

Mel May
Mel Interview 7

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the December 7 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/9A06Se7jrjE>. 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: So I don't think I have my own private voice.
- 0:05 JBK: Okay. Um,
- 0:06 RTH: We have the voice that was collected by Zencastr.
- 0:09 JBK: Yeah. So Zencastr does the video and audio files. [RTH: Yeah.] It does waveform audio too, which I think I've just been downloading the MP3, but if anybody ever needs very high-quality voice, I could send those files too.
- 0:25 RTH: So we've got 'em. But you have 'em. You have 'em, but you're not sending them. Is that the,
- 0:30 JBK: Um, the WAV files? I am not, I'm not downloading the WAV files. Um, I find the MP3 is generally good enough. Um, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] but if I don't know for other purposes...
- 0:44 RTH: They're good enough for me. Whether, whether anybody wants to make a more professional quality deal than we're making here, then MP3 might be good. But, uh,
- 0:52 JBK: Yeah, I think down the line for something like that, the WAV could be good.
- 0:56 RTH: Yeah.
- 0:57 JBK: But yeah, they're all on the Zencastr platform.
- 1:00 RTH: And, and I would say I don't, I'm, I'm only semi-confident about what I'm saying here, but, uh, on perhaps the last couple, but at least some of the last couple of the Zencastr combination videos, the edited videos where you put the three of 'em together, the, the sync of the audio with the video has been problematic. [JBK: Oh!] And it's particularly, I think in my window. So my window might be off by a second or

two. Uh, and so my recollection, I, I, I should have taken notes about it, but I think on maybe day 5 and 6, or 4 or 5 and 6, I'm not a hundred percent sure, but the, but the, the, the sync is the worst in my window. It's the second worst in Julian's window. And Mel's is pretty good, as,

- 1:52 JBK: Does it get worse as the video goes on, or does it stay consistently the same level?
- 1:59 RTH: I don't know the answer to that. I, if I had to guess, I would say it *doesn't* get worse. But I, I don't have much confidence in that.
- 2:09 JBK: Okay. Could, it's something I could, could adjust it. I just, it would be a pity to adjust it and have the timestamps for all the transcripts get thrown off. [Mel: Hmm.] I guess it'd be best...
- 2:21 RTH: Definitely we don't wanna do that! But, uh, yeah, I think there, I think there's, y'know, at the, at, for what we're doing at the moment, I think it probably doesn't much matter. If we go forwards, then we'll try to, we'll probably, probably try to fix that. But that could be fixed post-production or whatever. I mean
- 2:38 JBK: Yeah. Yeah. I could, I could fix that.
- 2:39 RTH: Whoever, whoever is recording can break things apart and put 'em back together again. And, uh
- 2:47 JBK: Mm-hmm. And, and what, what'd you think of trimming? Like should I trim this conversation off before I send you the edited version? Or is this kind of stuff interesting as part of the process? Or what do you think?
- 3:04 RTH: I don't have much of an opinion about it. I'm guessing that going forwards, most all of it would, most everything would be trimmed away. So,
- 3:12 JBK: Okay.
- 3:13 Mel: I personally come to the opposite angle. I kind of like keeping this for the minute. [JBK: Okay.] I don't know why. I just think it adds something, a realness to it.
- 3:26 JBK: [laughs]
- 3:27 Mel: And it's a nice option to have at the moment. So I would be hesitant in trimming it too fast.
- 3:32 JBK: Okay. Yeah. I could send with some minimal, minimal trimming.
- 3:36 Mel: But it's much of a much, but I just, I don't know. There's something I like about it.
- 3:42 RTH: So I agree with, I agree with all of that. And I especially agree that once you've trimmed it, it's very hard to get it back. And so even if on, even if we only had like a

1% interest in it, we might as well *have* it. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Because it's a thousand times worse to get it, to get it back if we don't, if we don't have it, or whatever.

- 4:00 JBK: Yeah. [Mel: Yeah.] Alright. Should we get into the beep, beep number 1?
- 4:07 Mel: Yes. Um, I will say that I found this one tricky again because it feels like it's been a little minute since we did it. Um, so that was just interesting to note that I would say there were, there were two times when it went off and I was like, I can't, I have no idea what happened then. Like, y'know, I just completely missed, like I was blacked out when it went off. So that was kind of interesting. Cuz that doesn't usually really happen.
- 4:38 RTH: And are, and are we gonna get to those beeps? So beep number 3 or whatever is gonna be one of those beeps? And... Or did you just skip 'em?
- 4:44 Mel: Oh, I just scrapped 'em, but I could probab-, yeah, they were, they were in the middle somewhere, but I've just literally, just I haven't even got note of it anymore.
- 4:54 RTH: Okay.
- 4:56 JBK: That's fine to scrap a beep if you weren't confident at all. [Mel: Yeah.]
- 5:01 RTH: So, so I, I agree that it is fine to scrap a beep, but, but I *also* think that it, it's also *sometimes* interesting to try to figure out what it was about this particular beep that made it difficult. Or the situation that made it difficult. [Mel: Hmm.] *Particularly* maybe in *your* situation, where we're, we are plumbing the depths of *nothing to something* [Mel: Hmm] *to, to whatever*. And the question would be, well, is this on that spectrum or is it a different kind of a thing altogether?
- 5:30 Mel: Yeah, it's true. I think certainly one of them yesterday probably fell into that category of like, I just immediately freaked out because I was like, oh my gosh, there's nothing identifiable there. So I think you're probably right. Okay. That's good to know. I can like, make sure of that going forward that I still note them. [JBK: Inaudible.] Um, okay.
- 5:50 JBK: And should I start, start with this beep? [RTH: Sure.] Okay.

SAMPLE 7.1 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 5:54 Mel: Um, okay, so I got, I did these yesterday afternoon slash last night. So first one went off at 5:42 PM, um, and I've written, "I was mulling over something, was thinking the phrase" (the exact phrase) "what questions do I have?" As I sat paused in between writing an email, the phrase was clear, but as a concept, it wasn't audio or visual. Um, I was really honed in on this thought. So nothing else was present in my awareness. I was sort of staring off into space. I was sat on my bed, my computer was in front of me, but none of that was relevant to my inner experience at that precise moment."

6:35 JBK: Okay. So even if it's irrelevant to your experience, let me just try to get this context. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So you're on your computer and you're, you're between writing emails? What, what did you say?

6:48 Mel: Yeah, I was sort of paused halfway through writing an email. [JBK: Okay.] Um, sitting on my bed in my bedroom, on my laptop.

6:56 JBK: And so you have, *what questions do I have* in your experience?

7:01 Mel: Yeah. Really bizarre phrase.

7:04 JBK: And, um, is there more context that would help us understand that, even if it wasn't maybe exactly present?

7:04 Russ comments: (This is part of the diamonds-glass series.) I think this question is an invitation to collude in the pretended shared apprehension of experience. Understanding the context is an invitation to sidestep our actual exploration of experience, as if, if I know Mel's *context*, then I would know Mel's *experience*, because I would know my own experience in that context and I would presume that Mel's experience is like mine. That is a glass kind of assumption, so the asking for context is something like: let's not go to the trouble of finding out about the diamond—let's just get the glass and assume that tells us about the diamond. That strategy is doubtless what most everyday interaction is like, but it is *not* good DES.

Julian comments: I see your point here. Asking about context might bring in something that's not there. It may well be that *eventually* we can better understand Mel's experience at this moment by knowing the general vicinity of what her questions are about. Are they about the meaning of life? How to fix a toaster? A business proposal? This could also be a red herring though. Mel's experience may turn out to be about the phrase itself without semantic significance. Or a kind of pondering process not clearly attached to any topic. So DES requires some suspension. Suspend what seems the most obvious path to clarity. Eventually some might turn up. Or not.

7:13 Mel: Yeah, I was writing like a business proposal, um, and so had done some things and was at like, the stage in writing the email of like, *and here are some questions that I have at the moment*. And so I was right in the, the middle of sort of, I'd stopped doing an action of typing, and I was sat thinking like, *what questions do I have?* as the beep went off? Or just before the beep went off.

7:37 JBK: Okay. So you're kind of thinking mulling, *what questions do I have?* And, um, and you say it is those exact words? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, like how, but it's not, it's not heard. It's not, you're not auditorily hearing the words. [Mel: Mm. (nods affirmatively)] Um, and how, how exact are those words? If if, if I, if you changed it a little bit, like, mm, "what are these questions?" or something like that, would that reflect your experience too? Or is it really those exact words?

7:37 Russ comments: Mel had said in her opening salvo (5:54), that she was "thinking the phrase (the exact phrase)" and also "the phrase was clear, but as a concept, it wasn't

audio or visual.” That makes somewhat ambiguous the degree to which words were present in her experience at the moment of the beep—by “exact phrase” Mel may or may not intend “exact words.” It is unfortunate that JBK starts by emphasizing the “exact words” aspect—that will make it difficult to disentangle the distinction between words present and a very specific (but unworded) concept present. He inquires about words at the end of this turn (“How exact are those words?”) and in upcoming turns (8:25, 8:56), but starting with the words muddies the water.

- 8:12 Mel: No, on this occasion it was very specifically that phrase, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] in, yeah, so those words in that exact order. That was the exact thing that was happening at that time.
- 8:25 JBK: Um, and as we, we’ve asked similar questions before, I think Russ did, is it that words are present? That these words, somehow this phrase is present? Or is it that the, the thought, the mulling, is so contained in, in this phrase that this is just such a good way to describe it?
- 8:51 Mel: I think the first, but I’m a little bit unsure of the question.
- 8:56 JBK: Mm. Let me try to rephrase it. Um, so would you say that this phrase itself, “what questions do I have?” is present? Or is it really that just this thought is so well described by this, that that’s the only way to describe it?
- 9:16 Mel: No, I think the first, the first option. Um, on this occasion that, that the first option is, is right.
- 9:25 JBK: Okay. So the, the phrase, the phrase is there, “what questions do I have?”
- 9:29 Mel: Yeah.
- 9:30 JBK: Um, and um, so that’s there, this kind of a, a mulling thought component, is there. Are there other ways to describe this, this mulling thought, whatever thing?
- 9:30 Russ comments: I think it likely (or at least possible) that there is not an experienced mulling thought component. Mel did use the word *mulling* in her original description (5:54), but that was likely (or at least possibly) context, not experience. Her 5:54 turn is aimed almost entirely at the words-present aspect of her experience, and it is likely (or at least possible) that her experience is entirely of words present. There is warrant to *inquire* (using, as always in DES, an even-playing-field inquiry) about whether there was a separate mulling, but not a warrant to *presume* that there was a separate mulling.
- 9:51 RTH: So, so could I ask what I think is sort of the most direct question, which hasn’t yet been asked, as far as I could tell? Which is: could you tell us how that phrase is present to you?
- 10:02 Mel: Hmm. Yeah, that’s the tricky bit. And that’s why I’ve described like, it definitely isn’t audio or visual. Um, so it’s like a, as a concept, which I think I’ve mentioned

previously, but like, so I *know* that that's the phrase that I was thinking. But in trying to articulate, I come back to that like it was a knowingness. It's so hard to explain. It's there, but I can't...

10:33 RTH: And, and does "there have any, any geometric significance? It's there in my head. It's there mentally? It's there in front of me? It's there vis-, I see it?

10:44 Mel: Like mentally. Um, certain- certainly not see it, certainly not in front of me. Feels very like internally, like, um, I guess I sort of feel like I experienced that ph-, that concept or that phrase like in here [points with both hands inside her temples]. Um, but that's just an association. Um, yeah. I can't, I know, but I can't, I don't have any tangible language for how it's there. It's just there. [laughs]

11:19 RTH: Okay. Fair enough, as far as I'm concerned.

11:22 JBK: Does it, does it unfold over time?

11:25 Mel: Uh, yeah, we've had that question beforehand, haven't we? Does it unfold over time? I don't think this did.

11:31 JBK: Okay. So it's kind of...there.

11:35 Mel: I think this was a slab. Yeah,

11:39 JBK: A slab. Okay. [Mel laughs] Um, "what questions do I have?" And, and is there anything about these specific questions present in experience? Or is it, it not about that?

11:54 Mel: No, I hadn't even got that far yet. It was just this,

11:54 Julian comments: I didn't ask about this adequately. Mel answers that specific questions are not there yet. But I should have been more broad: Is something starting to form? Is there some kind of inkling of pondering happening? As Russ pointed out, I've already fixed too firmly on mulling, without establishing if any of that's present. It could really be just about the phrase at this moment.

