

Mel May
Mel Interview 9

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the January 11 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/VR3M3_Poz_Q. 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 Russ comments: Mel reported that the beeper had stopped working. (Later we determined that the earphone wire had broken.)
- 0:00 RTH: Talk about the beeps, then we'll figure out whether we can fix the beeper remotely.
- 0:04 Mel: Yeah. And I need to... [fixes laptop camera placement] There we go.
- 0:07 RTH: [inaudible] And I would, I would say I've got a repair person coming to my house sometime between now and eight o'clock from now. So sometime in the next eight hours. But I might have to interrupt a little bit to get that process started. Hopefully not.
- 0:25 Mel: No problem.
- 0:27 JBK: Okay. We're all working with what we got.
- 0:30 Mel: A little bit.
- 0:32 JBK: Alright, should we get into beep number 1.
- 0:35 RTH: I'm ready. Day 9, beep 1.

SAMPLE 9.1 DISCUSSION BEGINS HERE

- 0:37 Mel: Okay. Um, so this went off at 8:16 PM. Um, and I've written, "I was bent over my suitcase about to do up the zipper. I felt the weight of my body through my feet. I had a super wide stance as I'm sort of bent in half. Um, and I think I was faintly thinking about my day tomorrow, but once the beep went off, I was instantly rattled and couldn't, uh, and could only recount stuff to do with the suitcase and everything involved in physically interacting with it."

- 1:10 JBK: Okay. So the, the suitcase physical aspect is, is the main thing in your experience here?
- 1:10 Russ comments: The main aspect in her description is the weight on her feet, not the suitcase.
- 1:20 Mel: Yeah, definitely.
- 1:22 JBK: The main thing you're experiencing. And you're bent over and feeling the weight of your body through your feet? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, so what, what are you experiencing? What's, what's that like?
- 1:22 Russ comments: Nearly always in DES interviews, when participants use an intensifier such as *super*, they are communicating that there is a sensory aspect of whatever is intensified. So I think it likely that the *super wide stance* experientially figures into the weight experience. That is, I think it likely that she is describing (in 0:37) something like weight-through-super-wide-feet, not just weight. DES is not about likelihood, so it would be desirable to inquire about whether or how the super-wide aspect figures into Mel's experience.
- 1:35 Mel: Um, it, my feet were in a really wide stance as I was like fully hunched over. Um, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] I think it, like *weight* is a good way to describe it. Like, um, uh, I felt heavy through my feet. I felt like just aware of my feet, as opposed to, y'know, day to day, like sitting here right now until I've mentioned feet, I wasn't thinking about the weight of my feet. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] But because of my whole body weight was transferred through them, I could feel it. Um, doesn't really answer your question very well though, Julian. [laughs]
- 1:35 Russ comments: Nearly always in DES interviews, when the interviewer asks about *X* and the participant responds about *Y*, they are communicating that *Y* is important and/or that *X* is somewhat off the mark. Here, JBK has inquired about weight (*X*) and Mel responds "really wide stance" (*Y*). I take that as a suggestion that the wide stance is part of the weight phenomenon, which deserves follow-up questioning. (See the related comment at 1:11:56.)
- Note also that there is now a new and different intensifier (*really wide*), suggesting that the *super* intensifier of 0:37 was not merely incidental. (See the comment at 1:22.)
- So I think Mel has suggested in three different ways that the wideness is (or at least might be) experiential. It deserves to be followed up.
- 2:12 JBK: Well, you're feeling heaviness in your feet. Yeah. Is there a separate awareness of this heaviness, some meta thing? Or is it just at this moment this feeling, this heaviness in your feet?
- 2:12 Julian comments: I don't think there's something meta here but I'm trying to rule it out since some of Mel's language could be read that way: [1:53] "I felt like just aware of my feet". Not to blame Mel. I think my own questioning could have been even simpler. In my 1:22 turn, I used more technical terms like "experiencing" twice. I don't

think I needed these. As you mentioned, Russ, I could have brought up the feeling weight-through-super-wide-feet and simply said something like: is there more to say about that?

Russ comments: FYI, to my ear, Mel's opening salvo ("I think it, like *weight* is a good way to describe it. Like, um, uh, I felt heavy through my feet") is a careful, skillful, explicit description of sensory awareness; I think it is a stretch to hear any possibility of meta in her talk (including the sentence you cite, when taken in context). So to my ear, the interest in meta comes from Julian, not from Mel.

2:23 Mel: I don't think it was quite meta, no. But, um, definitely awareness.

2:30 JBK: So, okay, awareness. This, this weight in your feet. And, and your feet are in a, they're wide apart. There's, is that just your physical position, them being wide apart? Or is there something of this wideness present to you?

2:30 Russ comments: This is a good question from the viewpoint of whether it invites Mel to describe her experience, because in her reply turn (at 2:50) she does describe her experience.

2:50 Mel: Um, yeah, like, I think, I think it's why I, I wrote that down, cuz it feels very much to do with like, very relevant to the feeling that I was having through my feet, because it was, my whole body weight was on them in this weird stance that I was in. Um,

3:11 JBK: And there's heaviness. Is there heaviness on a specific part of them? Like the balls of your feet, or...?

3:11 Russ comments: It seems that JBK has not heard what Mel is saying. JBK asked (2:30) whether the wideness was important. Mel replied (2:50) Yes. But JBK continued (3:11) as if Mel had said No.

In the I'm-no-mindreader department, I speculate that what has happened here is that JBK has nounified ("super wide stance" becomes wideness; "heavy through my feet" becomes heaviness) and then separated heaviness and wideness, so that when he asks (2:30) whether "something of this wideness present to you," he is inquiring about wideness as being a separate thing from heaviness. So when Mel says in 2:50 "my whole body weight was on them in this weird stance," he hears her as saying the experience is of weight and that the wideness is a fact of the situation.

However, I think Mel understands JBK's 2:30 question as asking whether wideness is an aspect of her experience, to which she responds "Yeah." So when Mel says in 2:50 "my whole body weight was on them in this weird stance," Mel means that the weird stance figures in her experience, perhaps that the weight pushes on her foot at a weird angle (we don't know because we never asked about it).

In short, I think there is quite a lot of evidence throughout the interview so far that Mel is in some way experiencing weight-through-super-wide-feet, not just weight. But there has not been adequate inquiry about that.

Julian comments: You're right that I missed the importance of the stance. Nounifying may very well be part of this. What else is part of it?

I think I'm overlearning from previous advice you gave. For the first sample on the first sampling day you mentioned to be careful when participants describe what they wrote down. In your post-interview 8:25 comment you say "DES participants often say "I wrote down..." when there was nothing in experience, or when they don't know what was in experience." If they have a clearer idea, they often start talking about the experience itself rather than what they wrote down. In this current sample, I may have clued in too fast to Mel saying [2:53] "I think it's why I, I wrote that down" I become blinkered after that.

An important note to myself is that mentions of writing can only be a clue and a mild one. For the 1.1 sample description what's most important is what comes next—Mel giving behavioral explanatory theories rather than describing experience. What's crucial in this current sample is that what Mel says next *is experiential*. She talks about how the stance is "very relevant to the feeling I was having through my feet."

Also, we've talked about weight on other occasions by now. For example in sample 7.3 Mel feels heavy. Maybe I'm more familiar with asking about heaviness and so default to that, rather than asking about stanciness. I need to be more open to experience I haven't encountered before.

3:17 Mel: No, through the whole foot? Yeah.

3:20 JBK: Through the whole, through the whole of both feet?

3:22 Mel: Mm-hmm.

3:25 JBK: Is it heaviness as in something ex- external on the skin? Like the, the pressure? Like, is there, is there more detail you could give on what this heaviness is like at this moment? Or if you dunno or it's hard to come up with more details, that's, that's fine too.

3:25 Russ comments: Asking what an experience *is like* (as in "what this heaviness *is like*?") is risky, because *is like* invites metaphor: "It's like a freight train going down a hill" or something similar. Better to leave out the *is like* ask "is there more detail you could give on this heaviness?" [I mention this because you asked a similar question at 1:22 ("What's that like?").] The good news is that Mel apparently knows that we want description, not metaphor, and so she provides it.

3:44 Mel: It's a little bit hard, but it's not, it's not skin. It feels deeper than that. Definitely. Yeah. Um... like it almost, it's the heaviness is sort of the only description that fits for me in terms of it... is like a weight in that area and the area is clearly my foot, but like specifically, does it feel like I can feel the skin tingling or particular toes doing anything? Like *No*. It's just like that area of my body feels [JBK: Mm-hmm.] um, y'know, like a, well, you don't, that's why I'm trying to explain it. [laughs] Um, yeah,

3:44 Russ comments: It has occurred to me several times over the last several interviews that Julian might profit from conducting the interview in the first-person. As I have said previously (e.g., Interview 5 at 44:40), I don't have a good rationale for making such a suggestion, but I do think trying to take Mel's point of view, including her grammatical point of view, might make it easier for him to avoid nounification and any

meta interest. It also, I think, makes it easier *for Mel* to focus on her experience, because any nounification by Julian is likely to be adopted by Mel, and that is a grain of sand in the descriptive gears.

Here, for example, Julian asked (3:25) “Is it heaviness as in something external on the skin?” which is nounified and objectified, and Mel replied in kind: “it’s the heaviness is sort of the only description that fits for me.” Had JBK asked something like “Do I feel an external pressure on my skin?” Mel would likely have been able to give a more natural response such as “No, it’s not my skin.”

