

For the record, I’ve never insisted that a trainee use first-person language. I don’t really have a rationale for that, either, except the notion that (I suspect) when the trainee is ready, they will adopt first-person language on their own.

45:01 Mel: Yeah. Maybe a little more than the suitcase, but it’s still like pretty reactive. But like I’m singing along, I think that’s slightly more experienced to than the actual act of, um, packing.

45:15 JBK: Okay. Um... yeah, I'm, I'm good on questions.

45:20 RTH: Me too.

45:21 Mel: So I feel like I served you up a fair few contradictions in that one [laughs], sorry.

45:26 JBK: But I'm, I'm more used to dealing, dealing with any contradictions. So...

45:31 Mel: I think, uh...

45:32 JBK: ...the previous day kind of helped me understand.

SAMPLE 5.6 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

45:36 Mel: [laughs]. Um... good. Uh, okay. I think this is the *last* one. Um, 12:49. So this was a lot later. Maybe I missed a beep or something. I've got... "I was about to pluck my eyebrows. I was looking in the mirror and was singing a song lyric, (which I've actually noted the lyric here. I've written that the lyric was that I was singing was) 'change in pressure', (and then I've just written the word or, well, it's not really a word I wrote" autopilot-y." Um, so yeah, I was, I was not actually plucking my eyebrows yet. I was looking in the mirror holding the tweezers about to do that, and I was mid singing a song lyric and that's it.

46:21 RTH: And is the singing present to you more than the singing of the previous beep? The same amount? Less than?...

46:32 Mel: I think this one was a little bit more present because of the fact that I noted exactly the lyric that I was singing.

46:39 RTH: Okay. And is this a singing-*along*? Is this song playing?...

46:44 Mel: Yeah, it was my speaker [Russ: Playing on your speakers.] and I was singing out loud with it... yeah.

46:48 RTH: Okay. And, and is, the singing out loud here: In what ways is it the same or different from the singing out loud in the previous beep? Singing along with...

47:03 Mel: Um, I think I was, I think I was more aware of the singing in this one. [looks unsure]

47:15 RTH: And, and anything more than just like, I've dialed up my awareness of it, like, um, but ...the seems like the same thing except I'm somewhat more aware of it? Or does it seem like they're somehow different aspects?

47:31 Mel: Um, I...feel like...um, that, because at the exact time the be went off with this, I wasn't consumed by another action yet, y'know, like I hadn't started plucking my eyebrows yet, so it's sort of in between things. So in that sense, like the singing was sort of the number-one thing that I was consciously aware of that I was doing. Whereas in the previous one I was halfway through packing my suitcase, so it was kind of more

happening. And so like, yeah, I was singing along, but it wasn't as like, at the forefront of my experience as this one because this one, like the singing was very... the dominant thing I was doing.

48:22 RTH: And how do you, how do you experience the singing along? What— the singing along...what... is that an action? I am experiencing myself as producing the words? Or is that a sound? I, I'm hearing myself singing? Or is that neither one of those things? Something else?

48:39 Mel: Yeah, I, I've written "autopilot-y," which I know probably sounds like a contradiction to what I just said. Um, but like, I'm not a, I'm not super aware of like the sound that I'm making per se. Um, it's more...uh, [lip smacks] hmm.... Yeah... I dunno.

49:10 RTH: So my... I'm singing along as meaning that the music and the words and the motion, whatever that takes, is being drawn out by the music. I'm...

49:22 Mel: Yeah.

49:22 RTH: ...accompanying the music, part of the music, whatever.

49:26 Mel: Music. Yeah. More like, it's a, it's an action that's happening and it's sort of, it's experiential in the way that it's almost a feeling that's sort of happening as part of it more so than like it being auditory or, y'know?

49:41 RTH: Okay. Than then I think I'm good.

49:48 Mel: [JBK: Um.] That's it! Oh yes, Julian, sorry, go.