RTH comments:

RE "But I should have been more broad: Is something starting to form? Is there some kind of inkling of pondering happening?"

I think JBK's 11:39 "is there anything about these specific questions present in experience?" was a good question. It does run the risk of overlooking something small, but that, to me, is preferable to the speculations that the alternative questions in Julian's comment encourage. "Is something starting to form?" suggests a theoretical answer: *of course* something is *starting* to form somewhere and at some level in her cognitive processes. Whether that is experienced or not may be very difficult (or impossible) to answer.

12:01 JBK: Um, and... [pause] I have a pretty clear idea of this experience. You have, um, this, this kind of thought / mulling component of "what questions do I have?" And, and

that phrase is present, but it's not heard. It's not seen, but it is there. Um, Russ, do you have other questions to ask about it?

- 12:32 RTH: Well, is there something to say, that there is a thought mulling component? Or is it just these are the, this is what's in my experience, this phrase "what questions do I have?"
- 12:47 Mel: I think, uh, it's right on the, on the line, like in the moment before the beep went off, that phrase was present. And I would say I was just before like really getting into mulling over following that phrase. So I've used the term *mulling* and I think that that is accurate. Like I was mulling over something. But I think the something at that time was that phrase, not necessarily the answers to that phrase yet.
- 13:13 JBK: Mm-hmm. Okay. So it's more about the phrase. Is there something, um, is there something about it that that makes it a question? Like, is it experientially a question?
- 13:33 Mel: That's a good question. I don't think so. I'm trying to... Part of me, I'm gonna lob this out, but you might hate that I have taken this on a small tangent. But I'm trying to think more about how I can possibly describe like, the experience of what we're talking about. Y'know, I'm really struggling to articulate that. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Part of me wants to attempt to describe it as like sort of something like, and I'm, I've literally just thought of this on the spot, but as if like a, a movie that you've seen before is playing in a room next to you or something, and you can *sort of* hear it, but not like te-really tell what the words are or what's saying, but you can sort of hear it and you certainly can't see it cuz there's a wall there. But there's something from, just from the little thing you can hear or whatever, you can sort of conjure up an image of what that movie was. That's sort of what it feels like, if that makes any sense in terms of an experience. Like it's sort of a concept and it's there, but there's this weird clarity, but also complete lack of clarity. Does that make any sense?
- 15:00 JBK: Um, I think we could look into it. I don't fully understand it yet. But, so do you mean about what questions that I have? So do you mean by that, that, so it's not fully clear, there's not some coherent thing coming to you? Is that what you mean by kind of a movie in the other room? Just-
- 15:21 Mel: It sort of is, but cuz that phrase is clear. I stand by what I've said. But it's, it's as if there's like a veil over it. So I know that that is still the thing and that is experience. But it's not this, um, crisp, shiny, y'know, perfectly-rounded-edges experience of this phrase. It's like a thing that I, I conceptually know is there, but how that looks and feels is whatever the opposite to shiny is, even though I know it's that phrase. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] There's a lot of oxymorons [laughs]
- 16:01 JBK: [laughs] Um, yeah, Russ, do you have other questions to, to ask about that?
- 16:07 RTH: So let me see whether I understand what you're saying, Mel. [Mel: Mm.] I, well, this is what I understand. Tell me whether this is right. The phrase, "what questions do I have?" is clearly present to me, but it's not like *crystally* clear. It's like there's some kind of a penumbra or sound coming from the other room or something, which

indicates that there's, that there's something beyond just this. But I, but what that is, is not describable. But it would be a mistake to say *only* that what's in my experience is "what questions do I have?" There's some intimation or something that goes beyond that. Is that, is that right?

16:52 Mel: Almost, I would say it's like I'm, yes, it's like a fog. So it's like that phrase is very clear, but around that phrase, it's foggy.

17:02 RTH: Okay. That comports with my understanding of it.

17:07 Mel: Yeah.

17:09 JBK: So round, so the foggy kind of veiled other room thing is not this phrase, but, but something else about this phrase or something else entirely?

17:19 Mel: Sort of how it's experienced. So when I refer to it as like a concept, a knowing, that is sort of me trying to dig into describing what that knowing feels like. So definitely identifiable phrase that I am experiencing mulling over. But the mulling over of that, like by definition for how I experienced stuff is encased in this sort of fogginess.

17:56 JBK: Is the phrase at all separate from the mulling over? Because I think what Russ asked before, like we came to the conclusion that it was more about the phrase at this moment or the the, or kind of the mulling, if it's there, was contained in the phrase. I don't wanna stick to *mulling* either. Um, but so is, is there other stuff beyond the phrase, or is all this kind of contained in, in the phrase?

18:28 Mel: No, it's all the one thing. Yeah. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] So it's just me trying to explain that, like, that thing is, yeah, again, like not crystal, not a sharp, it's not this beautifully, um, y'know, HD experience of that phrase in my brain. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Like my version of experiencing that phrase or mulling over that phrase is this fogginess where you can still tell that's the phrase, but like, it feels sort of like in the depths of something, y'know?

18:28 Russ comments: Mel's 18:28 turn (and the turns leading up to it) suggest to me this possible explanation: At the outset of this sample's discussion, we may have settled too easily on the phrase "What questions do I have?" as being in words (see the comment at 7:37). That is, when Mel says (18:28) that "What questions do I have?" is "not crystal, not a sharp, it's not this beautifully, um, y'know, HD experience of that phrase in my brain," she may be saying that it wasn't really in words but as a concept that is *almost* in words.

Julian's 11:54 comment raises another possibility: that there was "something starting to form" or "some kind of inkling" happening. There is no way of knowing about this sample—there is too much water over the dam and too much mud in that water. But it does factor into the iterative process going forward.

19:01 JBK: Yeah. Um, that to me, I think the, the more we try to dig and ask questions like, um, the more we try to get into nuances, kind of the harder it can be to understand. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And I think I do have some understanding of what you're saying. Maybe

not completely, because maybe the only, I mean, I think it could become clearer the more I do, but I, I think I understand somewhat. Uh, how about you, Russ?

19:31 RTH: I would trust the iterative procedure. [JBK: Yeah.] Either, either we're gonna get some more perspective on this as we go forwards, or we're not. And if we don't, then, then we're just not gonna get it. And if, if we do, great.

19:45 JBK: Should we go on to number two.

19:46 RTH: Yeah. Lemme, lemme make one comment about the, about technique. You spent, Julian, two or three minutes at the beginning of this asking about context, which I would not have done. [JBK: Okay.] And the, and the logic is in, in my head, for that is: the *experience* is what is difficult and evanescent, and the faster you get to it, the better off you're gonna be. [JBK: Okay.] The *context*, what was she was doing with that, that that's gonna be there *next week!* You could, you could wait for a week and she, and she could tell you about the context of that. But the, but the experience, [inaudible] [JBK: Yeah.] So every, every second that you talk about something other than experience before you get to the experience you're making your life and her life harder [JBK: Okay.] about the experience.

20:31 JBK: I guess my thinking is, for me, it's easier to kind of stabilize and situate like what's happening before I get into, um, the thing,

20:42 RTH: I think it's totally risky [Julian: (inaudible)] because it makes it seem comfortable to *you*. And that's not the point. The point is what's, what *her* experience is like. [JBK: Yeah.] And the, the, the risk of context is if she says her context wa-, well then you go down the path, (not, not just you personally, but mo- most people go down the path) *well, I understand what's going on, y'know, she's talking about this, I have got that kind of experience too*. But now you're in the mid, in the muddle of your, *your* take on what *your* experience *would be* given that context and what *Mel's* experience *was in* that context. And *that* is, I think, damaging to the process.

21:20 JBK: Yeah, I can see that. I think here, I think, cuz Mel, you're pretty skilled at DES by now. So you noted the context and also noted that your experience wasn't about it. So, but I yeah, I I take the note that it's best to go right for the experience. So should we go to number 2?

21:38 RTH: Yes. 7.2.

SAMPLE 7.2 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

21:40 Mel: We shall, and it's kind of relevant to what you were just saying, because I have written, um, this went off at 6:27 PM and I've written, "I was midway through writing a text. I was on autopilot. There was no distinct thought *per se*. I was looking at my phone, my thumbs were moving, but I was not aware of much."

22:02 RTH: And "not aware of much." Does that mean not aware of *anything*? Or...

22:07 Mel: I would say that, um, it was that these things were, um, in, in my awareness, but not, uh...We've had this before. Y'know what I mean? When I'm saying like, I'm doing the things and I'm, and I'm aware that my phone is here and I'm on it, but I'm not like super aware.

22:31 RTH: So you're texting? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And your, and your thumbs (are you a thumb texter?) [Mel: Yeah. (demonstrates with thumbs)] Your thumbs. [coughs] Excuse me. The words are coming outta your thumbs, basically. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And, and is there any experience of the words themselves?

22:47 Mel: Not particularly, no. No.

22:49 RTH: Okay. So you're a skilled texter, and out of that skill texting is coming whatever it is that you wanted to say, and it's happening. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But if there is any awareness, it is, y'know, and I have *some* awareness of what I'm doing, but not anything specific about it. Is that right?

23:11 Mel: Yep.

23:12 RTH: And is that, is that awareness more or less the same kind of awareness of *I'm aware of my body position in the chair. I haven't fallen out of the chair and whatever.* [Mel: Yes.] But, uh, but I, but I'm not thematically aware of the chair. [Mel: Yes.] Same kind of a deal? [Mel: Yes.] So I'm, I'm gesturally competently texting. [Mel: Yeah.] And to, and to the extent that, that has to be in my awareness (however we're gonna define that), it is, but it's not thematically before the footlights of my consciousness awareness. [Mel: Correct.] Okay. [Mel: Yep.] And then, so what I understand is basically there is no experience. This is a autopilot-y version of nothing.

24:05 Mel: That's exactly, you stole the words outta my mouth. I was about to say, this is one of those ones that fits into the autopilot / nothingness category. Yep.

24:05 Julian comments: This shows the work (that has to be done on each sampling day, on each sample) of coming to a shared understanding when we're using terms that might mean different things to us. Mel describes still having some awareness (of the phone and thumbs). Russ, you don't directly ask for her definition of awareness. This would lead away from the concrete. Instead, you refocus (as you often do) on a concrete comparison, Mel's experience of sitting in the chair, which before you turn her focus to it was likely not experienced or just on the edge. To Mel this comparison is spot on.

You did *not* create a new shared fixed understanding in awareness clear enough for us to say: *ah this is a definitive nothing moment.* By making a comparison, there are still some ambiguities. For some people the butt-on-the-seat-feet-on-the-floor sensory aspects of sitting in a chair might be more present than others. Or more present at certain moments. It's impossible to say that they don't figure *at all* into experience. And you stayed true to this ambiguity when you explained your understanding to Mel: "This is an autopilot-y version of nothing."

You also stayed true to it in your comment on my written sample description where you changed my original description "She is not experiencing anything" to read "She has no directly apprehended experience."

Sometimes you do prefer the more blunt formulations. Here it's a bit softer, a shade above total statue-like nothingness. Does that mean you see this experience itself as more present? Are you trying to do the 'impossible' task of distinguishing between a little bit and nothing? I don't see it like that but rather as part of bracketing the notion of there either being something or nothing. We also don't need a fixed formula for how to write this in a sample description.

Russ comments:

RE "Sometimes you do prefer... Does that mean you see this experience itself as more present?"

As usual, I find it difficult or impossible to answer questions that try to compare a specific to a general (this sample to *sometimes*, aka diamonds to glass). If you would like to ask whether I find this experience more present than sample X.Y (diamonds to diamonds), I might be able to give a profitable answer.

RE "Are you trying to do the 'impossible' task of distinguishing between a little bit and nothing?"

I'm trying *not* to do the impossible task.

24:16 RTH: Okay. Then I'm good.

24:19 JBK: Um, would you still say, because, um, I think last time we had some confusion where you thought if, when I was asking if something was there, that it had to be something clear and fully about something. Um, would you say a- anything at all is, is really there? Or no.