- 4:22 JBK: Kind of weight, like pressure...
- 4:23 Mel: Yeah.
- 4:25 JBK: ...in your feet. Um, does it, so it’s the whole foot. Does it extend a bit upwards into lower leg or ankle or...?
- 4:34 Mel: No, not that I recall. Just the foot. Um, the other thing, too, is like, it’s not, um, it’s not uncomfortable. It’s not painful. It’s just an awareness.
- 4:46 JBK: Okay. So this, this feeling, this pressure / heaviness, uh, on your feet. And you’re bent over your suitcase about to zip it up. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Is, is any of that, um, part of your experience or is, or is it here more about the heaviness on the feet?
- 5:06 Mel: Definitely more about the feet. I feel like I wasn’t quite sure what the split was in terms of, yeah, I was sort of about to do up the internal zipper. And I think once I was doing that I was actually sort of maybe off somewhere else. So, but then when I tried, when the beep went off and I tried to sort of think about that, I couldn’t work out what I’d actually been thinking about inside my head. But I think that’s relevant in the sense that that all got muddled. Like whether I was super focused on the zipper, whether I, I was off thinking about tomorrow or something, that all wasn’t super clear. But what was clear was the weight in my feet [JBK: Okay] and that part of my awareness.
- 5:50 JBK: So the, the weight is the clearest. Is the weight the very last thing before the beep? Or might it have been weight and zipper thinking about the day, but that part’s not so clear. So, so we’re talking about the weight?
- 5:50 Russ comments: Mel did not say “the weight is the *clearest*.” She said the weight is *clear*. That’s a big difference, because *clearest* implies a comparison among at least two things, and *clear* refers to one thing (and doesn’t say anything about anything else)...
- 6:03 Mel: Yeah, it was, it was definitely all happening at once. Yeah. So like, I’d been in that stance for a while, so it wasn’t like I’d just moved there and then, so that was the new thing. I think all those things were, um, happening at the same time, but the, the weighty physical feeling was the most apparent.

6:03 Russ comments: ...so I have to discount the all-at-once portion of Mel's response. That is not to say that there weren't multiple simultaneous experiential things—maybe there were. But because *clearest* was an unfair question, I don't trust the answer.

6:22 JBK: Okay. Did it change over time, become stronger, less strong, or, or you're not sure?

6:28 Mel: No, I think it was constant.

6:32 JBK: Okay. And, and maybe thinking about your day, maybe the zipper, but, but you're not sure about that. [Mel: Yeah.] So might not be best to probe. [Mel: Yeah.] Ok.

6:44 Mel: Yeah, I definitely even wrote straight away, like, *oh I, I was instantly rattled here*. Like I, I can only recount things to do with that physical part. I, I couldn't remember... [JBK: Okay] anything else.

7:01 JBK: Um, I'm, I'm good on this beep. [inaudible]

7:05 RTH: So lemme, lemme recount what I've got and see whether I'm good on that. So what I understand is that central to my experience at the moment of the beep is basically a sensation of weight in my wide-apart feet. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And this is not an analytical thing. It's not like I'm thinking about this or meditating or cogitating or whatever about the wideness-apart of my feet or whatever. This is a physical sensation in my feet, and p- part of that sensation i- is relevant to the wideness of part of my stance. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But it's not like in an analytical kinda way, it's just that that shapes the sensation.

7:43 Mel: Mm-hmm.

7:44 RTH: Is that right? So far?

7:45 Mel: Mm-hmm.

7:46 RTH: And then, beyond that sensation, there *may* or may *not* have been something else, and I'm not sure about that. [Mel: Yeah.] And this, if it were the something else, it would be maybe I'm thinkin' about what I should do tomorrow or, and maybe I'm trying to get my suitcase closed.

8:10 Mel: Yep, I think there def-

8:12 JBK: If, if I could add a bit to that.

8:14 Mel: Mm-hmm.

8:15 JBK: Uh, I, I was gonna say that, uh, Russ, you mentioned a lot the wideness. For me it was more about the, the weight. The weight was the main thing. This weight / pressure sensation, uh, I can't recall if you mentioned that in your description. And the wideness, yeah, may, may have shaped this weight. Um, but at this moment it was,

was more about the weight... the weight kind of pressure in the feet, rather than the wideness. What, what d'you think, Mel?

8:15 Russ comments: I believe my earlier comments have described why I think it is likely that Mel's experience was about weight-in-my-wide-apart feet, not just about weight. As I have said, I would have preferred that we would have asked about that more directly, because DES is really about beginning with what is likely and replacing it with what has been described (or rejecting it as being a red herring).

RE "This weight pressure sensation, uh, I can't recall if you mentioned that in your description."

I did begin my (7:05) summary with weight: "Central to my experience at the moment of the beep is basically a sensation of weight in my wide-apart feet." That description gives the weight aspect centrality.

I think JBK's 8:15 turn is at least as much about JBK (or maybe about JBK and RTH) than about Mel. He could have asked something like: "I've heard two different descriptions of Mel's experience, one that is more about the weight, and one that includes the wide-apart aspect. Can we talk more about that?" That would have been entirely about Mel—an invitation to Mel to describe her experience. But what JBK said, instead, was something like "*Russ* said wideness and *I* said weight. What do you think about that?" That is an invitation to talk about JBK, or about JBK vs. Russ, as well as about wideness and weight...

8:52 Mel: Um, well, I think the two are incredibly linked. Like it's one in the same, really. Um, but yeah, I think it's the, the resulting pressure of that wide stance. So yeah, I would lean sort of more with what you're trying to say there, Julian, I think.

8:52 Russ comments: ...and as a result, Mel has to attend to two very different things: her experience of weight and wide ("it's one and the same, really"), and (because she is a nice person) being supportive of JBK ("I would lean...").

I give more credit to the first half of her response than the second, because the first half is swimming upstream against JBK's implication.

9:09 JBK: Okay. Are we clear on this one?

9:09 Russ comments: In the I'm-no-mindreader department, JBK's smile and shift of posture at about 9:09-9:11 suggests to my imperfect eye something like *I was right!* or *I won!* I make no claim of being correct about that interpretation, but if that is in the ballpark of correct, then I make the following suggestion. If my take is off the mark, then I apologize for the waste of time. And I note what I will say is the result of long painful personal experience.

It is worthwhile to notice the feeling of *I was right!* – to be sensitive to its arising, to discern its signs and characteristics, so as to be able to notice its subtle, delicate features and thus to develop the skill of becoming awake to the arising of this feeling as early in its process as possible. That's a hugely valuable skill, because the feeling of *I was right!* almost always actually signals *I am/was wrong!*

That may seem counterintuitive, but here's why it works like that. (I'll write this about Julian and Mel, but it applies equally to Julian and anyone else, and to Russ and

anyone else, and to anyone and to anyone else.) First, Julian (Russ, too, of course, but I won't say this over and over) is *never* right about Mel's inner experience. The best that Julian can be is pretty good about Mel's experience, so the only appropriate reaction to any attempt to apprehend Mel's experience is *I fell short*, or *How could I have done that better?* As a result, if a feeling of *I was right!* arises, I think it reflects a delusion of some sort. *I was right!* is the result of having oversimplified or distorted, and then discovered some "evidence" that, within the confines of that oversimplification/distortion, corroborates that oversimplification/distortion.

Looked at another way, if you *really are* right, it wouldn't occur to you to feel *I was right!* You *are right* that gravity generally pulls you down toward the earth; I suspect you *don't* have the feeling that *I'm right!* about that.

I am right! arises as the outer skin of a delusion. The delusional aspect of a delusion is not available to you—that's what makes a delusion a delusion—because that would be a self-criticism, and a delusion won't permit self-criticism. But the delusion will permit the opposite feeling—the self-aggrandizing feeling of *I was/am right!* So the ability to notice the feeling of *I was/am right!*, however that feeling presents itself to you, is a very valuable tool: it is a sign that there is a delusion in the vicinity, and perhaps the only sign.

I re-emphasize: I am no mind reader. I have no right/authority/special ability to see inside your experience. I have tried / am trying to say what I think, acutely aware of my own limitations, in the hopes that it may be useful. (There is a similar comment at 1:11:56.)

Having already written the previous portion (but *not* having sent it to anyone, including Julian) and acutely aware of my own biases, I generated the following exercise, slept on it for two nights while examining whether I thought it might be constructive, and then emailed it to Julian (copying Mel):

Here's an exercise for Julian: Watch the interview for sample 9.1 and then try to reconstruct what your own experience was at the end of the interview (might be useful to watch your own portion of the video from 8:00 or so to the end of the interview). Write about your experience as if you were making a diary entry. There are two aspects of that suggestion: first, write it--commit it to paper (or electrons). It's not good enough merely to think about it. Second, this is a diary exercise--by you for you, trying to be honest with yourself. I will **not** ask to see this or ask you to comment on it, just as I wouldn't ask to see any actual diary you may keep. So the exercise, should you choose to accept it, is to be honest with yourself about what passes before the footlights of your consciousness at the end of sample 9.1.

Julian responded by email "Russ, I did your diary assignment and thought why not share? Mel you can also look if you want." and attached the following:

[Julian writes: Edited 'diary' with notes](#)

In doing this exercise, I'm aware that reconstructing thoughts like this has the risk, of missing a lot, or passing experiences through certain distorting lenses, insecurities etc. Still, I think there's *some* truth to this. I'm curious why you trust this kind of exercise (like you did with Neda Raymond as well in your co-written paper "Agency: A Case

Study In Bracketing Presuppositions”) more than other non-DES attempts to get at wider chunks of experience?