49:52 JBK: [laughs]. Well... yeah, this is something I'm still, I'm still quite unsure about this one. [Mel: Hmm.] Because you, you seem sure of the singing, but then there there's kind of these autopilot-y elements you mentioned. [Mel: Yeah.] Um, do you think it's possible, would you still entertain the possibility that singing was just the action and that it wasn't really experienced, apprehended? or?...

49:52 Russ comments: The object of DES is to help Mel describe her beeped experience with fidelity. So JBK could have asked something like: "Was the singing more directly apprehended than the suitcase packing, or are they both autopilot-y?"

"Would you entertain the possibility...?" is not at all about fidelity. *Of course* she will entertain the possibility, just as she will entertain the possibility that the moon landing was staged or that she is just a brain in a vat.

Here, as usual, the way of determining whether a question is good is whether it helps Mel to describe her experience at the moment of the beep.

50:18 Mel: Yeah, maybe. I mean, maybe, um, in the same way that, yeah, I can note when a beep goes off and I'm halfway through packing my suitcase, maybe this could be in the same category as that, that like the beep's gone off and I've noted that I was exactly in the middle of singing this song lyric, and I know I was doing that and I experienced it to some degree. But yeah, maybe actually it is to the same degree that I described

when I'm describing any other action [JBK: Yeah.] But [JBK: Go ahead.] I sort of feel like there is a bit more, there was a bit more like emotion, y'know, a bit more *feeling* to it.

50:59 JBK: Yeah. If, if there is a feeling vibe-y thing there, could you, could you be able to describe that or are you not sure?

50:59 Russ comments: JBK has asked across several interviews (if I recall correctly) questions of the type: *Mel says "Maybe X." JBK says "If there is X, could you describe it?"* I think that is a problematic question because it suggests that it is okay to provide descriptions of experiences that aren't present. I would rather that JBK convey something like *"If there is X, I'd like to hear about it. But if there is not X, then I think it risky to try to describe it. There's no rush—if the experience is important, we will get to see it on subsequent days."*

The general rule: If you have to put a question into the subjunctive (there are *four* subjunctifiers in JBK's 50:59 turn), it is probably better not to ask it. DES is concerned with things that are directly apprehended, *not* with the possibility of things that might be apprehended.

51:07 Mel: I would say it's like exactly the same stuff that I said earlier and whatever of like, y'know, that that sort of happiness, the sort of playfulness, a sort of optimism, like all those sorts of things, but with that vague veil covering everything.

51:27 JBK: So something vague. Um, but if it is there, it's something happy, positive? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And what I was curious about...was you said, um...and this... I don't know exactly what you said, but something like, I was experiencing this because I wrote down the words and I think, Russ, you, me, you mentioned earlier that when people, I dunno, justify something by saying, oh, I, I noted it down [Mel: Mm-hmm.] then... I mean, you didn't say I was experiencing it because like I had this inner experience that I remember and that I can talk about now. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

51:27 Russ comments: Julian is combining two of my general observations about what DES participants say. First, when participants invoke an explanation (e.g., by saying *because I was...*) instead of providing a straightforward description, then that should jangle the skepticism antennae.

Second, when DES participants say, as *the introductory salvo* of their description attempt, "I wrote down..." and then quote what they wrote in their notebook, it often suggests that there was nothing or very little in their experience, or that for some other reason they don't trust their recollection. Mel is a textbook example of this: she has been initiating her descriptions with such locutions pretty regularly for the last several sampling days. For example, today's sample 5.3 began, "I was on Twitter just looking mindlessly at my feed. Um, *and I've written*, 'I would say things were pretty empty here. Nothing particularly noteworthy.'" And sample 5.4 began "it went off not long after, at 11:12 AM *and I've written*, 'I was putting washing away [so I'm in my apartment still]. I was putting washing away very much lost in the action of doing that.'" In both those examples, there was little or nothing ongoing in Mel's experience.