24:45 Mel: No. On this one? No. Which was sort of bizarre to me. Um, but no, like even, I couldn't even, like *straight after* the beep went off, when I went to write this down, I couldn't even tell you what the words were at that point that were coming [JBK: Yeah] out of my thumbs. Like there was nothing, there was no... and, and there was no, um, there was no like feeling, y'know, when we've sometimes had like a vibe-y-ness to it, or, or whether I was aware of [JBK: Yeah] the temperature or blah blah, nothing. No.

25:19 JBK: Even discounting anything clear, like even if it's something very vague or uncertain, do you think...?

25:26 Mel: No, I honestly, I don't think that this, that, no. [JBK: Okay.] There was nothing to grab at. Unh unh [negative].

25:35 JBK: Okay. Um, should we, number 3? [RTH: Okay.]

25:35 Comment: There is discussion spawned by this sample at the end of this transcript in the section called EMAIL EXCHANGE IN THE COURSE OF WRITING THE DESCRIPTIONS OF THESE SAMPLES

SAMPLE 7.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

25:39 Mel: Yeah. So this one is slightly different, which was interesting. 6:53. Um, "I was aware of my brother and mum talking in a room down the hall, but not the specifics of the words or the content of the conversation. I was laying on my bed and I felt heavy." That's all I've written.

26:02 JBK: Okay. So aware of your brother and your mum. Is this like, this is context, this is something that's happening and, but it's not fully in your experience?

26:02 Russ comments: Mel mentions three things: conversation down the hall, laying on bed, feeling heavy. I see no evidence that the conversation was context, so it seems to me that this questioning is starting down the wrong track. (It turns out that feeling heavy was the most prominent (80/20) portion of her experience.)

26:17 Mel: No, this was in my experience, [JBK: This was...] this was definitely, yep was. Yeah, it was definitely part of my experience that I could hear them chatting, [JBK: Mm hmm.] but it was, it was kind of indistinct in terms of the way I was experiencing it. Like I could, they were close enough that if I *did* tune in the exact phrases I could *hear*, but at that time, like I wasn't, that wasn't part of my experience. Do y'know what I mean? I was aware that they were chatting and I could hear that, and that was part of my awareness, but like, not to the point of actually listening and taking in the content.

26:54 JBK: Okay. So at this moment, uh, how, how was it present in your, how was it present to you?

26:54 Russ comments: This question implies, I think incorrectly, that Mel has not just described how it was present to her. So the question is going to be hard for her to answer: *I just told him how it was experienced, but that apparently wasn't right. What should I say now?* As usual, that is RTH's opinion; the evidence will come from the fruits.

Exercise for the reader: compare and contrast the video (the transcript is not good enough) of Mel's 26:17 and 27:01 turns, paying at least as much attention to the non-worded aspects: tone, prosody, gestures, expressions, and so on. That kind of noticing is the fundamental DES skill.

27:01 Mel: Good question. I don't think I've ever had to kind of describe this scenario. Um, uh, I'd say like just, um, in a listening way in terms of, um, yeah, it feels, it feels like sort of that the audio is, because I was gonna liken it to like a conversation when I'm listening to someone, but it's not that, cuz that is a very active process, whereas this is more, um, passive. So it's kind of as if the audio's coming in, but it's sitting off to the side of my brain, like it's there and it's, um,... Yeah. I don't know how to describe that one.

27:01 Julian comments: Mel says it's a good question but nibbles her finger afterwards. So Russ's 26:54 comment is probably right that the question made Mel go into self-doubt *what should I say now* mode.



She does become more animated and confident as she describes it. She uses a lot of hand gestures, describing audio coming in but sitting to the side.



But then she seems to shift again and look more downturned, almost sad, as if that explanation also wasn't adequate. She trails off and says "I don't know how to describe that one."



I don't want to attribute precise emotions to Mel. That's not the point. But the point is that she was at least somewhat uncomfortable. My question at 26:54 would have been better if I picked up on what she *did* describe and went from there.

27:47 JBK: Is that literal at all, sitting to the side? Or is that more a metaphor?

27:51 Mel: Um, perhaps some combination of both. But that just feels nice in terms of, maybe that's me sort of, um, metaphorically compartmentalizing the space it's taking up in my, um, awareness. So it's not like a present central part of my awareness. It feels as

though it's like here [gestures outside the right side of her head] and that's happening. And I, I'm aware of it, but not, um, consumed by it.

27:51 Russ comments: JBK 27:47 asks a good question, but the answer isn't adequately clarified: maybe it is experienced, maybe it's metaphorical. It is likely impossible to make that distinction about this sample, but the distinction could be clarified for its iterative value.

JBK could have said, in response to Mel 27:51, something like: "I'd like to clarify (to the extent we can) whether you mean this [mimic right-side-of-head gesture] experientially or metaphorically. Some people sometimes experience thoughts as being literally in some particular region inside the cranium; some people experience thoughts as being literally in a region outside the head. Some people say 'the thought is off to the side' and mean that entirely metaphorically—that the thought is not as important as the main experience. Any of those (or others, or none, or I don't know) is fine with me." (The reference to "other people" is not to invoke comparison, but to normalize what might seem weird.)

The problem with leaving this unclarified is that we have communicated to Mel by our actions that we don't really care about the distinction between experience and metaphor.

28:18 JBK: And even if you're not aware of specifics of the conversation, is, is there still some other aspect of this talking that's, that's present to you? Like the sounds of it or something like that? Or, or not really.

28:36 Mel: I mean, I just, I can tell that it's my mom and my brother, and I am aware that, y'know, like they're not fight-, they're not arguing or anything, like whatever. But beyond that, no. Like, it's just, it, it is, it is experienced the same way as if the radio is on.

28:56 JBK: Yeah. Okay. [Mel: Sort of incidental like-] You say like they're not arguing. Is that something that later you can interpret it a certain way? Or is something about the tone of the conversation also experienced? Or...?

29:11 Mel: Yeah, I would say the tone of the experience, uh, the tone of the conversation is experienced at the time. Like that, like, yeah, the, the general vibe of the conversation is part of the experience, but then not more specific than that.

29:25 JBK: Would you say you, you have some vibe or is it more just kind of...

29:30 Mel: Yeah, I don't think I had vibe. I think the thing that stood out to me here was, um, that I was aware of my body, which certainly isn't often the case. Like, I was laying on my bed and I distinctly, uh, felt heavy.

29:46 JBK: Okay. So can you describe that part more?

29:51 Mel: Hmm. Um, yeah, even when I was writing the word *heavy*, I was like, *what is a good way to describe this*? Um, I don't think so. [laughs]

30:09 JBK: So you're feeling heavy. Is it like, uh, a noticing that you're feeling heavy? Or is it more just you're feeling heavy?

30:19 Mel: I think feeling heavy. And, sorry, yeah, to be clear again, like when I say *heavy*, I mean physically, too, not like emotionally (uh, [laughs] although probably that as well). Um, but no physically in terms of like laying down and I guess I was like probably exhausted. But that, that physical feeling of heaviness was there. Uh, was I notice-, no I wasn't noticing. It wasn't a meta thing. I wasn't noticing me noticing, y'know, apart from when I wrote it down. But at the time just I was feeling that.

30:50 JBK: Feeling heavy. Is it a heaviness in particular regions? Or is that not part...?

30:56 Mel: No, this definitely felt like just entirely as a whole being, like my whole body. Yeah.

31:03 JBK: Mm-hmm. Is it about...

31:05 RTH: Including your head, and your arms, and your legs?

31:05 Julian comments: Russ, you interject "including your head, and your arms, and your legs." I would have pursued this differently. I'm not a fan of micro-phenomenology as a whole, but one useful thing I got out of a micro-phen practitioner was that she asks *does this have a location* instead of *does this have a bodily location*. The idea is that feelings, sensations, and so on might not just be localizable to the body. Our nerves, of course, are located only in the body, but how we experience things could extend beyond—into the space around us for instance. I had originally asked about "particular regions" but when Mel answered that she felt it in her "whole being," it clued me into backing up and starting not with assumptions that the heaviness was solely bodily.

I did try to return to this line of questioning later. It came across more as inquiring about a separate feeling component. I would have liked to move away from imposing clear distinctions between physical sensations and more emotional feelings. I couldn't think of a good way to untangle it, so I dropped this line of questioning.

Even if, in the end, this experience was more about physical sensation, I still think 'dragging your feet' is good before trying to pin things down very precisely.

Russ comments: I agree that feelings and sensations can and do sometimes extend beyond the body (and have written many times about that over the last 20 or 30 years) and am easily open to any suggestion that sensation does not conform to body geometry. My question to Mel was wide open to that possibility.

You had asked about "particular regions," and Mel said "this definitely felt like just entirely as a whole being, like my whole body." I noticed (as did you) the mention of "being" and "body," and I also noticed the ambiguity / vagueness of "whole." My response ("Including your head, and your arms, and your legs?") was sensitive to both those aspects—I invited Mel to be specific without stipulating the aspect. A vital aspect of my question was the *including...?* portion of the locution. *Including...?* is an invitation to expand, as well as to contract (which is the avenue Mel took). If Mel's experience had been outside her body, the *including...?* would have enabled her to expand to something like "Yes, and also in the regions outside of them."

That is, understanding my question is not about the words. My question was an invitation to be specific in whatever way and manner that specificity entails. Would it have been better to have asked “Including your head, and your arms, your legs, regions outside your body?” or “Including your head, and your arms, your legs, or any other aspects of your being?” Maybe, but I doubt it. I think my question conveyed a limitless interest in the specifics of her experience, whatever they were. I think a genuine interest in the genuine specifics leads to fidelity, in whatever realm that happens to be.

However, I do agree that it is reasonable to wonder whether “whole being” suggested the possibility of something beyond the bodily, so I thought your (31:54) query about “whole being” was warranted.

- 31:11 Mel: Yeah. Okay. Good question. Yeah. Um, so now you’re gonna pull me up on that. I would say actually then if you did challenge me on that sort of my head and like my torso. Like, y’know, the, my fingers and my toes, probably not necessarily, but like the main— once you get out to like the finer limbs, I guess I wasn’t really aware of those feeling heavy, but say like from knee up to shoulders, like that whole sort of torso bit and probably my head, I just was laying there and I sort of felt heavy.
- 31:47 RTH: So the massive portions of your body, including your head? [Mel: Yeah.] Okay.
- 31:54 JBK: Um, is it just about the body? Or is there something besides that? Because you mentioned your “whole being.” Like, is it, is it in your body or is there some, uh, or [inaudible crosstalk]
- 32:07 Mel: Yeah. No, I think, yeah. Sorry, I didn’t mean to cut you off. Um, I, I think this was quite physical as opposed to like, um, in like, y’know what I always say, like, inside my brain. Like I don’t think that that it was matched in there. Like it was sort of, um, some degree of nothingness. I mean, in the sense that like there was no thought *per se* or whatever, y’know. In, in my experience, the conversation my mom and brother were having was there, but there was no like, thoughts beyond that or whatever. Like the overwhelming thing was this physicality. But in terms of more like thoughts or mulling over anything or whatever, none of that was really present. So I don’t think that there was a heaviness inside my brain sort of thing.
- 33:01 JBK: Um, and... would you, could you say which thing was more present at this moment? The conversation or the heaviness?
- 33:12 Mel: No, I think the heaviness. And that’s relevant to what I was saying before about like when the, when I was trying to describe their conversation as sort of off to the side of my brain. Like it was part of the experience, but it wasn’t the central experience. So the thing that was *more* experienced was that, that physical feeling.
- 33:31 JBK: Okay. Is there, um,
- 33:35 RTH: 60 / 40? 90 / 10?