Anyway here’s my answer. It focuses more on ‘thoughts’ than whatever else might have been in experience. Though I did put more emotional stuff in italics:

He’s talking mostly about wideness. Didn’t mention weight, but it was more about the weight. Did he? He might have mentioned it but I just didn’t catch it. Should I mention that it was more about the weight? But what if he did mention it? But he’s talking much more about the wideness. Bring it up. Show that you’re good at the method, can catch more. Maybe he’s getting older, starting to miss stuff.

Then when Mel says it’s both.

Ok, maybe I’m wrong. *Getting nervous*. Damn, don’t want to look like a fool.

Then when she says: “lean more with what you’re trying to say, Julian”

Relief. Ok maybe I didn’t look like a fool. But it’s both of them, shouldn’t rest too hard on either one in the description.

[possible thoughts but not sure]: maybe she’s just trying to placate me.

So I *did* get a more accurate description

Ok, that’s as much as I want to excavate. I do think there was some ego involved, of trying to prove I caught more of the description. I don’t think the interjection was necessary, since going back over, you did mention the weight in the feet. You did mention the weight once and the stance much more, though. Most of your description focused on the stance. This partially motivated my questioning. Still, I don’t think this was saying that the stance was more important, just that it needed more description to work out how it played into experience.

As for Mel’s eventual answer: it’s both the weight and the stance, but maybe more about the weight.

I don’t think it changed much how I imagined this experience. I think my understanding was pretty much unchanged by this whole interchange.

I do note the intrusion of ego/desire to prove/ desire to win. That’s never good.

I assume one of the points of this assignment was to note that, but I’m not sure. Why did you choose this specific point of the interview for your assignment? Did you have any guesses as to what my experience was before you assigned it?

Commentary written three months after this diary exercise

I see your point now even more, Russ. In Mel’s eventual [8:52] answer—it’s both the weight and the stance, but maybe more about the weight—the *maybe more about the weight* part could very well have just been said to placate me. Even more, I see how I missed picking up on the stance part of her experience.

Original “diary”

Mentioned the wideness apart

sensation of my wide apart feet

wideness apart

part of that sensation

wideness

He's talking mostly about wideness. Didn't mention weight? Did he? He might have mentioned it but I just didn't catch it. Should I mention that it was more about the weight?

So ego—>prove that you're good at it, can catch more

"the two are linked"

Ok maybe I was wrong about the clarification

"lean more with what you're trying to say, Julian"

Ok maybe I didn't look like a fool. But it's both of them, shouldn't rest too hard on either one in the description.

Russ comments:

RE: "Why did you choose this specific point of the interview for your assignment? Did you have any guesses as to what my experience was before you assigned it?"

As best I can reconstruct, there were three events in this interview that seemed to me to be aligned: (1) Your personalizing of the question at 8:15, making it (at least in part) about *JBK and Russ* rather than about Mel's experience; (2) Your misrepresenting what I had said about weight ("I can't recall if you mentioned that"); and (3) Your bodily reaction (that I took to be a smug smile and a bodily jolt) at about 9:08—9:11. My ego-involvement receptors jangled somewhat at (1), somewhat more at (2), and somewhat more at (3). Singly, I probably wouldn't have responded. Together, those events suggested themselves to me as being the externalized aspect of, as you aptly say, "the intrusion of ego/desire to prove/ desire to win. That's never good." There had been several other instances over the weeks, which hadn't arisen to the level where I would apply myself to a response, but which doubtless formed the background of the present sampling.

So the question arose in me, what to do about that? And what I landed upon was (a) to give you the opportunity to reflect, uninfluenced by what I might think (other than that I was suggesting that you reflect *about this*); and that I would write my comments (reproduced here at 9:09) before you responded (or didn't respond), uninfluenced by what you might say. That was my level-playing-field attempt to explore this issue.

RE: "In doing this exercise, I'm aware that reconstructing thoughts like this has the risk, of missing a lot, or passing experiences through certain distorting lenses, insecurities etc. Still, I think there's *some* truth to this."

I agree with both halves of this observation: you doubtless miss a lot and there's some truth. I hoped that the exercise might have some value in the some-truth aspect.

RE: “I’m curious why you trust this kind of exercise (like you did with Neda ... as well) more than other non-DES attempts to get at wider chunks of experience?”

That’s an important question, which I think rests on the intention of the exercise. First, this exercise has some similarities to DES: it points to specific instances (8:15; 9:08-9:11) that are more-or-less adequately recorded; it makes substantial effort to provide a level playing field; it operates within a fairly substantial historical context of interactions that attempt to be specifically faithful; it is specifically personal (aimed at Julian and no one else); and in its essentiality it recognizes its own limitations—it doesn’t try to be anything more than it is.

However, this exercise is also substantially different from DES: it is not aimed at a series of specific experiences over time; we have not tried (and probably will not try and perhaps could not possibly be successful) to ensure that our descriptive language (of terms like *ego*) is unambiguous and lies gently on phenomena; and so on.

The best I can say is that I trusted my motives enough that I proposed the exercise. That was a risky venture, because it requires balancing, on the one hand, my acute realization that I am blind to my own blind spots (and so may well be to a small or large degree projecting them onto Julian) with, on the other hand, my impression I have quite a lot of experience and some (I think) pretty good observational skills and some (I think) pretty pure motivation to advance the grasping of inner experience. But there is no measuring stick to assess that balance: it comes down to Russ as an individual, assessing to the best of his imperfect ability his own motives and his understanding of Julian, and incorporating what he as an individual takes to be appropriate safeguards (e.g., sleeping on it for two nights), acting in the way that he hopes is for the best.

This exercise is not really about trusting the results; it is about contributing to the process. If I was (at least in part) and Julian is (at least in part) on the right track, that *ego* is involved and that’s not a good thing, then Julian will (at least somewhat) take on board the suggestion that he be on the lookout for the *I’m right!* feeling, which (he might come to recognize) does signal the operation of *ego*. And ten or twenty years from now, if he has applied himself to that recognition, he may have a pretty good handle on the arising of his own personal *ego* distortions (whatever that means) and how to deal with them constructively (whatever that means). But that is more a ramification than a result. I am *not* trying to describe Julian’s experience; I am trying to describe the results of my own experience, on the possibility that that can be constructive for Julian.

But perhaps I haven’t answered why I would do this exercise when I don’t trust “other non-DES attempts to get at wider chunks of experience.” Here’s a thought experiment: suppose, last October (before sampling with Mel) that Julian had been a participant in a study of *ego* involvement, filling out questionnaires, responding to structured interviews and qualitative methods, and so on. Would that study have been aimed at precisely the kind of *ego* that we are talking about here? (I am not claiming that I know what that is, or even that Julian knows what that is, although he probably has a better inkling than I have.) I doubt it. It would have been aimed at the investigator’s version of *ego*, which may or may not have overlapped with Julian’s. Even allowing that the investigator’s and Julian’s version of *ego* was the same, would Julian have been able/willing to respond/describe the operation of that *ego*? I doubt it. That investigation would have been on the wrong side of the presuppositions, where Julian was more likely to defend the desirability of his *ego* involvement. Would

that study have given Julian any hints about how to recognize his own ego involvement? No—it likely would have operated in the realm of the investigator's generality vs. Julian's generality. Could an explication-interview study (that begins with "Tell me about an instance where your ego interfered" and then asks you to repeatedly relive that instance) arrive at the same kind of experience we are talking about here? Maybe. (Julian may have some insight into whether he would have given in that setting a similar example as to what we observed here.)

Mostly, though, the present exercise is *not* the same kind of thing that are studies aimed at getting wider chunks of experience. This exercise is *not* about ego involvement in general, and not even about ego involvement as a construct. I don't care whether we call the topic here *ego* or any other word; I don't care whether Julian's experience here is the same or different as any other person's. My primary interest here is in *Mel's* experience, not primarily Julian's. I am interested in Mel's experience as it is investigated by Julian, and therefore derivatively interested in anything in Julian's experience that interferes (or may interfere) with his apprehension of her experience. I thought (and still think) that the exercise I proposed might be of value in that endeavor, not because of what it would say about ego involvement in general, or even about ego involvement in Julian, but about that it might help *Julian as an individual* if he wants to become able to apprehend Mel's experience with fidelity. That is, this exercise is part of the iterative process, not so much aimed at elucidating Julian's experience during interview 9 at 9:09, but at (potentially) sensitizing Julian so that at interview 10 or 13 or whatever, he might be more facile-ly able to respond to an experience that might be in the ballpark of similar.

Added a few days later: In summary, in this situation, the "wider-chunk" typical psychological study would be a "study of ego involvement." But carefully considered, except possibly in an explication-interview study, there is no reason to believe that the investigators and each of their participants individually understand what any of the others mean by ego-involvement—that is, the study participants (including the investigators) don't really know what they are talking about. The investigators will draw conclusions about group averages, but there is no reason to believe that the group average reflects any individual, much less most individuals. So I think it is too charitable to think of the typical study as a "wider chunks of experience" study—I think it is better to think of it as a "let's pretend we know what we are talking about" study. I think psychological science cannot profitably advance built on such studies.