By contrast, when Mel's experience was at its most differentiated (as today's sample 5.4 at 8:43) she did *not* lead with *I've written*, instead saying:

I was walking back home from getting coffee. Um, and I was walking down Ludlow Street in the Lower East side thinking about what I would say to Matty Healy if I ran into him before his concert tonight [laughs]. Um, and I've noted this because the thought was specific, so there was a specific thought... I thought I was thinking, like, what would I say to him if I ran into him on the street? And the specific thought was like, when the beep went off, I was thinking, I would say, "I love the performance art and cultural commentary you're doing at the moment." And I've written, "I wasn't visualizing meeting him, but I was definitely midway through considering what I would say if I met him.

There, she described the context and the experience in substantial detail, and *only then* did she append *and I've written*. So I think the *I've written* general rule applies to Mel.

Both those considerations lead in the same direction here: we should be skeptical of Mel's description of the level of experience in her singing. The iterative procedure may help us out here, eventually.

52:09 Mel: Yeah. I think the more that we have discussed this, then I think that it...yeah, it's just more like I was caught mid-action and that maybe apart from like the sort of, there's definitely a vibe-y element to it, really, I don't think it's that different to any other time I've been caught mid-action and describe it as sort of autopilot-y and really easily identifiably caught doing something that's physical. Um, like I think that that's just what's happened here. But I just wasn't super aware of it, so I was like, oh, well it's really easy to identify. I was singing and I was caught in the act of doing that. But like, in terms of inner experience...yeah. Like I think it's the same as any other time when I describe it as like a bit autopilot, but also maybe a bit, a bit of a vibe and a, and a and a state of being or whatever. But that...I think it's that sort of thing.

53:05 JBK: And Russ, I'm wondering, how did you interpret this moment?

53:11 RTH: Well, I, I took her early in this conversation descriptions as being, *I'm more into the music on this beep than I was in the, in the previous beep*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And *now* I hear her saying, *well, y'know, maybe it's the same thing. The beep caught me*, whatever. And I'm guessing that the, of those two, the earlier one is probably more faithful to the experience than the last one, cuz we've talked more about it [Julian: Yeah.] and things get, water gets muddled. But in, in *no* case I did, I hear her saying that, that she was really into the specific analytic whatever of the music. She was more bopping along to the music, singing along to the music, than she was...

53:11 Russ comments: I have these reactions, as I view the video of this interview two weeks after the interview took place:

- (1) It was good that Julian's skeptical antennae were jangling, as he noted at 51:27.
- (2) I'm mildly surprised to hear myself (in 53:11) side with Mel's first account. Today, I would have preferred to hear myself say that we don't really know.
- (3) We need to keep in mind what is at stake here: The question is whether the singing is pretty much entirely on autopilot or whether there is a little bit of direct

apprehension of it. I think we cannot resolve that issue, which is roughly the same as saying we can't determine, on a San Francisco morning, exactly when the fog lifted. But that doesn't mean that fog isn't important, nor that at some times it is dense and at other times light.

- 53:59 JBK: Yeah. Because, um, specifically you said, Mel, that you wrote down some exact words. Do you, can you say what those are?
- 54:12 Mel: No, no. Julian...
- 54:12 Russ comments: Zoom froze for a little bit.
- 54:14 JBK: Everyone frozen.
- 54:15 RTH: Julian. Julian. Frozen. Now he's unfrozen.
- 54:17 JBK: Yeah. I was, I was asking, uh, cuz Mel, you said you wrote down some words. I was wondering what those were.
- 54:24 Mel: Oh, yeah. Um, it, well, the exact lyric I was singing was "change in pressure." Um, it, and...but I think that that was noticeable because, uh, it's like the, it was the chorus of the song, so like that line gets sung over a lot. So it was just really easily identifiable. Um, uh...but yeah, in terms of like, were, was I singing that song lyric and thinking like specifically about like what those like...oh, *change in pressure* and like what that meant? No, like, y'know, there were the words coming out of my mouth, but then it was more just experiential and whatnot. Like not actually, um, conceptually thinking about what those words mean.
- 55:09 JBK: And the experience was more about the singing those words, or hearing those words, or not really about those words. Those words were just happening, but more about the general...
- 55:21 Mel: Vibe.
- 55:21 JBK: Vibe-y-ness, vibe-y-ness...
- 55:23 Mel: [laughs]. Yeah. Yeah.
- 55:26 JBK: Um, and yeah. I'm curious, Russ, cuz I thought you'd ask follow ups about the, the vibe. I'm, I'm wondering why, why you didn't.
- 55:44 RTH: [pause] I, I guess I thought it would probably push too hard in a, in a specific direction, when I wa, wasn't sure that either there wasn't anything specific or if there was something specific, it had been lost in the conversation.
- 56:00 JBK: Okay.