- 33:37 Mel: Mm, good question. Uh, definitely more than 60 / 40. Maybe 70 / 30. [RTH: Okay.] 80 / 20, somewhere in that. [RTH: Okay.]
- 33:48 JBK: Is there, uh, a valance to this heaviness? Like is it positive or negative? Or does that not at all relate to it?
- 33:58 Mel: Don't think it's, I don't think it's relevant. I think [inaudible]
- 34:01 JBK: Not relevant.
- 34:02 Mel: Yeah. No, not on this occasion. I know what you mean, but I don't, it's not.
- 34:09 RTH: So heaviness has several different meanings, I guess. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] One could be is I feel myself weighted down, pushed into the bed or something like that. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] One is, I feel myself sort of massive. It's not that it's, it's not that I'm being acted on by gravity, but, but because I, I am massive and therefore if, y'know, somebody tried to move me, it would be hard, hard for them to move me, cuz y'know, it's heavy. Does that, does that distinction make any sense to you?
- 34:42 Mel: Slightly. I think the first one feels more relevant in that I just felt like weighted down.
- 34:51 RTH: Okay. Not trying to imply that one's better or worse than the other, just...
- 34:54 Mel: No, no, no. Um, but yeah, I, this, yeah, I know you don't like it when I link to other previous times, but this was very interesting to me cuz I haven't, like, we had that one time where I had like, pain at, from going to Pilates, but like this, yeah. It was cool to be able to notice this, is what I'm saying.
- 35:16 JBK: Is, is there more that you wanted to say with the link? Because I think linking is fine if it's specific moments that are accessible. Or at least we could try it. I mean,
- 35:25 Mel: Well, I, the, the, all I wanted to say is that I'm not often aware of my physical self, I guess, y'know, like our previous times would also suggest that. So it was really interesting to me. Um, I like, I don't know, this just falls from like a curiosity perspective. Y'know, every time you're all like, never discount the nothingness. Like you get bored by that. And it's kind of true. I do, because it feels like hard to explain and that happens all the time. So this is like a, this is a different experience for me. So I'm like, *oh, that's so interesting!* Like, what's that about? I never note that my whole body felt heavy, or felt anything. So it's like, I, I was, I enjoyed this. [laughs]
- 36:12 JBK: This is, uh, this is a more theoretical outside of DES question. Um, do you feel like you're kind of, these tie into self-narratives when you, you notice different things about your experience?
- 36:12 Russ comments: I would, of course, prefer that JBK not ask this (glass) question. The task of describing (diamonds) experience is difficult enough without distracting from it with extraneous conversations. The good news is that JBK did flag it as a non-DES question.

- 36:29 Mel: What do you mean by self-narrative?
- 36:31 JBK: Um, like, do you say, oh, another sample where I feel heavy, y'know, a new way to understand myself.
- 36:39 Mel: Yeah, definitely. That's why it's interesting to me. Um, it's kind of like the coolest challenge as a communicator. Y'know, I spend every day trying to tell stories or trying to articulate things for people. So this is the ultimate hard thing to try and articulate my day-to-day experience. So something like this is like a new exciting challenge to try and articulate. That's all. That's why it's lighting me up.
- 37:08 JBK: Yeah. Experience is challenging, right? Should we, number 4? Do you have more questions?
- 37:16 RTH: Yeah. Lemme, lemme make one more comment before we go. I, I think at the beginning of Mel's description of this, that she gave some hinty kind of evidence that the physical was more important to her than the conversation.
- 37:31 JBK: Yeah.
- 37:31 RTH: And we spent a lot of time talking about the conversation, which would've been easier, I think, if we had gone directly to the physical first and then gotten to the conversation.
- 37:41 JBK: Okay. Yeah. And I did notice that too. I kind of, I don't know. I, yeah, I still have to break this pattern of saving the best for last. I feel like I'll spend the most time on this element so let's get to the other stuff first. But I should reverse that.
- 37:54 RTH: I think you should reverse that. Yeah. Number 4. [JBK: Number 4]
- 37:54 Julian comments: Maybe me saying "I noticed it too" was trying to save face. Doesn't matter; in any case I went back to the video again as an exercise. This is what Mel says:
- "I was aware of my brother and mum talking in a room down the hall, but not the specifics of the words or the content of the conversation. I was laying on my bed and I felt heavy."
- Verbally her description of the mum and brother is characterized by negatives: *not the specifics of X or the contents of Y*. Laying on the bed is described in simple, concrete terms.
- But more importantly, you can look at Mel's gestures. When she talks about hearing her mum and brother, she waves her hands away. When she talks about feeling heavy, she emphatically points her fingers down—indicating *this* was clearly present.

SAMPLE 7.4 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 37:58 Mel: Um, this one went off at 7:50 PM Uh, I've written, "I was listening to my sister, fully comprehending what she was saying." Um, if you would like some additional context, we were midway through dinner. Um, but none of that was particularly relevant to my actual inner experience at that time. I was just listening and comprehending.
- 38:24 RTH: And is the content that you're comprehending particularly a, a particular part of your experience at this time? Or is it one of these *I'm just absorbing what she's saying*?
- 38:37 Mel: Yeah, it was sort of weird. I think *No*. It was absorbing what she was saying. Even though that feels, again, like a bit of an oxymoron to be so consumed, but then not like on something specific. Cuz I didn't wanna write down anything specific about the content coming out of her mouth. But I was so *actively engaged* in listening. It feels like that's sort of not possible. But that's what was happening.
- 39:00 RTH: And do you experience yourself as being actively engaged? Or do you experience yourself as being, I guess, more passively absorbing the conversation, absorbing what she's putting out?
- 39:14 Mel: Yeah, like I'm not a, I'm, I'm not aware of whether I'm passively or actively absorbing it at the time like that to the, like a meta level like that. But in terms of like, yeah, I'm sit-, um, nah, I would say it's pretty actively li- like listening. That, I don't think this was passive. Like I was fully absorbed in the conversation. But again, like not, I wasn't waiting for my turn to talk. I wasn't at the point of like conjuring up a response to whatever she was saying. I wasn't even necessarily like, and perhaps it was to do with what she was saying, but I wasn't even necessarily like, um, having an emotive response or anything. It was just really intaking information.
- 40:05 RTH: So my question was only about your experience. I, and, and I'm, and *I'm* gathering, I guess reading somewhat between the lines, but the, so (I, I wanna articulate how I'm *gathering* and you tell me whether I'm, I'm right or not), but this is, I experienced this as receiving what my sister is saying, rather than I am actively reaching out to understand her. Is that right?

40:05 Julian comments: Russ, you rephrase Mel's experience as "receiving what my sister is saying, rather than I am actively reaching out to understand her." This is giving two options when the distinction between them might not be relevant to her. In past samples of absorption in conversation, Mel had no experiential difference whether she was the one talking or the one listening. Either way, she was absorbed in the conversation. This made me wonder if we should back up from pinning this to Mel listening to her sister and ask if it was more about being absorbed in the conversation.

Russ comments: There may come a time to consider whether it would be better to call this *absorbed in conversation* or *absorbed in what her sister was saying*. But so far in the present conversation, Mel has clearly referred to this as *absorbed in her sister's speaking*. The distinction I am interested in here is about what she means by *absorbed*: Is that like a sponge—whenever the liquid appears, the sponge simply, automatically absorbs it; or is that more like an active mopping up—tracking down the liquid to absorb it.

- 40:43 Mel: [pause] Yes.
- 40:44 RTH: The difference there is sort of like we, we could make a distinction between, between *hearing*: where, where some sound happens and I, and it, and it comes in to me; and *listening*: I'm, I've perked up my ears [mimes it]. I'm, I'm listening *particularly* for that. So *listening* has an active quality to it, whereas *hearing* has a receptive quality to it.
- 41:11 Mel: Mm. Yeah, I understand.
- 41:13 RTH: And so I wanna know as far as your *experience* is concerned, [Mel: Mm.] does this seem like a receiving or a
- 41:21 Mel: Yeah, I, well, I guess it falls into the category, the category of *hearing* rather than *listening*, [RTH: Okay.] based on the distinctions you just made. *But* to the best of my memory right now.
- 41:34 RTH: Okay. Then I think I'm good.
- 41:38 JBK: Um, but on that, we had some other conversation samples where the experience didn't change depending on if you were talking or if your [Mel: Mm-hmm.] friend was talking. So in that sense, either listening or hearing, I don't, I don't know if this is the same one. Do, do you think, um, but, but if it is similar, if it's more about being absorbed in the conversation, then maybe... is it more about being absorbed in the conversation or absorbed in what your sister is saying, like your sister *per se*?
- 41:38 Russ comments: RTH's upcoming interruption suggests that he didn't understand what JBK was asking.
- 42:15 RTH: So before you answer that question, let me let, let me clarify the question be, because I think your question, Julian betrays, uh, an assumption that it's not warranted. So there is in the experience of speaking the same kind of a distinction between speaking and hearing. Most times I would say, when people are speaking, they feel some kind of agency about it, and sort of in like a listening kind of a thing. But sometimes when people speak, the words just roll out and there is no sense of creation *at all*, any, any more than there was a sense of creation in Mel's text messages. The words were coming out of her thumbs. The words can come out of your throat just as much as they come outta your thumbs, unbidden for, for, for some people. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So there— the distinction, but sort of the act of the doing of speaking or the happening of speaking is just as relevant to speaking as it is to hearing.
- 43:15 JBK: Yeah. Now I, I get, I get the distinction between the, these different elements of hearing. Is, so is hearing part of this or is it more just this absorption or is hearing your sister part of this experience?
- 43:35 Mel: I would say based on the distinctions that Russ gave before of hearing the listening, I'd put this in the *hearing* category, but you're getting dangerously towards the end of my like memory, y'know what I mean?

43:50 JBK: Mm-hmm. Okay. Um, so should we move on to number 5?

43:59 Mel: I'll put this one down as not a great beep! [laughs]

43:59 Julian comments: We have uncovered on the fourth sampling day that it was sometimes more apt to describe Mel as absorbed in *a conversation* rather than absorbed in *what her conversation partner is saying*. My case for bringing this up is that we did spend a while untangling it and I think uncovered something about Mel's experience.

You misunderstood and took us in a different direction. Still, I *did* bring it up and I *did* want to ask about it. I *did not* make myself clear. At some point, I figured that rather than going through the effort of making myself clear I would just drop it. This came across to Mel. My 43:50 "Okay" sounded dismissive. And Mel negatively characterized this as "not a great beep." I should not have given her this impression.

I think in the future if I venture to bring something up, I have to commit to it. I can't cop out because making myself clear turns out to be too much of a struggle. Or if I do decide that we're going down the wrong path, I should clearly own up to this as well, rather than putting the onus on Mel.

Russ comments: I did misunderstand, and I apologize for that.

RE " We have uncovered on the fourth sampling day that it was sometimes more apt to describe Mel as absorbed in *a conversation* rather than absorbed in *what her conversation partner is saying*."

No we didn't. (This is another installment in the it's-not-about-the-words theme.)

This is what (I think) happened on day 4. Mel and her friend Milly were in a café having a conversation. At sample 4.3, Milly was speaking; Mel described that as *I am absorbed in what Milly is saying*. At sample 4.4, Milly was (again) speaking; Mel described that as *I am absorbed in what Milly is saying, and that was just like 4.3*. That is not extraordinary—these are two very similar situations with two very similar experiences. At sample 4.5, Mel was speaking; Mel described that as *My experience is just like in 4.3 and 4.4*. This is at least potentially extraordinary—these are two very different situations with very similar experiences. In exploration, Russ said something like *If 4.5 is the same and 4.3 and 4.4, then it would seem to make sense to say that the experience in 4.3 and 4.4 was not absorbed in what Milly was saying, but rather was absorbed in the conversation, so that the same could be said about 4.5*. Mel agreed with that, seemingly without reservation.

Absorbed in the conversation is Russ's construction; it was *not* Mel's natural construction. It was a useful construct for Russ to have advanced because it allowed Mel to provide a new and compelling slant on the similarity between being absorbed while Milly was speaking and absorbed while Mel herself was speaking—yes indeed they were the same. But that does *not* make *absorbed in the conversation* more apt than *absorbed in what Milly is saying*; it *might be* more apt, but to hold that it is more apt is to give far too much credit to a one-data-point observation. *Absorbed in the conversation* was Russ's grunt to call attention to something potentially extraordinary;

nothing more than that. What that something is was not necessarily well defined; and how extraordinary it is was not necessarily well defined.

For example, let's assume that the omniscient being Knows that Mel is frequently absorbed in whatever happens to be surrounding her. That is, the OB would Know that at sample 4.3, Mel was absorbed in whatever happens to surrounding her (which at that moment is Milly talking). The OB would Know that at sample 4.4, Mel was absorbed in whatever happens to surrounding her (which at that moment is Milly talking). The OB would Know that at sample 4.5, Mel was absorbed in whatever happens to surrounding her (which at that moment is Mel talking). The OB would Know shortly thereafter that Russ is an ignorant mortal who makes, as ignorant mortals often do, a generalization based on too little data—he puts 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 into a narrow category (*conversation*) when, if he were omniscient, he would put into a broad category (*whatever surrounds her*). Thus the OB would Know that “Mel is absorbed in a *conversation*” is *not* apt.