The present exercise is *not* designed to be a contribution to psychological knowledge. It is designed to contribute (possibly) iteratively to *Julian's* ability to align himself with *Mel's* experience, and then, possibly, to his ability to align himself with the experience of others, and then, possibly, to be in a position to be trusted to contribute to psychological knowledge. That is, the exercise is fundamentally personally individual, aimed at Julian, regardless of how Julian's characteristics are described, regardless of whether Julian's characteristics are similar to anyone else's, and regardless of whether Russ and Julian agree about what Julian's characteristics are. Russ has, from his side of the chasm, suggested an exercise that Julian might engage in on his own side of the chasm. To the extent that Russ is observant, knowledgeable, and creative (or lucky), Julian may find the exercise useful. Whether

such efforts can contribute to Julian's advancement and/or the advancement of psychological science remains to be seen, but I think it is at least possible.

If we ever make any of this public, it may well be that others might profit from our example. I think that Julian's experience is not rare, and I say that because I recognize in him my own experience: It took me many years and many iterations to recognize in myself that the *I'm right!* feeling is likely both diametrically incorrect and simultaneously very valuable. I suspect that there are others in the same boat as Julian and me.

9:13 RTH: Number 2?

9:14 JBK: Number 2.

SAMPLE 9.2 DISCUSSION BEGINS HERE

9:19 Mel: These beeps were going off at weird times! There's something odd going on, because they seem to go off in bursts. So this went off at 8:23, which is only a few minutes later. Um, and I've written, "I'd just paused to ponder the sentence I'd written. I was typing a note for an online voucher for a friend. Um, I know I had stopped to consider the sentence I had written. I wasn't satisfied with it, so I'd physically stopped and was looking at the screen in what I would describe as *pondering*. However, that process was actually fairly empty. There was no alternative phrases thrown about in my head yet. I was just staring at the phone screen, paused, sort of waiting for an alternative sentence to arrive." So I know I was, that's the state of being that I was in. I know I caught myself in that process. But, um, it, like, if there wasn't another phrase or anything to grab at yet; it was sort of the moment before that happens when the beep went off.

10:28 RTH: So I'm clearly in the reconsideration (or whatever) mode.

10:34 Mel: Mm-hmm.

10:37 RTH: But I hadn't, I guess I haven't heard any, anything that is particularly experiential about that. It's, it's not.... I'm waiting, I'm waiting for a relevant experience to occur. And it isn't, hasn't yet occurred, but I don't really experience myself as *waiting*. I'm in the *mode of* waiting, but it's not like I am noticing the waiting. Is that right?

11:06 Mel: Yeah. Like, I think it's, it was, it's weird to describe because, uh, everything that I can usually grab at sort of wasn't happening. Like yes, the phone screen was in my awareness and I was definitely looking at it. There was some act of pondering involved in that, but I can't grab it. Like, well, these exact words were going through my brain or... So it leans in towards sort of that... It doesn't feel like an autopilot thing when I've described stuff like that. Y'know what I mean? Because this wasn't that. But there's sort of nothing really happening yet. But there was: I was pondering, I was wai-like, is this helpful at all or no? [laughs]

- 11:56 RTH: Well, it is, but, but so I get... I guess what I'm getting is that it's, the *pondering* [Mel: Mmm.] is present to me, but it doesn't [Mel: Mmm.] have any features. It's like a featureless pondering. [Mel: Yes! ...] So it's not nothing...
- 12:11 Mel: ...which sounds weird. Yeah. I guess that's what I was trying to describe. That it, it wasn't nothing. There's a difference between me sitting there and emptily staring at my screen, even though this sort of objectively sounds like that. I know it wasn't that. There was pondering, but it hadn't got to the level of pondering where you're throwing around different ideas about the thing that you're pondering. It was right before that state or that, that thing happens.
- 12:43 RTH: Okay. And, and, um, my eyeballs are aimed at the screen, and I no doubt am seeing the screen. I understand myself to be seeing the sentence. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And is that, is that in my directly apprehended experience at the moment of the beep, that I'm seeing the sentence?
- 13:00 Mel: I don't think so. Like, it's as if that had just happened. I, this feels caught in between that. I'm staring at the screen. I had previously written that. I, I am, I'm not even, like, I'm not even reading that sentence at that point, or I'm not like... Not necessarily. I'm looking at the screen. But beyond that, there's not, there's not a whole lot happening with that.
- 13:32 RTH: So in the sense of *context* [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I'm reconsidering this sentence that I've written, which I'm not happy with. And I'm, that's, that's the task that I'm engaged in. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And, uh, and in the sense of *action*, my eyeballs are aimed at the screen, but I'm not really experiencing that directly. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I no doubt was experiencing it in some way. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But my, my, my eyeballs are no doubt reacting to it in the way my eyeballs and the LGN (or wherever those things go) do. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But, but I, it's not like I experienced myself as *seeing* the sentence. What I experienced myself is, is this featureless-pondering stuff, and about that I can't say anything more than I experience it and it doesn't have any features.
- 14:25 Mel: Yeah. Which I'm finding very annoying, but Yes.
- 14:30 RTH: And annoying in the difficulty of the description? Or annoying in the, in the moment?
- 14:34 Mel: I think so. Yeah, no, not in the moment. Like right now in trying to describe it, because I, I can feel so confidently that that is the experience I was having, but it's very frustrating to not be able to find any more words for that.
- 14:52 RTH: And in that, that, in that, in that sentence, the "that" is this pondering?
- 14:57 Mel: Mm-hmm.
- 14:58 RTH: It's the pondering that I'm experiencing.
- 15:01 Mel: Yeah.

- 15:03 RTH: That's how I understand it. And I, I can understand the frustration. But if, if that's the way the experience is, I don't, I don't have any problem with that. I think, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I think there can be... I don't, I don't, I don't think we need to have features and, uh, I think, I think there can be active pondering going on with, without any particular features involved.
- 15:30 Mel: Hmm. Okay. Still annoying for me.
- 15:33 RTH: So I'm good.
- 15:34 JBK: I have, um, I have a question. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So, um, I'm happy with featureless pondering. Um, at other times you've used other words, like there was maybe not quite pondering, but *waiting*, um. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And not to like, hang up on one word, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] but I wanna know if, if some of these maybe get at certain aspects of this experience. Like, um, was, even though it doesn't have features is, is it more of like a, just *waiting for something to come*, but *featureless*, or more, or more of a, I dunno, like could you, could you describe, [Mel laughs] describe it more? Or does this not make sense? Does the fact that it's featureless make it hard for it to describe more about it?
- 16:32 Mel: It does make it hard and it's, it's, this is the thing that's annoying me, cuz I'm not satisfied with the description, but finding it very hard. I really like that. [RTH starts to speak, then stops.] Yeah?
- 16:44 RTH: Go ahead.
- 16:45 JBK: Yeah go ahead.
- 16:46 Mel: Uh, I was just gonna say that *featureless pondering*, I, that's definitely the best description that I had thrown around here, because I, I had written down the word "pondering" straight away, that feels really relevant. *Featureless* feels, then, a better description of what that is, even though it's actually not cuz it's featureless, but like that... *Pondering* feels better than *waiting*. Um, but I like, in a sense, I feel (and, and yell at me if I'm going too far off track here) but this has sort of a really interesting beep in that it's gone off right at the time before my brain does idea-creation, in a way. So like, th- you've caught me right at the moment before an actual idea comes out of my fingers or mouth or whatever. And how that happens for me is sort of this [laughs] [gestures air quotes] "featureless pondering" until it arrives. Whereas, y'know, I've said, I ha- it's not, there's no audio in my brain and I'm not talking to myself about other options or... This is sort of what happens before the idea, the thought, the whatever. It's a different version of that nothingness that we've found at other times, I think. So in that sense, it's kind of really interesting because this feels very, um, true to my experience. But can I give you more words about it, other than that very wish washy stuff? I'm struggling.
- 18:26 RTH: So the, the difference between *waiting* and *pondering*... If—and this, I'm trying to understand what, what Julian's question is. So *waiting* seems like a, like a passive, I don't [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I don't experience myself as doing anything; and *pondering*

seems more actively engaged. [Mel gestures emphatically with her index finger]. Is that...

18:53 Mel: Yes, I would agree with that. Yes! Absolutely! That's a really [inaudible]

18:56 RTH: ...Is that Julian's question *and* Mel's answer? [Mel laughs]

19:00 JBK: Yeah. That does, that does get kind of to my question. [RTH: Okay.] Um, but do you, and then.... Do you feel this as kind of, uh, active as more active in that way? Or passive, or hard to say?

19:14 Mel: Yes. No, definitely active, even though that feels a bit of an oxymoron, cuz there's not a whole lot of like, activity to grab at. But certainly that, that, that moment of pondering that I kept that, that's sort of the, um, distinction I was trying to make when I wrote this description down. That this *definitely* felt active. This wasn't some sort of autopilot; this wasn't some sort of nothingness. This was active, but still has a lot of those similar characteristics. [laughs]

19:14 Julian comments: To Mel this was *definitely* active. Although for her, active here might mean something quite different to a lot of people. She describes it based on it being *at all* experiential. It's not nothing. Would other people describe a similar kind of experience as passive? This question may make no sense because active/passive distinctions are relative to each person's individual experience. There's a lot of theoretical writing on active/passive distinctions, with different theorists having different criteria—the sense that an action emanates from oneself, that one has control, that one has a sense of ownership, a sense of authorship, etc. But I think it may be impossible to pin down any one thing that is meant by an active/passive distinction. It's probably not even possible to pin down this distinction for any one participant. They might have different criteria for each sample.