- 56:02 RTH: And in response to your *previous* question, when, when, when Mel or somebody says, “what I wrote down is,” I take that as being a way of saying, *I can’t remember. You’re asking me a question and I’m trying to be responsive to your question. And so I’m gonna tell you what I wrote down.* [Mel: Mm.] *But beyond, but beyond that, I don’t feel trustworthy or confident or, or whatever.* [Mel: Mm-hmm.] If she had a clear recollection, she wouldn’t say it. She wouldn’t say, “I wrote down ‘I was listening to the music.’” She would say “I was listening to the music.” [Mel: Mm-hmm. That’s a really good point.] So I, I, “I wrote down” as a pretty strong underminer from, to my ear, usually. [JBK: Okay.] And, and I have, and I’ve been, y’know, I’ve been listening to Mel fairly carefully and I don’t see any reason to believe that, that she means that in any other way. [JBK: Okay.] She’s saying, *I wrote down; I’m not really sure here, but, uh, the best I could do when I had the chance, this is what I wrote.*
- 57:05 Mel: Yeah.
- 57:07 JBK: Okay. So you sensed some uncertainty and didn’t want to push too far in some elements, but it...Yeah. It sounds like you didn’t like doubt all the way that it was completely autopilot. Um, but you just didn’t want to push too far on specific elements.
- 57:22 RTH: Right.
- 57:22 Russ comments: *Completely* autopilot is a bit more than I thought. What I said at 55:44 (“either there wasn’t anything specific or if there was something specific, it had been lost in the conversation”) seems apt.
- 57:26 JBK: Okay. Um, I’m good on questions.
- 57:28 RTH: Me too.
- 57:30 Mel: Well, that’s it, that’s all the beeps today. [JBK: That’s the beeps?] Some bizarre ones for you [laughs].
- 57:37 RTH: Well, I, I still think we’re, we’re, I think this is, these are interesting. They’re interesting in, their, in the way that we’re trying to get at the limits of nothing / something / empty / autopilot-y.
- 57:51 Mel: Yeah. I mean, I really found... I really liked today, even though it was a bit embarrassing content-wise, but that, that the beep went off when I was in the middle of having something that feels like a, a real clear thought. Y’know, when I’m talking about that, when I was pondering what I’d say if I happened to meet Matty Healy. Like that’s a really distinct thought that I was *definitely having*. And that’s interesting because I know that I, I am capable of that and that that sometimes happens to me, but more often than not, it’s that nothingness that we have come across a lot of times. So it was really interesting to have the beep go off when I am having definite clarity of a specific thought. Like I found that really interesting today.

- 58:37 RTH: And I had a similar reaction to that, which was *Mel knows how to talk about inner experience when there is inner experience to talk about* [Mel laughs]. And, uh, and so that's a, that's a way of, par-, it's a ingredient in my understanding of what Mel's trying to tell us.
- 58:58 Mel: Yeah.
- 59:02 RTH: So, shall we do it again?
- 59:04 Mel: Yes. So, oh, we're...yeah, we're gonna have to, um, change time zones for the next one cuz I'll be back in Australia.