Russ is *not* omniscient, and he has the good sense to realize that—that is, he accepts himself as an ignorant mortal. That means he does *not* take what he himself says as being apt; he takes what he says as being an honest attempt to mold his utterances to the phenomena he has observed, full of the shortcomings, distortions, exaggerations, and so on that create and surround his ignorance. He has developed the iterative method and the many other aspects of the DES bracketing of presuppositions as principled tools to expose some of his shortcomings, distortions, and so on, so that *next time* perhaps he can grunt with a little higher fidelity.

RE “we did spend a while untangling it and I think uncovered something about Mel's experience”

That is, to my ear, from the viewpoint of fidelity, a seriously backward way of understanding the DES process. The aim of DES is to think that we have probably *not* uncovered something about Mel's experience; and then to encounter some new experience that might shed some light on it but again with the recognition that that also falls short; and then again to encounter some new experience that might shed some light on it but again with the recognition that that also falls short; repeating that *until there seems to be no warrant or energy for holding that the characterization falls short*. That is the heart of the iterative method: If you are on the scent of fidelity, you have, above all else, to genuinely value the discovery of being wrong. And I do mean genuinely value. Pretending isn't good enough. To prematurely believe that you are right is the enemy of DES, because it invites confirmation bias (which I think is among the most pervasive and pernicious of human habits).

All that is in general; in this specific case, I think that the discussion of sample 7.4 cannot possibly contribute to the fidelity of the *absorbed in the conversation* viewpoint, and it will *decrease* the likelihood that we will *ever* be able to sort it out. Sample 7.4 is a Milly-was-speaking kind of sample, and that can never add anything to the Milly-speaking-experience-is-the-same-as-the-Mel-speaking-experience. Every time we refer to the 7.5 Mel-speaking sample, we corrupt our memory of it a bit more with whatever presuppositions we have, including the Mel-speaking-experience-is-the-same-as-Milly-speaking-experience presupposition. The more Milly-speaking samples we amass, the worse that gets. The only way we can advance that understanding is to happen to get some new Mel-speaking samples, and approach each in a foot-dragging way. Out of that process *might* come a warranted

understanding that the Mel-speaking experience is the same as a Milly-speaking experience. Or not.

RE “I think in the future if I venture to bring something up, I have to commit to it.”
I agree with that, as long as it is in the context of preferring to be wrong.

- 44:02 JBK: No, [inaudible] that. I wouldn’t say that. I’d say, I think I have to, I think I got... no, I was understanding it more as absorption and then you described it more hearing. So I think I would need to go re-listen to Russ’s interview to understand that better. But
- 44:27 Mel: I think my description is lacking for this beep, to be perfectly honest.
- 44:31 RTH: Are we talking about the beep that we’ve just finished talking about? Or the beep that we’re about to talk about?
- 44:35 Mel: No, the beep that we just did.
- 44:39 RTH: Okay.

SAMPLE 7.5 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 44:40 Mel: [laughs] Okay, next one, 8:24 PM, um, [reads] “I was predominantly experiencing pain in my neck. I was looking at my phone and laying on my bed, but my inner experience really centered around that pain. There were no thoughts *per se*, what I would regularly describe as a nothingness, aside from the distinct ache at the nape, at the base of my neck.”

- 45:07 JBK: Okay. So let’s go right to the experience, the neck pain. Um, could you describe how this is present?

- 45:07 Russ comments: “How is this neck pain present?” is a question about meta-awareness—it asks about the manner of presentation of the pain, not about the pain itself. A non-meta-awareness question would be something like “Tell me more about this ache.” Mel’s original description was quite skillfully *not* meta-experiential, and it is risky to suggest meta-awareness when none has been implied.

It would be okay to inquire directly about whether Mel’s experience was a meta-awareness, as long as the inquiring is level-playing-field fair. What is not fair is to slip the meta-awareness implication in as if it were already under discussion.

Julian comments: The phrasing is more meta than it needs to be but the intention was not at all meta.

Russ comments: I think when you adequately discriminate between what is meta and what is not meta, then you will naturally stop phrasing things more meta than they need to be. I think that to reach the point of adequate discrimination, rather than deny a meta intention it would be more beneficial to genuinely accept the possibility that there is something like meta of some kind lurking somewhere in the vicinity.

Maybe it's *not at all meta* as you define that term, but that would be too much about the words.

45:17 Mel: Yes. I knew you would ask me this and I thought about this at the time. Um, because you get to like, how do you, um, how do you just describe this? Um, it was very much centralized to the bottom of my neck. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Um, there was an awa-, an awareness of that area of my body. It was not a positive awareness. [laughs] It, um, was an ache. It had a weight to it. Um, it was not a sharp pain, it was a constant throb. Um, yeah, in terms of the inner experience, like being aware of that, just it's where my attention is sort of passively, but that's the central part of it. There's no, there's nothing else like that's, yeah.

45:17 Russ comments: That answer is a mix of experience and meta-experience. For example, she says "there was an awa-, an awareness of that area of my body. It was not a positive awareness"; I suspect that there was *not* an awareness of that area of her body—there was an ache in the neck. The body-area talk is meta-description, an attempt, I'm afraid, to answer JBK's problematic (45:07) question. The same is true about the not-positive awareness. That is speculation about the process of the pain, not about the pain itself. So I have to discount this talk.

Julian comments: Her language is meta. I don't think she means it or conceptualizes it as meta either. Mel often uses this kind of language when describing sensory experience. For example around 29:30: "I was aware of my body, which certainly isn't often the case. Like, I was laying on my bed and I distinctly, uh, felt heavy." This experience wasn't meta either and I don't think she conceptualized it as such.

Still, I will take the note that my language could have been clearer and that would have helped Mel more clearly express herself.

Russ comments:

RE "Mel often uses this kind of language when describing sensory experience."

(This is in the *don't blame Mel* category) In my opinion, Mel used meta language at 29:30 because JBK's questioning had been unwarrantedly meta for the previous minute. By contrast, her opening salvo (25:39: "I was laying on my bed and I felt heavy"), before it was influenced by any of our talk, was not in the slightest meta.

When working my way through the transcript, I considered commenting at 28:18 that JBK's question was problematic, leading Mel off the track. I didn't write that comment (fatigue, etc.) but now I will write what I might have said. So imagine the following as a comment at 28:18:

28:18

Russ comments: That is a problematic question as evidenced by the ensuing conversation, which goes off the track. So why is this question problematic? To answer that, let's compare what I might have asked:

Russ₁: So I'm hearing my Mom and brother talking but not registering what they're saying. Is there anything else to be said about my experience?

That's a first-person question, and it doesn't seem fair to compare that to JBK's 28:18 question, so let's recast it to the second person:

Russ₂: So you're hearing your Mom and brother talking but not registering what they're saying. Is there anything else to be said about your experience?

Russ₁ and Russ₂ seem equally okay to me, so let's contrast Russ₂ with what JBK actually asked at 28:18:

JBK: And even if you're not aware of specifics of the conversation, is, is there still some other aspect of this talking that's, that's present to you? Like the sounds of it or something like that? Or, or not really.

To my ear, Russ₂ asks directly and exclusively about Mel's *experience* ("Is there anything else to be said about *your experience*?"), whereas JBK asks most directly about *the event that is experienced* ("is there still some other aspect of *this talking*"). The center of DES is to focus on experience and exclude all else (to cleave to experience), but JBK 28:18 mixes together the event and the experience.

The result of not cleaving to experience is that the ensuing conversation focuses on aspects of the *situation* (whether they were arguing, the tone or vibe of their conversation) that were probably *not* aspects of Mel's *experience* at the moment of the beep.

Whether they were arguing, and so on, was *perhaps* a factor underlying Mel's experience (maybe they had been arguing earlier, and that was part of Mel's motivation for hearing the conversation) but that lies in the realm of causation, which DES avoids because there is no end or beginning of such causative speculation). I generally think of such problematics as being in the broadly defined meta range: the argument history, or the focus on tone or vibe, in some sense *lies close to but is not* the experience (heard-but-not-semantically-parsed voices); I lump all such lying-close-to-but-is-nots into the broadly defined *meta* bucket. I don't really care whether we use the term *meta* for such things; for example, one could call JBK's conflating the voice characteristics with the experience a *stimulus error*, but that term has lots of philosophical and sensation/perception connotations that are misleading. The object is to cleave to directly apprehended experience and eschew all else, no matter what one calls the all elses. I think JBK 28:18 and his follow-up questions does not cleave to experience, and that leads Mel into talking about the all elses.

As a slight aside, in the grammar-lesson department: I said that it didn't matter that Russ₁ was in first-person (asking about Mel from Mel's point of view) and Russ₂ was in second-person (asking about Mel from Russ's point of view). But I notice, by contrast, that JBK (28:18) is a *third*-person question, asking primarily about something that is not Mel at all (the in-the-next-room talking). Third-person objects are usually in the all-else category.

RE "I will take the note that my language could have been clearer and that would have helped Mel more clearly express herself."

(This is in the *not about the words* category) That is a statement about the words, which is, I think, off the mark. If your questions had been closer to Mel's experience, that would have helped Mel stay closer to her experience. It's a big difference.

The corollary: To the extent that you are clear about the distinction between experience and all else, your language is likely to be clear.

46:18 JBK: So it's towards the bottom of your neck?

46:20 Mel: Yep.

46:21 JBK: Would it be make, make sense to very specifically localize it? Or is it more general kind of area?

46:28 Mel: Um, I mean like, y'know, just that exact, like the, the top of your spine, bottom of your neck. [gestures]

46:34 JBK: The spine, bottom of the neck? [Mel: Yeah.] Is it more on the muscles or bones or all of it, or you're not sure?

46:42 Mel: Good question. Like kind of muscular, not bony. Um, sort of feels like, y'know, the size of a tennis ball maybe. That definitely is a thing that I'm aware of. Um,

46:54 JBK: Um, is it, does it have a, a kind of shape to it?

47:00 Mel: Not, not specifically. Like it definitely feels that sort of size, but does it feel like neat or whatever? No, it's just like there's a bit,

47:09 JBK: Even if it's not neat. Does it have a rough, kinda like ballish like shape to it or, [gestures] or just more kinda...?

47:22 Mel: No, just that size. But beyond that like, no. It's just that area.

47:28 JBK: Um, is there, is there just this pain or is there a separate kind of awareness or noticing of this pain?

47:37 Mel: No, just this pain is being experienced and not, like nothing else.

47:44 JBK: And nothing else. And... and do you, is it kind of constant or does it change over time? Get more or less intense?

47:56 Mel: No, it was constant. Um, and... yeah, not, like, not sharp or something. I keep coming back to that word. Um...yeah

48:17 JBK: And, uh, kind of a achy, weighty...

48:23 Mel: Mm. Mm-hmm.

48:24 JBK: Is it kind of throbbing? Or, or...?

48:28 Mel: No, I'd say just more of a constant than that.

48:31 JBK: More of a constant ache. And a weight. Is it, is it comparable at all to the beep 3 heaviness weight? Or is that just a different thing altogether?

48:31 Russ comments: For the record, I haven't understood what she meant by weight from her first mention (45:17) to now.

48:48 Mel: No, this is more than that. Yeah.

48:51 JBK: Okay.

48:52 Mel: And this has a negative, like this is not an enjoyable, y'know, whereas the other felt like it wasn't, wasn't positive or negative. This feels like unenjoyable. [laughs]

49:03 JBK: Has a negative... Is it a strong negative or mild or

49:09 Mel: Nah, I would say like mild. Like there's a negative element, but it's not like, y'know. [JBK: Mm-hmm.]

49:09 Julian comments: Russ, in other spots you've told me it doesn't make sense to ask how strong pain is. The only question that makes sense is to find out how much of experience it takes up. Here the pain is central. There's nothing else in experience. But yet Mel describes it as mild.

I see different potential options. A) the pain was the only thing. But that doesn't mean it took up all of experience. There could have been 10% neck pain and 90% nothing. B) Mel describing it as mild doesn't really mean anything. C) The pain was central taking up most of experience, but was also mild. Maybe exact Likert-scale pain ratings are impossible, but some approximate, comparative, rough ballpark descriptions are possible. Maybe you could say: mild, moderate, strong, but anything more specific just gets you lost in impossible comparison. I'm happy to bracket picking any favorite option.

Russ comments: I think here it would have been fine to ask roughly about the severity of the pain in the spirit of "Maybe you could say: mild, moderate, strong, but anything more specific just gets you lost in impossible comparison."