That being said, I don't think it's an empty question to ask. Mel here was clear that her pondering *was* active. And we should take this seriously. Rather than using Mel's descriptions to pin down some shared universal definition of passive/active, rather we can use that distinction as a tool to try to gain access to Mel's experience.

It did help me understand her experience, and get past some presuppositions. Because Mel didn't describe any features to her pondering, I may have defaulted to seeing it as more passive, more like waiting. But to Mel, this didn't do justice to her experience.

Russ comments: This is my characterization of what I think Mel has tried to communicate to us:

This pondering is difficult; there isn't anything clear; it's pretty close to nothing, but it's not *nothing* (here I use italics to indicate confidence and unambiguity), and if I had to choose between nothing and something I'd say it's something, but it's not really *something*, it's just more than *nothing*; and it's pretty close to waiting, but it's not really *waiting* because waiting seems too passive, and if I had to choose between passive and active it's more like active, but it's not *active*.

19:14

Exercise for the reader (1):

Is Russ's characterization on the mark, or does it miss something important or exaggerate something that is unimportant?

([Our answers are at 29:19](#); no fair peeking until you have committed yourself to your own answer):

Julian comments: Russ, we discuss this somewhat in the answers to the exercise for the reader, but I would still like to know whether you have any general thoughts on the active/passive distinction? We made that distinction a few times on this day of sampling. It seems that it is usually not hard for Mel to make this distinction. On this day quite a few samples were clearly active, and on a past days, quite a few were clearly passive. There may be samples that contradict this, though they don't come to mind.

Some questions do come to mind: Do you think this active/passive distinction is somewhat stable across different participants? Or do some have very different things they mean by active? Do you understand it as something clear or as something more vague and undefined. Some theorist like to break agency into different components, like an action seeming to emanate from oneself—do you find this useful?

Asking these questions, I can almost anticipate your answers. That many are motivated by theories in consciousness studies. That these should be ignored to focus on Mel's experience at individual moments. So having written that, I may try to see if what 'active' and 'passive' mean to Mel in terms of the specifics of her experience.

Russ comments: I agree with your anticipation of my answers. I think that Mel has a pretty clear notion of the distinction between active and passive. I suspect that other DES participants also have a similarly clear notion, and I suspect that those notions are similar, but (a) I don't know; and (b) (as you pointed out) at this point in the history of the world, I'd prefer to get Mel with as much fidelity as we can get.

Julian comments: Regarding theories, for instance Horgan and Timmons (2011) write "it may be that the DES method is too narrowly focused on the non-subtle and easily introspectable aspects of one's phenomenology at a very 'thin' time slice of one's ongoing experience to really reveal much about agentive phenomenology." I found this paper mostly off the mark, but I did at the time wonder (and write) something about DES and agency. "Agency" may be too theoretical, but I do wonder if there's more about the active/passive distinction that can be looked into.

Russ comments: I responded about agency in Hurlburt & Raymond (2011). *Sometimes* (as in the study in H&R 2011) DES participants describe the direct apprehension of agency, but that is by far the exception than the rule. Those who write about agency do not notice that, which I find damning.

Julian comments: Thanks for pointing me to this Russ, I didn't know it. It's a good example of a process similar to mine. I am also confronted with my presuppositions here.

The words present discussion may be one. The describing Mel's pondering as more passive may be another one.

The content/non-content discussion I'm not sure of. It may be there that you have presuppositions that the content of movie for instance must enter experience in some way.

I was interested by Neda's descriptions of wanting to 'win'. I do too at times. Maybe you do too.

I do wonder if Neda's descriptions of her own internal states during the interview fall under the category of non-DES broad retrospective accounts of her experience. I have this question when going over my own interviewing. Was I motivated by vanity during a certain portion? It's hard to judge this retrospectively, so I'm still unsure to what extent this is useful.

I think this ties into some other discussions for example about interest vs. disinterest in experience. About being wary of 'intrigue'—which I've taken as vanity masking as curiosity; "here is something interesting I could publish a paper about, let me confirm it". Let me know if you want me to locate these discussions to jog your memory.

Q: In developing reliable observations, do you believe that monitoring and shaping your internal states are part of becoming a better interviewer? E.g. monitoring your own curiosity, disbelief, skepticism, 'intrigue'. Or is it better to focus on Mel, on her experience, and have this untangle any knots in your own mindset?

Russ comments: It is a conundrum. To the extent that you pay attention to your own internal states, you are not paying attention to Mel. But part of the necessary bracketing of presuppositions requires that you pay attention to your own internal states. Those are indeed in opposition in the short term: trying to focus on your own stuff *today* will make you worse at hearing Mel with fidelity *today*. But focusing on your own stuff *today* may allow you to bracket presuppositions so that you can hear Mel in higher fidelity *tomorrow*.

Said another way, the iterative acquisition of skills is *not* linear: fidelity gets worse before it gets better, but over the long term, if you keep at it, fidelity can improve.

19:50 JBK: Okay.

19:52 RTH: Um, so, so what I would say about that is that I, I think there's lots of processing that takes place. And there's, there's actually no necessity for that processing *ever* to become conscious, what we would call *before the footlights of consciousness* or *directly apprehended* or whatever. [Mel: Mm.] We process a lot of stuff without it. You, you may more than some people, have, have longer periods where that happens, but [shrugs] that's where you apprehend...

20:22 Mel: As in, maybe it happens long enough for me to, in some senses become aware of that process. [RTH: Right.] Yeah. Yeah. That [inaudible]

20:34 RTH: And, and I don't, so when, when you gave, what, what, what you said, "we could yell at you about that," [Mel laughs] That was, that was a little bit of a, uh, talking about cau- causation or process more than I would, than I think we probably have a right to

know, [Mel: Right.] because I, I think it's quite possible that the, that this pondering would be fruitless and, and so there *wouldn't* be a result. And, and we don't know about that because we beeped you and interrupted it and whatever. [Mel laughs] So, so we don't, we don't really know. But, so, but catching what was going on seemed like an, like, like you had *some* access to *some* processing going on, [Mel: Mm-hmm] but without being able to articulate that.

21:18 Mel: Mm-hmm. Satisfied [inaudible]

21:23 JBK: I have a kind of... [Mel: Yeah.] I have a kind of meta, meta question. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, and Russ, you could tell me if you think it's best for later, uh, not now. But for this sample, I think it being featureless is an important part of it, that there's this kind of pondering, waiting, but there's no exact content. There's no alternate sentence here that's coming to you. And, um, on previous days, previous samples, I thought it was useful in the description to say that content wasn't a part of it. Maybe like watching *Saltburn* and the actual content of the movie is not so present. And me and Russ had a discussion about this and, and Russ disagreed that was best, like, best not to put that in the description. And so, Russ, what, what do you think comparing this, cuz here, do you think mentioning that it's featureless is important to understand it, and then how might that be different from other ones where you don't think we should mention that it's featureless or content, content/less?

22:35 RTH: So I, I don't think we've sorted through what the con- what we, what we mean. You, you, maybe the last, the last thing that we've written about content as, as I was the writer, and I don't, maybe, I dunno whether you've agreed with that or not, but I still don't know what exactly *content* means. What I would, what I would, so, but we could, we could talk about it here. It seems to me that the, the, the *content* of Mel's experience at beep 9.2 was this sentence. But that content is not experienced in, in any way. That's more like the context. So the, the content is in the context. Mel, Mel is thinking about this sentence. She's not thinking about Cadillac Escalades or the war in Ukraine, or a lot of other kinds of things that she could be thinking about. What she is thinking about at this particular moment, is, this sentence in its adequacy or whatever. That's the content, it seems to me. Is that what you mean by *content*?

23:36 JBK: No, I don't, I don't mean content in that way. I mean, I mean, something experiential, something about how the context figures into experience. And here, I don't think it does. I don't think the sentence do- like, becomes directly experiential, at least from Mel's description. Cuz it seemed like it was more about this waiting, pondering, whatever, that doesn't have any clear, um, like it doesn't have a clear sentence to it. It doesn't have clear alternate sentences. Um, and that's similar to how I understood a lot of your experience watching *Saltburn*, where Mel said, you said that one sample was indistinguishable to you from another sample. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And so there must've been different things happening in the movie. Maybe there, one was like a conversation scene, another was, I dunno, a, a love scene. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, but it sounded to me like that didn't even, not even just that you weren't noticing a particular element of this or that, but that it might not have even colored the experience in a way to make one moment of you like being carried-along with the movie, uh, different from another moment. Or maybe they're just different in tiny

ways. So, so that's what I mean. I don't mean context, but I mean, uh, how that, like, how that becomes experiential.

25:29 RTH: Well, I, I still think those are pretty problematic and, and different from here.

25:35 JBK: Okay.

25:36 RTH: Because what, what was in the *Saltburn* scene's beeps what was present to her was the movie, the scene in the movie. [JBK: Mmm.] And, and if you, I don't think you can take that away and have like, like the *observer* left over and say, well, the observer is the same at one at this point as it was the last time. The scene is different, but the observer stays the same. I don't think we have any warrant to be able to say that. That would be like, there was some homunculus in there who was watching the movie, which I don't think is really the case. Or may be the case, but [inaudible]

26:27 JBK: I don't, I'm not separating scene and observer. Um, it would be, it would be nice to just ask you, Mel, but I think those beeps are a bit too far back for you to, for us to be able to redo it. I think we'll have to go from the transcripts. But to me it seems quite similar in that there is...

26:48 RTH: Similar to what? Similar to here?

26:53 JBK: Yeah, this featureless. To me, featureless and content-less are similar in a way. And I, I guess I don't wanna overly generalize, um, and say that they're exactly the same. But here you have some, some experience, but it doesn't have, it doesn't have clear features of, of other sentences. And it might be indistinguishable to you if it was this sentence that you were pondering about changing, or if it was another sentence that you were pondering about changing.

27:31 Mel: No, it was very clearly that I wa- I was pondering, uh, that sentence. It wasn't, but I just hadn't worked out. I wasn't, um, super focused on that specific sentence that I'd written. I'd like, I'd already decided that was inadequate, and I wanna think about a different one. But that—when the beep went off, that wasn't happening. That had already happened. And a new idea, a new sentence, an alternative version of it hadn't happened yet. So I was very firmly in the act of pondering something in between the two. Um, but so it's not... I think Russ is sort of right that the context is that sentence, and that's as close as you can get to *content*. But I, I don't think it was super, super linked. Um, like it is, but it's not,

28:27 JBK: So it's not...

28:30 RTH: These things seem like very different— The *Saltburn* and the, and the present sample 9.2 seem very different from, to me, Julian, because in the *Saltburn* scenes, there is something which is very clearly present to her. It's the movie, a movie, she's totally...

28:48 JBK: Or...

28:48 RTH: ...totally seeing the movie. Whereas *here*, what she is seeing is, or what she is attending to, is this pondering stuff, which, and the pondering stuff has no features. That's why *featureless* is a, is a pretty good word for me. It's hard to, it's hard to, hard to describe what this pondering stuff is like.

28:48 Russ comments: When RTH says "she is attending to, is this pondering stuff, which, and the pondering stuff has no features," he is sloppily referring to meta-awareness, which is not his intention.

29:09 JBK: Okay. I think what we should continue this discussion with the, the transcripts and everything.

29:09 Russ comments: An aim of DES is to provide descriptions, an aim that requires using words. And the words that are used have not only a definition but also a connotation, common usage, penumbra. The object of DES is to make its descriptions, its whole set of words with their definitions, connotations, interactions, penumbras lie easily on the phenomenon being described.

We started out (9:19) describing Mel's 9.2 experience as "pondering." Here's Webster on **Ponder**:

- 1:
to weigh in the mind :
pondered their chances of success
- 2:
to think about : reflect on
pondered the events of the day

Both by definition and also by connotation and usage, center-of-the-target pondering has a directly apprehended content (chances of success, events of the day). Mel's 9.2 experience is somewhat less than that; that is, Mel's experience is *not* center-of-the-target pondering. So we weakened it to *featureless pondering*. That seems a pretty good description: we notified the reader that Mel's experience was not garden-variety pondering but pondering of a somewhat-not-to-be-presumed-by-using-the-word-pondering kind—it is *featureless pondering*.

In the sample 8.2 *Saltburn* example, we described her experience as being "carried along by" the movie. That expression has, by definition, connotation, and common usage, a *lack of* particularization of content—I'm *in sync* with the movie but *not* noticing any particular detail or aspect. That is center-of-the-target use of the phrase "carried along by." So when we say about sample 8.2 that Mel was "carried along by the movie," we are center-of-the-target describing her experience. However, if we append *contentless*, as in Mel was "contentless carried along by the movie," then we are communicating that there is something special about Mel's being carried along here—that we must modify it by appending *contentless*. But I don't think that's right—her experience *was* pretty garden variety being carried-along-by, which is already in its manner of speaking contentless. So I think "contentless carried along by the movie" would be bad description: it misleads the reader by implying that there is about her experience something-not-to-be-presumed-by-simply-using-the-phrase-carried-along-by.

So from the standpoint of high-fidelity description, I think “featureless pondering” is good, but “contentless being carried along” is bad.

Julian at 26:53 said “To me, featureless and content-less are similar in a way.” We are still trying to figure out what (if anything) that way is. It is *not* about the words. *Featureless* in 9.2 means, essentially, *a little bit less than the usual*, and *content-less* in 8.2 means, essentially, *a misleading way of emphasizing something already described*. Featureless and content-less are *not* similar (pretty close to opposite) in their usage here.

Julian has said (as I recall) that he is not confusing description with some sort of structure-of-consciousness interest. That is, he has said that he does not want to know whether there is some mechanism of consciousness that is employed in being carried along in a movie, and also employed in featureless pondering, and also employed in engrossed in conversation. Such interest goes beyond DES’s ability. And he has said that he is not interested in meta-awareness. But I have yet to figure out what his interest is. My best guess is that his interest is driven by being captured by words (and if so, then this comment is in the it’s-not-about-the-words category), but I’m not at all sure of that.

Julian comments: I can agree to most of this. Except for Mel’s experience being “garden variety” being carried-along-by. It seems quite different from some carried-along-by type samples I’ve had from other participants. She described multiple samples as exactly the same, even though I offered the option that they could be a tiny bit different based on what was happening on screen. Regarding if we call it contentless or featureless or non-particularizing, or whatever—and I’ve come to agree with you that these are a theoretical overreach—I still think this is something worth noting.

NOTE: Julian and Russ had further discussion of this topic by email in the days and months following the interview. This discussion can be found below at the end of the interview in the section called [“SAMPLE 9.2 COMMENTARY ARISING AFTER THE INTERVIEW: ABOUT FEATURELESS VS. CONTENTLESS.”](#)

29:15 RTH: Okay. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Number 3.

29:19 JBK: Yeah, let’s try number 3.

Answer to Exercise for the reader (1):

Russ’s answer to Exercise (1) is in two steps. The first step to provide a second exercise:

Exercise for the reader (2):

If your answer to Exercise (1) is, broadly speaking, that Russ’s characterization is pretty faithful to Mel’s experience, then go back and read Julian’s comment at 19:14. In diary fashion (that is, as a private message to yourself), write down your reactions as you read it. (Really! Write it down! It’s not good enough to pretend.)

(Our answers are [at the end of this transcript, at 1:12:59](#) (no fair peeking until you have committed yourself to your own answer):

SAMPLE 9.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 29:21 Mel: Um, this is why I think the beeper is broken, because this went off three minutes later and the other one was very soon as well. So, um, this was 8:26, and I wrote, "I just started deleting the sentence. [laughs] My thumb was pressed down on my iPhone screen. The letters were being deleted. I'd decided on shortening the sentence to just the first half, which was the phrase 'take Chey'. Um, that was the phrase I'd settled on, but I wasn't at the point of inputting it into the screen yet." Um, so in terms of my inner experience, the physical act of my thumb pressing down on my phone screen and watching the letters delete was very much part of my experience. Um, there was, um, that, that, ph- that, that, that *phrase* was very much part of my experience in that, um, for reference, Chey is a person's name. So "take Chey" is that's what, what that means. Um, so that, that particular phrase was absolutely in my inner experience in my head. Um, I hadn't written that out yet, but that phrase was very clear. Um, and that's sort of it.
- 30:43 JBK: Okay. So you're pressing down on the delete / backspace button. [Mel indicates with her thumb a pressing motion] Yeah. Um, and the letters are erasing.
- 30:56 Mel: Mm-hmm. And I'm watching them be erased, like, y'know, one by one when you do it on a phone. [JBK: Yeah.] That was very much part of my awareness.
- 31:05 JBK: Okay. So it's not just an action, a fact of the universe that's happening [Mel: Unh-uh], but [Mel: Mm-hmm.] it is experiential here.
- 31:10 Mel: Yeah. Mm-hmm.
- 31:13 JBK: So, so watching them one by one get deleted. Is it... [Mel: Mm-hmm.] is it mostly that visual element of watching them get deleted?
- 31:29 Mel: [pause] I think so.
- 31:32 JBK: Um, but it's also the, the physical pressing down? Or it's a mix, or you're not sure.
- 31:38 Mel: Yeah, it's that, well, that's just a constant press. So my thumb is down. I would say watching, there's something sort of satisfying watching each of these letters, just erase individually. So I think that was the most present in my awareness, actually. Like my physical thumb's down. But I'm really like sort of enjoying watching these letters delete. So I'd say that was the, the main part of the experience.
- 32:04 JBK: Okay. Watching the letters delete. Is there, um, like kind of enjoyment / satisfaction part of it? Or is that more just later you're talking about this kind of thing and that comes to mind? Or is that, are you experiencing that at this moment?
- 32:21 Mel: I think I actually *am* experiencing at the moment. Not in a, not in a meta way, but like now if, like, if I analyze that, yeah, I think there was definitely a satisfaction element in watching them get deleted. Like, yes.

32:35 JBK: Okay. Um, I, I, I think there might've been, but I think since, um, you're thinking like you, since you didn't write it down and now you're thinking back and it comes to mind. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I think, I dunno. I think there's still a risk of probing that too much. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, I think it very well may have been there, but I also think it's, it's possible that, cuz it's something that I asked about, too, and that might have been biasing. [Mel: Yeah.] Um, but let's, and then there's this, uh, take, take Chey.

32:35 Russ comments: As a general rule, I don't think it is necessary or desirable to confine what is credited to what is written in the participant's notes. The situation is somewhat different with Mel as a particular participant, because Mel has said in the past that she herself is reluctant to credit what she hasn't written. However, I don't think Julian introduced this enjoyment / satisfaction: Mel wrote in her notebook about the letters being deleted in her original notes, and Mel introduced (31:38) the enjoyment of watching these letters delete. So whereas I think it is always a good idea to be skeptical, particularly the farther into a sample, I did not have any particular skepticism here.