However, your questions are not about the strength of the pain; they are about the strength of the *negative*. And that is problematic to my ear, because the negativity was *not* part of the experience of the pain in the present (7.5) sample. The negativity is in the comparison of the *weight* of 7.5 and 7.3. That is, the negativity does not really exist in any sample, but in the space between the samples. So to ask about the strength of the negativity is to try to get a rough measurement of something that doesn't exist.

49:17 RTH: So are we talking about a negative element that goes beyond just that it hurts somewhat?

49:26 Mel: Uh, how do you mean?

49:33 RTH: I wanna know whether there is something more than the unpleasant throbby of my neck, and that [inaudible]

49:42 Mel: No yeah, it's really like the unpleasantness category in terms of like, there's not level of negative association, but nothing more interesting than that.

49:53 RTH: And I, and I, and I was interested in Julian's question, too, about the, about the heaviness. So is the neck experience—I don't care about the valence of it—but the

neck experience was a bodily experience and the weight experience was a bodily experience. Do those, do those seem like the same kind? Where, are we talking about bodily experiences in, in the same way in both of those situations?

50:18 Mel: Yep. But it, um, in this beep it's stronger. [RTH: Okay.]

50:28 JBK: So is it stronger just in the sense of more unpleasant? Or stronger also more physically since like more physical sensation? Or, or what do you mean by stronger?

50:40 Mel: Oh, I would say both because I'd say they're, they're, they're inherently linked in terms of, I am more aware of this because it is unpleasant, I think, as well, y'know, whereas the other one wasn't unpleasant and it was like the central part of my awareness, but it wasn't like, um, but it wasn't a super consuming thing. Whereas like, this is like a very strong experience, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] if that makes any sense.

51:15 JBK: Yeah. And you mentioned also that other stuff wasn't really there. Is there any other stuff that's *slightly* there? Or, or no.

51:24 Mel: Not that I noticed, no. [JBK: Okay.] I didn't feel the need to write down anything else. No.

51:30 JBK: Okay. And the context at the end again, was [laughs], you were lying on your, your bed, or was the general context?

51:38 Mel: Yeah, I was lying on my bed and I was looking at my phone.

51:42 JBK: Okay. I was... Was your neck in a certain position?

51:49 Mel: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I think so. [moves her neck into several positions]

51:54 JBK: Was um, was that kind of position experienced? Or was it just the position you were in, and the pain was the experience?

52:08 Mel: No, I think the pain was the experience at the exact time the beep, like before the beep went off.

52:15 JBK: Alright. I'm good on this.

52:17 RTH: Me too. Number 6.

SAMPLE 7.6 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

52:19 Mel: Okay. Last one. I've got, this went off not long after 8:28 and I've written "Autopilot. Um, I was looking in the mirror as I put moisturizer on my face in the bathroom. No thoughts. Pain in my neck still very much present, which feels like a tightness, a weight, a knot, an area of energy."

52:45 RTH: So are there two experiential aspects here? One, the... Or maybe three, the seeing in the mirror, the putting on the moisturizer, and the pain in the neck? Are those all in experience? Or are some of those just happening [coughs] and not really experienced at all?

53:02 Mel: No, I think you're right, I think there's three. I think there were three distinct experiences. Yeah.

53:08 RTH: And pretty evenly, dis-, pretty... or is one more prominent than another?

53:13 Mel: No, I think that the, um, I think the neck was still more experienced, that pain. And then I think looking in the mirror and the, the physical act of putting on moisturizer on my face were probably quite similar.

53:32 RTH: 50 / 25 / 25? 40 / 30 / 30?

53:38 Mel: 40 / 30 / 30.

53:38 RTH: 40 / 30 / 30. Okay. And the pain. So I feel, I feel a pain in my neck. [pause] And what do I feel?

53:49 Mel: Yep. Um, well, yeah, I wrote, "which feels like a tightness, a, a heaviness, a knot, an area of energy." All the same stuff from the previous beep is still present.

54:07 RTH: Okay. [Mel: Mmm-hmm.] All right. And then the other two, one of those, I'm, I'm losing track of what they are. One of 'em is the seeing in the mirror and the other is the moisturizer.

54:17 Mel: I'm putting, I'm physically putting moisturizer on my face. Yeah.

54:19 RTH: Let's do, let's do that one next. So what, what are we, what are we talking about in terms of the experience there?

54:26 Mel: Um, I'm, I'm, aw- I'm aware of the feeling of the moisturizer on my hands and my face. It's, y'know, slippery and slimy and kind of cool, um,

54:42 RTH: On both my hands *and* my face?

54:45 Mel: Yep. Cuz that's the thing, [RTH: Equally?] Yep, as the beep went off, I'm like probably caught in this action. So the, the physicality of my face and my fingertips and the feeling of the moisturizer is, is in my awareness.

55:04 RTH: Okay. And is my experience aimed, [coughs] excuse me, more at my face or more at my fingers? Am I putting the moisturizer on? Or is my face feeling itself being massaged, or applied, or whatever?

55:20 Mel: Good question. I think more I'm putting the moisturizer on.

- 55:26 RTH: So this is more the action of the *doing*, rather than the *being done to*?
- 55:32 Mel: I think so, yeah.
- 55:32 Russ comments: Mel's hesitation suggests grounds for skepticism. This questioning is more iteratively aimed at a differentiation that might be useful in *upcoming* days than at confidently differentiating *yesterday's* experience.
- 55:34 RTH: Okay.
- 55:35 Mel: Um, [pause] yeah. But I was.... Like this slightly different to, y'know, cuz this could be an autopilot sort of action category, but I don't think it is. There was an awareness of the physicality of the thing I was doing.
- 55:55 RTH: And is the awareness of the physicality? Or is the awareness of the lotion-ality [Mel laughs] the slippery cool-y? Or the mechanically doing?
- 55:55 Julian comments: Mel laughs at lotion-ality. And it is a funny phrasing. But I think a great one. An attempt to make it 'scientific' and formal probably would have made it confusing or meta.
- Russ comments: I find myself creating such neologisms fairly frequently. I think it is *not* because I like neologisms; it is because (a) I do whatever it takes to distinguish aspects of experience from each other and from all else; and (b) it is not about the words; and as a result, neologisms appear.
- 56:10 Mel: The doing. Hmm. Umm. [pause] I don't know.
- 56:21 RTH: Okay. Fair enough. It is easy to make, it's easy for *me* to *make* those distinctions. That doesn't necessarily mean that those distinctions are *possible* for you.
- 56:21 Russ comments: And even if they are possible, RTH was not intending to get adequate answers this go around. This whole sequence (since about 54:26) was iterative training aimed at some subsequent sample, when it might be useful to be able to distinguish the doing from the receiving of experience.
- Julian comments: Mel's "I don't know" comes after a long 10 second pause. This is a good sign to my mind. She's able to pause to substantially think through something. And then doesn't feel pressure to give a half-baked answer.
- 56:32 Mel: Yeah, I'm trying to think.
- 56:33 RTH: I can ask. And so I, I'm happy to have an "I don't know" as an answer. But now we've had this conversation, so somewhere down the road. It is, it, it is the case that it is possible to, for people to split apart quite clearly *this was a doing* (I was, I was feeling mys-, my hands as they, as I did it), and other people to be saying, *well, I was feeling my, my face being massaged as if Russ was putting this on my face* (not, not me or something), y'know? [Mel: Yeah.] So those are ...

- 56:33 Julian comments: In the day 2 transcript notes (at 12:46 and 25:30) you write about how you switch off between third and first person quickly and usually it isn't confusing. I thought it interesting here that the switching was so fast that even you realized you might have to step back to clarify.
- 57:05 Mel: No, that's interesting! When you say it like that, it's *definitely* the first part of that category.
- 57:09 RTH: Okay. So this is the *doing* of the...
- 57:13 Mel: ...doing onto. Yeah, yeah, the *doing* is the thing as opposed to the this. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I think, I think so.
- 57:20 RTH: Okay.
- 57:22 Mel: Um,
- 57:23 RTH: And other people and other people would get 'em both at the same time. I wasn't saying, I wasn't meaning to imply that people *had to* separate those things out. I was just saying that *sometimes* people do, and apparently *you* in this, in this case.
- 57:36 Mel: Yeah, sure. Well, I think, I think that, um, y'know, perhaps it's, it's a tricky distinction. But if I were to make one, I think it would be that. Um, [RTH: Okay.] And then, yeah, I'm also definitely looking at myself in the mirror while I'm doing that. And that is part of my experience, too.
- 57:36 Russ comments: Mel is confident about the doing / receiving experience, but we should still be skeptical. Within that confidence, she applied substantial subjunctification ("But if I were to make one, I think..."). Furthermore, she didn't have that distinction readily at hand at the moment of the beep, so we should be open to the possibility of confabulation. That doesn't mean that I don't believe Mel; it means that my skeptical antennae are jangling (as are Mel's as evidenced by her subjunctification).
- 57:57 RTH: And is that a, an, well, tell me about that looking at.
- 58:03 Mel: Um, I would say in something that is helpful for me here is like, y'know, in similar ways where like on previous beeps, I'm like looking at my phone, but not really, it's sort of irrelevant. This is different to that. Like, I'm looking at myself in the mirror and I'm, look-, I'm taking that in. I'm, that's sort of a kind of an active thing.
- 58:31 RTH: So there is a distinction to be made here between what I, what we could call *looking* and *seeing* in which is the same as hearing and...
- 58:41 Mel: Listening.

- 58:42 RTH: ...listening. And so looking would be like, I'm, I'm examining, [mimes looking through binoculars] I'm, I'm, uh, I'm, y'know, I'm, I'm, I'm interested in this. I've, I'm zeroed in on that. That would be the *looking* portion. And the *seeing* could be, well, I'm, I am absorbing, I am *receiving* what the photons are... So does this seem like I'm more *looking* at myself or, or more *seeing* myself?
- 59:09 Mel: Well, I'm more seeing, but still with seeing being like definitely experienced as opposed to like when, y'know, I'm seeing my phone but not. Y'know what I mean?
- 59:22 RTH: So I'm, I'm clearly experientially seeing, but I *don't* experience myself as examining or as, [coughs] as particularly focused in on some aspect or whatever.
- 59:34 Mel: Yeah.
- 59:35 RTH: Okay. Then I think I'm good.
- 59:41 JBK: Um, I'm curious about the pain element. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] . And if there's more you could say about it. Um, and also the possibility, I think I, I might've started more cautious than Russ, like, asking if each of these things was something that was occurring or if it was experienced, kind of getting to that first, um, with even the possibility that pain could be something that's happening in the body, but not di-, like, totally experienced at that moment. So about, about the pain thing, do you think were you experiencing at this moment, or was it something that was happening in your body and then after the beep you can look back and say there was pain?

59:41 Julian comments: I mentioned that I would've started more cautiously. Mel's original 'grunt' 'autopilot' could have indicated that some of these elements were more contextual. I think given sample 2 of this day and that it's still a challenge to disentangle context from experience, we shouldn't take anything for granted. You start by asking about Mel's three experiences at this beep (the looking, the putting on moisturizer, and the pain) if they were all experienced. Mel confirms. I would have gone each in turn. I also think it was quite early to lock in a percentage (40-30-30). Quantizing experience is tricky.

Russ comments: First, when you say "You start by asking about Mel's three experiences at this beep (the looking, the putting on moisturizer, and the pain) if they were all experienced," you entirely mischaracterize what I asked. The turn is at 52:45, and I *asked* whether there are two or three experiential aspects, saying explicitly "Are those all in experience? Or are some of those just happening and not really experienced at all?" There was absolutely no taking for granted in my questioning.

Second, it sounds like you have a substantial misunderstanding of why I inquire about percentages. It has nothing whatever to do with locking or quantizing, and actually very little to do with the percentages. Instead, I have found that asking for percentages is often (including with Mel) an effective way of encouraging Mel to try to aim more directly at her apprehended experience(s). People (including Mel) often talk in relatively general terms about their experiences, not discriminating adequately between what their experience was at the moment of the beep and how their experiences often or usually (or whatever) are, and how others might experience

similar things, what is context, and so on. It turns out that asking people to give percentages slices through that ambiguity, as if the question facilitated an answer such as *Oh! You mean the experience that was actually ongoing at the moment of the beep? Well if that's what you want, let me focus on that.* Then they think for a while and say *40-30-30*. I don't really care about the *40-30-30*. I care a lot about the first part of that—the part that reflects that they are now focused on that particular sample's experience.

This is, of course, another lecture in the *it's-not-about-the-words* series. I'm interested, and closely keep track of, Mel's apparent contact with her experience. If I grunt *percentages?* and her contact with her experience seems to improve, then I think I am on the right track—that was a good grunt.

BTW: Even though my aim has little to do with quantizing, I do find that DES participants are generally (not always) pretty confident about their percentages.

Julian comments: I see your point there and how percentages can be a useful tool for redirecting attention. I've used percentages too in the past. I think there are risks though, of giving a percentage as locking in experience. For instance, it locks in that a certain element was in experience.

Russ comments: If one takes percentages as locking in experience, then that will probably be communicated to Mel and it will lock in that an element was in experience. But if one takes percentages as grunts that try to move Mel in the direction of describing experience, among the thousands of other grunts that have the same intent, and that that intent has been grasped by Mel on the basis of many hours of careful example and illustration, then I think the risks are not great. (This is another in the *it's not about the words* series. I think Mel knows pretty well that I think words, including words about percentages, never lock anything.)

Julian comments: I like your comments about how genuine interest in Mel's experience can let me naturally sift through my concerns about the right approach to take—how much of a doubting Thomas to be.

For this sample, my concern was that the grunt 'autopilot' has been used for little-or-nothing samples. And here Mel reports three things. This may be her most multiple experience yet. So that indicated to me to proceed with grunt 'caution'. Not to discount the possibility to open up other possibilities. Asking in one fell swoop if all three things were experienced and then locking in percentages seemed to me premature.

About doubting the pain. I actually doubted that one the least. It's the only one I asked about though. Maybe the perceptual awareness of looking at herself in the mirror was doubt #1, followed by the moisturizer. In Mel's descriptions there was quite some uncertainty. There also was some certainty, so it's hard to tell.

Why did I ask about the pain if I doubted it the least? Only because you asked the fewest questions about it. After the lines of questioning for the other two elements, I didn't feel like it would be possible to go back and ask: really? Are you sure? I feel like it would put me in an uncharitable, antagonistic role rather than one where I could honestly inquire.

Julian comments: You might also think I'm overly cautious. When I asked about the pain, I started by giving the possibility that this pain was ongoing but not at this moment experienced. This is something I've seen with previous sampling. I don't want to impose it on Mel but did want to give the possibility. She was confused by it, indicating that it probably doesn't reflect her experience. Or else that it's something quite counterintuitive to imagine.

Russ comments:

RE "cautious" - I think the issue is not caution, because it is not possible to be cautious in the way you describe, and it is not desirable to be cautious in that way even if it were possible. What is desirable is to distinguish clearly and skillfully between what comes from JBK and what comes from Mel, and not let the from-JBK interfere with the from-Mel.

On this day, the from-JBK includes these that you have mentioned: whether something is meta-awareness, whether bodily experience extends beyond the body, whether pain is present without experience, whether percentages are appropriate, whether "autopilot" includes context, whether absorption is in the other or in the conversation. Those are all legitimate interests, along with thousands of others like what "I've written" means, what mulling means, what clear means, what staring means, what hear means, what tricky means, and so on and so on and so on.

It is not possible to be cautious about all of them, so how to proceed? The DES aim is fidelity, so I think the procedure is to be sensitive to *all* of them, and simultaneously to bracket *all* of them. It is *not* a step toward fidelity to select one or a few of them and be "cautious" about them. Fidelity means hearing what Mel says and how she says it and what she doesn't say and what her bodily features and gestures convey (etc.) and hear/see/evaluate/reply to all of that in a way that enlists Mel as a partner in the process and skillfully builds her skill and commitment across time; that accepts that Mel communicates imperfectly and complexly and tries to help her at each step of the way. (It also accepts that I understand imperfectly and complexly and tries to help me at each step of the way, but that's not the point I am making here.) That trying to help involves hearing Mel's communication sensitively, charitably, supportingly, open to the penumbra of meanings and interpretations that might be understood within her utterances. Our job is to help her clarify what she said, erasing this aspect of the penumbra, highlighting that aspect, adjusting our and her tentative understandings until we have done as best we can under the circumstances.

That is all about Mel's experience, helping Mel to apprehend and describe in ways that she finds faithful and we find intelligible. If Mel's penumbra included some hint that could be understood as feelings that extend outside the body, it would be appropriate to explore that, as you did at 31:54, as a way of helping Mel describe her experience in a way that you can understand. But if the penumbra does not contain such a hint, then a mention of it would be to scratch JBK's itch rather than Mel's. For example, Mel has said clearly that the pain is experienced, and there is nothing in the penumbra of her expression that I can see that suggests that pain is not experienced. So I think this question arises from JBK, not from Mel, and Mel's confusion arises because she has difficulty sorting that out.

The art of all that is to help her describe her experience free of JBK's interference or pressure. The aspiration is not to care about the outcome of the interview other than to get Mel's experience in as high fidelity as we can muster.

Then it might be time to consider JBK's interests that were not part of Mel's penumbra. It would be appropriate now to ask whether Mel's experience of her sister speaking is the same as or different from her sister speaking on day 4, and whether it is the same or different as her own speaking on day 4. The aspiration here is also not to care about the outcome, and, furthermore, to communicate to Mel that you don't care about the outcome: either way is fine, etc. The easiest way to do that is actually not to care about the outcome, but that is closer to a lifetime endeavor than a one-time decision—that is the heart of the bracketing intention. (BTW: the more genuinely you care about Mel's experience more than your own interests, the more relaxed you can be about timing of the questioning. But the other side of that coin is that the more genuinely you care about Mel's experience, the less you will care about your own interests.)

Julian comments: Yes, just like my interest has to be genuine, my caution/doubt/skepticism has to be genuine. Well actually I don't think those two are separate. But yes, I shouldn't be coming from a place of *well it's possible to doubt this so I should. Or I would be extra scientifically rigorous if I doubted this. Or If I doubt this then I can prove in a paper how careful the method is. Or any other approach that distracts from me trying to get as faithfully to Mel's experience as possible.*

1:00:32 Mel: I find that a little bit of a challenging distinction to make, but I think that, um, like I think it was experienced at, at the time, as well as the other things though, y'know, it wasn't experienced in a more consuming way than the others. But I, it was certainly part of my experience, I think.

1:00:54 JBK: Was it on, on the level of the others or, or less? Or you're not sure?

1:00:54 Russ comments: That is a substantially unfair question. Mel originally said the pain was more prominent. You inserted (as we have seen) the possibility of no pain, which she denied, and now you present her with the option of less than or equal to. There is no warrant for omitting the greater-than option that I can see. It is a form of coercion.

Julian comments: I was going off what Mel had just said: "it wasn't experienced in a more consuming way than the others." But yes, this was most probably said to placate me. And her original percentage estimates were more accurate.

1:01:00 Mel: No, it was..

1:01:00 RTH: Or more.

1:01:02 JBK: Or more.

1:01:02 Mel: Yeah, it was a touch. It was a touch more.

1:01:02 Julian comments: So it's possible that the "extra-cautious" approach made her downplay this element or doubt her experience. You were right to give her again the option that the pain was more experiential. And she took this option.

This all to say that I'm still grappling with the right amount of caution to use. A takeaway for now is that it's always best to give as many avenues as possible for revision. If someone does report an element, it's good to later give possibilities for them to say *well actually it wasn't there at this moment*. On the flipside, if someone denies or downplays an element, it's still good to give later options to say *actually it was present*. This is the case with Mel downplaying the pain and then later identifying as the most experientially salient.

Russ comments: If you can come to genuinely take on the it's-not-about-the-words understanding, then both of your possibilities will happen automatically, and you don't need to worry about it or be cautious. If you understand that *Yes* can actually be the first draft of *No* and vice versa, and that *X* can actually be the first draft of *Y* or of not-*X*, and that the DES art is penumbra sensitivity, and that the how-it-is-said is at least as important (probably more important) than the what-is-said, then you will always naturally be trying to help Mel either clarify *Yes* or transform it into *No* or *Maybe*, and so on, and the amount of caution will work itself out.

1:01:07 JBK: A touch more. Okay. And, um, yeah, because I'm curious about knowing more about that, because I think you said it was very similar to the other pain. Was it *exactly* the same, like tennis ball size, lower part of the neck? Or how, or was it maybe some differences? How would you describe the pain?

1:01:29 Mel: Nah, exactly the same. I'm just in a different location, but there's only a couple of minutes later. Like it's still the same experience for sure. Yeah.

1:01:38 JBK: Okay.

1:01:39 Mel: Nothing felt different about it.

1:01:40 JBK: Ok, same size, location. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] It's still constant. It's this... Okay. Then I'm good on this one.

1:01:51 RTH: Me too. So shall we do it again?

1:01:54 Mel: Yes, we shall.

CONVERSATION AFTER THE SAMPLES

1:01:59 JBK: Um...

1:02:00 Mel: Um. Also just a thing to note, I mean, and you probably note this already. But like, I find these interesting now looking at this, wondering, y'know, there have been like previous times where I'm like, oh, I was looking in the mirror and there was nothing *per se*. Like now I'm like, well, I wonder, actually, was I looking or seeing and was I,

was there a, y'know, I f- I dunno. I feel like I'm getting better at being acutely aware of certain parts as opposed to early weeks, if that makes sense.

1:02:31 RTH: I think that's the way the process works. [Mel: Yeah.] And I don't, I don't think there's any shortcut to it. So for example, had I, given... I *could have* (I would be, have been perfectly capable of) giving a lecture about, about the difference between hearing and listening and between seeing and whatever [he means *looking*], whatever I could've given you that lecture at, at the outset. That would've been a *bad deal* from my point of view, because it, it would make, it would have made it *seem* like that was a *very* important distinction to me. [Mel: Mmm.] Which it's *not*. It is a distinction to me only to the extent that it's an important distinction to *you*. [Mel: Hmm.] So it *has to* come... that, I think the iterative process *has to* work in, in this way where, y'know, when, when we're starting to talk about, about seeing things or feeling things or whatever, then we have to start to make the distinctions that allow us to communicate about it.

1:03:28 Mel: Yeah. I feel that, cuz it, it's like, just through experience of doing this, it allows you to be like, no, that feels a bit different. Why does that feel a bit different? Or whatever. So yeah, I agree. If you had given me all of that sort of language or some distinctions at the start, that actually just would've been overwhelming.

1:03:45 RTH: And the, and the, the art, what I would call the art of the, of the interview here is for me.... I, I definitely *don't* want to try to give you some words to use, uh, in, in the sense of, I *don't* want Mel to have heard, Russ says, well, y'know, now he's got, I *gotta make a distinction between hearing and seeing*. [Mel: Hmm.] [RTH misspoke and now corrects himself] Or hearing and, and, uh, listening. [Mel: Hmm.] That, that is *not* the case. What I would *like* is for our conversation to ever more, uh, discriminations, ever, ever more careful dis- Not even that, but ever, ever more faithful. So whatever words we use, whether I use the words for the first, for the first time, or *you* use the words for the first time, doesn't matter to me. But the, the object is to, for the words to rest faithfully on your experience. And, uh,

1:04:39 Mel: Yeah. Yeah.

1:04:41 RTH: And not, and *not* because you, you think I think that's an important distinction. I don't think *anything* is an important distinction...

1:04:47 Mel: Yeah.

1:04:48 RTH: ...*except* as it helps you... make, make your words conform to your experience. And, and that I can understand 'em, obviously. I can understand what you're talking about.

1:05:00 Mel: There's something quite nice about that experience. Like, y'know, like how early in the piece I said, I found it like frustrating or hard to articulate sort of things or like, y'know, it was messing with my perfectionism complex. I feel like that is dissipating as time goes on, because I feel in myself again (yeah, not, not in a way of appeasing *you* with language or feeling like blah, blah, blah) like purely from a motivated-by-myself thing, I am finding more and more comfort in my ability to describe things for myself.