33:13 Mel: [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

33:14 JBK: This, this is, how do you spell Chey by the way? S, S-E-A or?

33:20 Mel: Yeah. No. C-H-E-Y.

33:26 JBK: S-C-H-E? S-C-H-E-Y?

33:28 Mel: No. No, no S. No S.

33:30 JBK: Ok. C-H-E-Y.

33:31 Mel: Just, just C-H-E-Y.

33:33 JBK: Okay. "Take Chey". So you're deleting to the first part of the sentence "Take Chey." [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And you said that, or, or this, and this is experiential to you, "take Chey"? And, and, and what's that like?

33:54 Mel: Um, um, like as a concept, again, I think. Um, I know that that's the phrase that I'd settled on (which, side note, feels like a really wonderful phrase after all that pondering, that's what you've come up with! [laughs]). Um, but, uh, it's experienced in the sense that it's a concept that was definitely in my head, but that's how I'm experiencing that phrase. Um, like it's not, yeah, there's no audio to it. It's not sort of unfolding one word and then the other. It's like, *take Chey* as a concept is, um, something that I'm clearly thinking. Um,

34:42 JBK: Okay. And the concept would be just more like, just *take Chey* or something like *take Chey is, is a good thing to write* or, because you mentioned having settled on it. Is that, is that at all part of your experience or is it really just more about *take Chey*.

- 35:05 Mel: No, I think this was just, yeah, it, there wasn't, um, an active element of me being like, *oh, okay. Yep, good. That's, that's the phrase we're gonna land on.* It was just, that's the, that's the new one. And I'm deleting, and I'm enjoying watching the letters delete, *knowing* that that's the phrase I'm gonna leave there.
- 35:32 JBK: Um, maybe, maybe I was too hasty with, um, [Mel laughs] not delving more into the, the enjoyment / satisfaction part. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, I mean, is there, is there more you could say to describe that? If, if it was there? And if it, if you're not sure, you can just say that.
- 35:32 Russ comments: This is a nounification and a cleaning up. Mel's original description (at 31:38) was "I'm really like sort of enjoying watching these letters." JBK has nounified the verb *enjoying* into the noun (object) *the enjoyment / satisfaction part*, and he has excised the *like sort of* qualifier. Both work against fidelity.
- 35:57 Mel: Um, all I feel like I wanna say is that it's subtle. Like that feels like a relevant description. Um, but it's, but I, I definitely think it's present, that there's a subtle, there's an undertone of satisfaction at watching these words just individually get deleted. Um,
- 36:21 JBK: Subtle undertone. Would you...?
- 36:23 Mel: Yeah. Like if I compare it to like, it how much space it's taking up in my awareness, it's low. The phrase *take Chey* is clearly the thing, the physical, the physicality of the touch of my thumb on the phone screen is definitely more present. But there's certainly an undertone and a lesser, y'know, percentage degree of that satisfaction also being experienced at the time, I think.
- 36:50 JBK: Okay. And undertone: would it, is it part of, kind of part of the visual element, or would you, would you say it's, it's, it's its own little thing? Or, or you're not sure?
- 36:50 Russ comments: This appears to be an attempt to withdraw from the nounification (see the comment at 35:32), but...
- 37:08 Mel: Um, I'm not quite sure what you mean as in like, directly linked to the vis-... Like, I don't get it.
- 37:18 JBK: Um, yeah, I don't, uh, I don't wanna describe this in a way that I'm imposing my own things. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But, but in that it could be a kind of separate feeling? [Mel: Uh huh.] Or it could just be, uh, a little part of the, the visual, watching the letters and not something separate from that, but just... part of how...?
- 37:42 Mel: Yeah, I think I know what you mean in terms of like, do I have this general undertone of satisfaction and that sort of feeling? Or is it directly linked to the visual action that I'm seeing? Yes, it's directly linked. Absolutely. Yeah.
- 37:58 JBK: Okay. Yeah. I don't wanna, I don't know if those two options, cuz there might be something in the middle [Mel: Sure] or it might be impossible [Mel: Okay] to make

that distinction too. Um, okay. And, and to be c- cuz I think at one time you said the visual was the most present, and then I think at another time you said Chey... Did, could you try to give percentages to like, to the visual watching versus the, the *take Chey* kind of thought?

38:30 RTH: So it seems to me that there are three possi, there are three possibilities. Thumb pressing.

38:36 JBK: Yeah. The thumb pressing and the, the satisfaction, or if you want to include the satisfaction with the visual.

38:36 Russ comments: ...but *satisfaction* remains a noun/object.

38:46 RTH: So I, I think that would be a mistake to try to separate those. So it seems to me, there are three things. There's the *take Chey*, there's the thumb pressing, and there's the letters disappearing satisfyingly.

38:46 Russ comments: Note that "letters disappearing satisfyingly" is one way of avoiding nounifying / objectifying satisfaction.

39:01 Mel: Mm-hmm.

39:03 Mel: Um, hmm. I just immediately feel like it's a bit tricky to do percentages here for some reason, which maybe feels like it's a fairly decent split and nothing is really standing out as, as a lot. I mean... I, I definitely [JBK: You also don't have to force percentages.] Yeah. No, I definitely think that that, um, the feeling of satisfaction is less present than... But then like the, a physical act of pressing my screen, like I know that's happening. It's part of my awareness, but it's not super part of it. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Like, I'm not distractedly aware of that. So, so, so the only thing I could probably say, and maybe this is contradicting myself, but is that the phrase *take Chey* and the satisfaction directly, like the, and the visual thing of watching the letters delete, feel very, feel more present than the physicality of touching my phone.

40:10 JBK: Mm-hmm.

40:10 Mel: That's probably all I could say.

40:14 JBK: Okay. Uh, I'm happy with this beep. Russ?

40:20 RTH: So what I, what I would say is that I think we might've gotten a quite different answer to those questions if we had asked the per- percentage question first. And, and the reason that I think that is that *I think* that Mel, out of the box, would have said that the *take Chey* was the more important part, but your questioning went on thinking as if that wasn't important at all. And, and so that I think is the questioning has elevated the possibility that the, that the some and the satisfaction and whatever is a bigger deal than it actually was in her experience.

- 41:04 JBK: Me. I, well I definitely didn't think it was an important, I thought it was, I thought it was an important element. I do think there's more detail I could have gotten out of it. I, I, maybe I asked questions and came to an understanding quickly on it. But...
- 41:22 RTH: Yeah, I think that, I think, I think we, for example, we never really decided whether *take Chey* had words involved, whether it was just a content thing without words.
- 41:33 JBK: To me, it seemed clear that they weren't those actual words.
- 41:36 RTH: But I don't think if you
- 41:37 JBK: Do you wanna ask more questions about that? Or the, um, that it was, that it was that thought that would be expressed with those words, but words weren't present, hearing weren't sequentially present. But yeah, maybe there's more to ask about it. So...
- 41:55 RTH: I think there is. So, but whether, whether it's too late to ask 'em, I dunno. I dunno. I'll ask 'em and we'll see what happens. So, so about the *take Chey* portion, and I understand that the *take Chey* portion was the first part of the sentence. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And that somehow the rest of the sentence wasn't present to me. But the *take Chey* portion was present to me at the moment of this beep. That this is, this is the result. Is so, is that right so far?
- 41:55 Russ comments: We have been talking about this sample for 11+ minutes, so there is good reason to be skeptical about any conclusion we might come down with about a distinction as subtle as concept-with-words vs. concept-without-words. But the discussion might be valuable from an iterative-training perspective.
- 42:22 Mel: Yes. As in the rest of the sentence is already gone from my brain. [RTH: Right.] So even though it, I was in the act of physically deleting those words, internally I had already deleted those words, I guess is a relevant thing. So I was already focused on *take Chey*.
- 42:42 RTH: So the question is (and that *is* how I understood it), so the question is, is *take Chey* present to you as *words*: "take Chey"? Or is it present as the *concept*? And the concept could be, well, the first, *it's the first part of the sentence*, or it's, or it's, I just, *I know what I'm talking about, so I don't need to have the words*, but...And, and, and I would like to say it, it has my question that I'm asking right now has nothing to do with whether these words are spoken or heard or whatever. The question is [Mel: Mm-hmm.] whether these words are directly present to you at the moment of the beep.
- 43:17 Mel: The words "take Chey" are directly present to me. Yep. [RTH: Alright.]
- 43:22 JBK: Okay. So you, you were right to follow up on that one.
- 43:30 Mel: Can you explain to me why that you think that then? Because to me, and this is *very* important, I don't feel like I just said anything different [laughs] to what I'd previously said. So what do you think you just said, like, learnt different.