- 1:05:36 RTH: I, I think it is the fundamentally humanist kind of a kind of a thing. And, and, and in *most* people (there're probably some exceptions), but i- in most people that I think tapping into that is a, it's a, is a beautiful thing. I mean, I think it's, [Mel: Mmm!] it's you becoming more in tune with what, what, what is inside you to be in tune with. And what, what could be better than that?
- 1:06:07 Mel: Mm. Yeah, there's something kind of, there's a, there's a nice feeling about that. Like, I don't know, it feels, it's like a almost calming or like a tranquility about, I don't know, just, I don't know. Anyway, that's just my thoughts that I've noticed that change in myself, that it's almost like, oh, I am getting better at this from, from *my* perspective, not, not a, whether *you* feel the same. Um, yeah. I guess trying to, getting better at articulating my experience, which is the aim of the game, but I feel like that's happening.
- 1:06:07 Russ comments: I agree with that but would add one clarification. "Getting better at articulating my experience" might be understood as meaning that "I am getting a better vocabulary" or "I am becoming a more facile talker." Those are doubtless parts of it, but I don't think that would lead to the *nice, calming, tranquility* transformation. I think that transformation comes more from genuine acceptance (*this is the way I genuinely am, these are the limitations, these are the difficulties, these are the ambiguities*) than from descriptive adequacy.
- 1:06:40 RTH: Well, good.
- 1:06:41 JBK: I wanted to, because we talked about the, the listening / hearing distinction before, and when Russ was giving those options, uh, I was wondering if, um, that was maybe limiting, or if it might be none of those. I don't know if we can re-access this. It might just be, it might've been something I missed in the, in the interview, but yeah, I guess it holds for if, if we ever give you options for how to define things more clearly, it could always be none of those options that we give.
- 1:07:18 Mel: Yeah. And I think that that's also a thing that I'm, I'm better at now. Y'know, when early days I was perhaps like, y'know, now I would just say to you like, "I don't know." Whereas before I would clutch at wanting an answer more. Um, but no, I actually find quite the opposite. I don't find it limiting. Sometimes I find it very helpful to have you articulate what you think I'm saying and maybe like, *oh, yes, that, that's what I'm trying to say*. Uh, I, I'm, I quite enjoy when I get options, but I am certainly very happy to be like, no, it's still not any of those things. [JBK: Yeah.]
- 1:07:55 RTH: I, I would say I, I'm guessing, that we've spent seven hours or whatever together and, and I'm guessing Mel understands that whenever I suggest a word, the there is *always* an implied *or neither of the*, [Mel nods affirmatively] *or both or something else, or this is wrong or that's bad*. Because I think that comes out of every word that I have said in seven hours, and I'm guessing that, that she's got it.
- 1:07:55 Russ comments: "I think that comes out of every word that I have said" is a way of saying that I think I convey (my understanding of) *syāt* as modifying every word that I use. (See my comment at 20:08 in transcript 4.)

- 1:08:24 Mel: Mm-hmm. I think it's also just a helpful thing of when you're like in this, y'know, weird world of trying to articulate stuff that's hard to articulate, it's, it's, it is, um, it kind of feels supportive when you guys lob up something that then I'm like, yes, that, uh, y'know, that you're not out here on your own constantly trying to articulate stuff. Like, it's sort of nice. I don't know, it just helps feel like I'm explaining what I'm trying to explain.
- 1:08:54 JBK: Yeah. Alright. Should we plan a next time? [Mel: We shall.] Should I stop the recording first? Why don't I, and then we can keep planning.
- 1:09:06 Mel: Yep.
- 1:09:07 JBK: But nobody say anything interesting. [Mel laughs]

EMAIL EXCHANGE IN THE COURSE OF WRITING THE DESCRIPTIONS OF THESE SAMPLES

In the course of writing and editing the description of sample 7.2, we had this email exchange:

1 Julian comments: I understood this as more of a nothing experience. Even though Mel did originally describe some awareness of her surroundings. As you asked about it, Russ, it seemed that this background awareness may not even be there. I'm curious if you have a different take on this. On the previous day I leaned more towards nothingness than you did. I've gone back through some of those samples and video but not all of them, so my understanding of this might change.

2 Russ comments: Your original description of this sample, "She is not experiencing anything," seems too categorically severe to me. "She is not experiencing anything" is something that you would say about a person who is a statue, or is dead, or unconscious, or asleep, and I don't think that her 5:42 experience is like that, or at least might not be like that. So I suggest softening the description to "She has no directly apprehended experience."

3 Julian comments: I also tried to ask a question to try to distinguish between nothing and a little-bit-of-something. On the previous day there seemed to be a misunderstanding that when I was talking about something being experienced, Mel thought I meant that it was clear, strong, focused, etc. But I really mean something more basic—that there's a something-that-it-is-like quality even if it's very slight, vague, diffuse etc. Here I wanted to get more into that. But I felt I wasn't making myself clear or was phrasing it too theoretically, so I didn't pursue it. I started on unclear footing, in the vein of *on previous days you thought X* when actually *Y*. Specifically, at 24:19 I said, "Um, would you still say, because, um, I think last time we had some confusion where you thought if, when I was asking if something was there, that it had to be something clear and fully about something. Um, would you say a- anything at all is, is really there? Or no." This is too abstract and removed and if I pursue this line of questioning again, I would rather focus on the experience at hand.

4 Russ comments: I would recommend bracketing the notion that there either *is* a something-that-it-is-like quality or there *is not* a something-that-it-is-like quality. That is a theoretical either/or notion that may or may not actually apply in real people's experience. So I would recommend trying to grasp Mel's experience, and not try to force it into one or the other side of that either/or.

After you get good at apprehending Mel's (and others') inner experience without regard to that either/or, *then* you might have something important to say about the either/or. But if you *start* with the either/or, and Procrustean each of Mel's (and others') experiences with that razor, then you never will have anything to say about either Mel's experience or the either/or.

5 Julian comments: This is a good point. It seems like the most basic distinction to make. But that could also mean it's the most entrenched presupposition. I am finding with this project that presuppositions like that one and like clear conscious/subconscious divides have to go.

6 Russ comments: : Good. "It's not about the words" is basically a synonym for "clear word-of-any-kind divides have to go." So it's not just a divide between conscious and subconscious, it's a divide that is implied by any word or set of words that is (are) understood to be perfectly (or almost perfectly) clear tokens.

The phrase "there's a something-that-it-is-like quality" is a good example of the problematics of words. That phrase is, I think, usually a shibboleth that intends something like *I'm going to show you that I am part of the consciousness-studies cognoscente*, but the fact is that that phrase does not have a meaning that is shared across those who think about it, and even if it did, it doesn't map easily (or at least not necessarily easily) onto Mel or any other individual. So the use of that phrase, from my viewpoint, actually means something like *I'm going to pretend to know something about consciousness when I really have never tried carefully to apprehend anyone's inner experience*.

So the paragraph that started this discussion (4 Russ comments) could be written about any word or concept X, to read:

I would recommend bracketing the notion that there either *is* X or there *is not* X. X is a theoretical either/or notion that may or may not actually apply in real people's experience. So I would recommend trying to grasp Mel's experience, and not try to force it into one or the other side of that either/or.

After you get good at apprehending Mel's (and others') inner experience without regard to that either/or, *then* you might have something important to say about the either/or. But if you *start* with the either/or, and Procrustean each of Mel's (and others') experiences with that razor, then you never will have anything to say about either Mel's experience or the either/or.

Said another way: it's not about the words.

7 Julian comments: Something-that-it-is-like is not an empty cognoscente class marker for me. It's the most useful definition of consciousness I've found so far. Many times when consciousness scholars talk about consciousness they mean self-consciousness—being able to observe your own thinking. Hofstadter, especially, is guilty of this. Many times they mean something that comes down to attention or focus. So something that takes an especially salient place in attention like 'sensory awareness' counts. I've found it useful to use the something-that-it-is-like definition to articulate that when I talk about consciousness it doesn't (just) mean the obvious, reflexive, meta, salient but refers to all the potential murky penumbra going on. I use it to give as basic and broad a definition as I can.

That being said, I'm open to the idea that it may have to be discarded. It may become nothing more than a tool to give possibilities. When you ask if a mental image has borders or not or if the distinction is irrelevant, you still are using the potential constraining 'framing' of borders. In the future if I try to distinguish between something-that-it-is-like and not or if the distinction is irrelevant, I may have to use the phrase [or rather the idea behind the phrase] in the same way.

I do think it's possible to be skillfully going about your day and have no inner experience at certain times—for those times to be indistinguishable from dreamless sleep. In that sense a something-that-it-is-like distinction might come in handy.

One point I have to take away is that presenting the possibility of 'the distinction is irrelevant' cannot be an afterthought. It can't be a phrase I throw in just for insurance to say 'look I was cautious and thorough.' It has to be clearly presented to an interviewee. And most of all, it has to be a crucial part of my own bracketing as a researcher.

8 Russ comments: I'm happy to see you promote "the distinction is irrelevant" from insurance / afterthought to clearly presented. But if you are to be able to grasp Mel (or anyone else) adequately, you will have to promote "the distinction is irrelevant" much more thoroughly: it has to be the very first consideration, as well as the middle consideration and the last consideration. That is the heart of the *it's not about the words* message.

RE: "When you ask if a mental image has borders or not or if the distinction is irrelevant, you still are using the potential constraining 'framing' of borders."

I think that misunderstands the DES method. I have *never* asked "if a mental image has borders or not or if the distinction is irrelevant." I have, of course, uttered words that could be quoted as such, but the words don't matter. What I have asked, more fairly quoted, is "what, if anything, was experienced at the moment of the beep?" and then tried, in a large variety of ways, including substantially the iterative process designed to help the subject apprehend her experience and describe it, and help me understand what she is saying. In that process, *if she says she had an image*, I would try to understand what she was intending about her experience when she says "I had an image," and that might well involve my asking "does that image have borders or not, if that distinction is relevant?" But that is *not* imposing my 'framing' of borders—I don't care a whit about whether her image has borders. I'm trying, in what I consider to be the most skillful way I have evolved, to grasp her experience as she experienced it without presupposing that I understand what she has said. I probe around what she says, in a variety of different ways, using mostly words, to try to safeguard our understanding each other. But whatever words I might utter should not be understood out of context—they should be grasped as small bits of the attempt to help Mel and me understand what we are saying to each other.

EXCHANGE ABOUT WRITING THE SAMPLE 7.3 DESCRIPTION

Russ comments: Exercise for the reader (My answer is below—no fair peeking until you commit yourself to an answer.)

Julian's original description is as follows:

[Mel is lying on her bed]. Her body feels heavy. This is mostly in her head, torso, and legs, though the overall impression is that her whole body is heavy. She is also hearing her brother and mom talking down the hall. This is less present than the heaviness.

Which is better, and why?

- A. Her body feels heavy. This is mostly in her head, torso, and legs.
- B. She feels heavy (mostly in her head, torso, and legs).
- C. She feels heaviness (mostly in her head, torso, and legs).

-
-
-
-

Answers below

-
-
-

Julian's original description is as follows:

[Mel is lying on her bed]. Her body feels heavy. This is mostly in her head, torso, and legs, though the overall impression is that her whole body is heavy. She is also hearing her brother and mom talking down the hall. This is less present than the heaviness.

Which is better, and why?

- A. Her body feels heavy. This is mostly in her head, torso, and legs.
- B. She feels heavy (mostly in her head, torso, and legs).
- C. She feels heaviness (mostly in her head, torso, and legs).

Russ's answer: A is problematic, because it suggests that she first feels her body and then notices that it is heavy, or that it is her body that is doing the feeling. I don't think there was any such separation.

The distinction between B and C is about whether the experience is more of the body (B) or more of the sensation (C), but I don't think we adequately distinguished between them.

Julian's answer: I chose (B). I did read your answer after choosing (B) but before formulating this reply. Still, my thinking was similarly about the heavy feeling primarily being there. This feeling is in the body but specific body awareness isn't the core of this moment. I can see your point about not adequately distinguishing between (B) and (C). I can only say that my intuition is still towards (B) and if we have to choose one now I'd go for (B). And for any more clarity, we'll have to leave it up to the iterative process.

Russ comments: I write exercises for the reader not necessarily because I think there are right or wrong answers, but because I want the reader (you or others) to think about what the differences are. Often I think there are better and worse answers (that's usually what motivates me to create such an exercise) but the object is to *think*, not to *agree* or *disagree* (that's why the "no fair peeking" instruction).

Furthermore, I don't care about the words. I do care about what is conveyed by, ignored by, taken for granted by, and so on—that is, I care about the thinking behind the words. In short: the exercises for the reader are part of the iterative process.