- 43:45 RTH: So the answer to that question is, I *don't* think you said anything different from what you said at the beginning, but I think Julian *heard* that there were no words at the first part. And I think he, he heard that mistakenly, or assumed that or whatever. And that's a kind,
- 44:01 JBK: I was thinking of it more as that concept was present and the concept was described by those exact words. But, um, well, I guess that the words...hm, yeah for me it was more about the concept.
- 44:01 Russ comments: This is a good example of (a) why DES is difficult and (b) that it is not about the words. Mel's opening salvo is at 29:21 and JBK returns Mel to the *Take Chey* portion at 33:54. JBK's parsing of those turns as being an unworded concept is certainly a reasonable interpretation. In fact, I could accept that it is probably *the most reasonable* interpretation if you understand words as they are usually used. However, there are other *possible* interpretations. For example, phrases such as "very clear," "absolutely in my inner experience," and "definitely in my head" are the kinds of phrases that more easily attach to worded experience than to unworded concepts.
The art of DES is to keep what you *don't know* alive for as long as possible, until there is no longer grounds for not knowing.
- 44:15 Mel: But I still find that to be true, Julian. Like [Julian: Okay.] now this, this is where I get confused because of the way I experience words, I guess of like, but that is the concept. The, those words *are* the concept, but how I'm experiencing those words, I'm not really sure beyond, because they're just there. Like that, that, that this coming back to me struggling to not be able to grab at an audio or a visual element. So I'd find the distinction between the two, like whether the words were experienced or the con... Like how did you interpret that experience differently before, Julian? Or did you not in terms of when I was just saying like, I experienced it as a concept and then now I'm saying those words were present, but they're still not present in an audio-visual way. Like is there a difference in your understanding there?
- 45:21 JBK: Um, [pause] it's, it's hard to say here. Often in other samples there, it can be a bit clearer. Like if someone has a thought, I *need to go buy towels*, and just the concept is there. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Or if they have that thought with that concept in the words or somehow there, but not, um, not like directly innerly heard or anything. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Sometimes it can be a distinction. Here, since the concept *is about* words, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] it's *about* what you are writing, that might, might make it harder. Um, yeah. But I dunno for me... if it changes all that much or if it's a subtle change.
- 46:16 Mel: No, I sort of agree with you, Julian. I think it's confusing here because the concept is directly linked to words. So I sort of, I find that a bit satisfying. Cuz when you're saying like, oh, *go off and buy towels*, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] yo-, me experiencing that feels like how I would experience this, but this just happened to be very linked to actual vocabulary. So I sort of find that satisfying, that comparison.
- 46:43 JBK: Okay. Um,

- 46:48 Mel: Maybe I've just confused everyone.
- 46:50 JBK: [laughs]
- 46:52 RTH: Well, this recalls the conversation that, that Julian and I have had in writing [Mel: Mm-hmm] so that Mel may or may not have read it or not, but, uh, about what, whether there should be quotation marks around things. So the question is, in this particular sample, does *take Chey* deserve to be put into quotation marks? And uh, and I think the answer is yes, because I think the experience was about "take Chey," it was not about, well, the first part of the sentence is good, or the concept of we should take Chey and not Janice or whoever. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] (I don't, I dunno what that sentence means at all.) But, uh, but that, but that, but that it's the, it is the words "take Chey" that are experienced.
- 46:52 Russ comments: Listening back to this interview, I think RTH is expressing somewhat more confidence about the presence of words than is warranted. See the comment at 41:55.
- 47:48 Mel: Experienced. Yeah. I, it, for what my 2 cents are worth, I would feel like that this is a quotations, puh, experience. Like yeah, if you were gonna transcribe that, I would, I argue for the quotation for that one.
- 48:07 JBK: I also wonder, because of course we, we kind of think, oh, how am I gonna write this later to describe it? How am I gonna code this? But I think we shouldn't try to impose those things on *you*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Like, it might, like if for you the difference between concepts and words isn't clear, isn't useful, I think we should take that seriously. I mean, I guess it's not good form to talk about coding, but I think we've mentioned it before, this idea of unsymbolized thinking. [Mel: Mm-hmm]. Uh, I think we've talked about it, that there could be a thought, but no clear words to it. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, so, but yeah, so the, but I, I think these are questions for us to deal with later, y'know, how to, how to describe it or put codes to it, but,
- 48:07 Russ comments: For the record, the distinction that was in play for me was not about unsymbolized thinking. It was between what I have called *words present* vs. *cognitive recognition*.
- 49:00 Mel: Mm-hmm.
- 49:01 JBK: But maybe it, it shouldn't be forced now.
- 49:04 Mel: No, it's fine. I just sometimes find it necessarily not genuinely helpful in getting better at descriptions or anything, but sort of like... helpful to myself. [laughs]
- 49:17 JBK: Yeah.
- 49:21 RTH: The, the whole notion of whether words are present is an is, is an important deal. I think word words, words can be present in a whole lot of different ways, ranging from spoken down to, I have a hint of these, a hint of the meaning that's behind these

words, or something. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And it, and I don't think that it's, that it's a matter of that the, that these things can be either in this category or in this category or in this category, or in this category.

49:21 Russ comments: This discussion has been difficult both because the concept is itself worded (as JBK noted at 45:24) and because we didn't embark on this discussion until late in the sample interview. So some skepticism about what we have found is warranted.

49:53 Mel: Hmm.

49:58 RTH: But I'm ready to move on to number 4.

49:58
SAMPLE 9.4

NOTE: Julian and Russ had further discussion of this topic by email in the days and months following the interview. This discussion can be found below at the end of the interview in the section called "[SAMPLE 9.3 COMMENTARY ARISING AFTER THE INTERVIEW: ABOUT META-EXPERIENCE ETC.](#)"

DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

50:01 Mel: Yeah. Sorry. Um, this went off, uh, at 9:04 PM and I've written: "Two things were very present in my experience here. 1. I was scratching my chest and that sensation was very much in my awareness. And 2. I was staring at my laptop screen, really focused in on a number on an invoice."

50:29 RTH: One of those more powerful or present or whatever than the other?

50:34 Mel: If anything, slightly more the scratching. But they were both..

50:40 RTH: Slightly more: 60—40? [Mel: But they were both...] 70—30? 51—49?

50:46 Mel: Yeah like, uh, I was gonna immediately say 60—40, but maybe even slimmer than that.

50:52 RTH: Okay. Okay. So tell me about that, the dress, chest scratching. What, what is in your experience about that?

51:01 Mel: I was literally doing this. [scratches her chest] So I could feel, um, like, uh, there was a kind of itch and I was scratching it. [laughs] Um, and that felt, um, I could, I could feel the sharpness of my fingernails and, um, could feel that sensation very localized to that area that I was scratching. [pause] Um, uh, what I wanna say, but, and you can take me back to specifically this, but it, um, was interesting when I wrote this down that it felt, felt like, especially when so often I find that my inner experience is really locked on one particular thing. And often it's like very, um... whatever. But this felt very like, two distinct experiences that were, that were definitely actively part of my awareness at once, which was sort of interesting. Like, I was like super, like lent in and looking at this number. Um, and by looking that, looking at it, I sort of mean kind of like the pondering earlier of like definitely looking at a thing, not really, uh,

overanalyzing yet, but certainly actively looking or however we've described that previously, Russ. But at the same time, I'm equally as, experiencing equally as—invested's not the right word—but equally as experiencing this other, um, action. And those two things are like concurrent. Um, yeah.

52:50 RTH: Okay. So, so let's, I'm, I'm not quite done with the scratching portion. So let's, let's [Mel: Yes.] finish, finish that up. So is this a chest sensation or a scratching action? Is this a more, a *sensation* or an *action*? They're both going on, but as far as your experience is concerned?

52:50 Russ comments: It seemed a chest sensation at the beginning 51:01 ("I could feel the sharpness of my fingernails") but perhaps an action at the end of 51:01 ("experiencing this other, um, action").

53:10 Mel: *Both*.

53:14 RTH: And so this is a, a sensation in my chest and an action in my hand that are *both* present to me.

53:22 Mel: Yes. When you say...

53:23 JBK: Or a sensation in the hand could be a possibility.

53:26 Mel: Yeah. It's, um, a sensation in like my fingertips, and it's a sensation, um, like not *in* my chest, like *on* my chest, sort of, if that distinction is clear. Um, [RTH: Okay.] this feels very, uh, yeah, this is very different to the weightiness that I felt in my feet when I was hunched over my suitcase. That feels like a very sort of internal, y'know, not relevant to the tips of my toes or whatever. This is opposite to that. This feels very much an experience that's happening between the tips of my fingertips and I'm feeling it on that side of things. And it's kind of, uh, almost a bit tingly and a bit, um, coarse, um, on my chest side of things of like, I'm feeling the coarseness of my fingernails. Um, and the it all, this doesn't feel like a deep sensation. It's all very, whatever that word is...

54:24 RTH: Surface-y?

54:24 Mel: Yes. Surface-y. [laughs]

54:26 RTH: And, and, and so is this equally sensation, equally chesty sensation and fingertip sensation? And by, [Mel: I think so.] by fingertip sensation, I mean receiving through the fingers.

54:39 Mel: [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

54:40 RTH: And receiving through the chest corpuscles or whatever the, whatever those sensation organs... I don't care about the organelles that do the processing. But, but this is e- equally sensation.

- 54:55 Mel: Yeah. Like, I think so. Like maybe if anything a slight split towards the chest, but like that 60—40 sort of thing. I definitely am feeling it on this side as well. [holds up and wiggles her fingertips] That's, yeah, for sure.
- 55:06 RTH: Okay. And how, and how about the motion. Is the, is the doing of it. So is this something that is being [Mel: Not so much.] this is more being done to you than I'm doing it to myself? Obviously I am doing it to myself. It's,
- 55:06 Julian comments: As Mel explains, it's more about the sensation than the *doing of it* or the *it being done to*. So that distinction doesn't seem very useful to Mel. But Russ, your questioning doesn't force her to choose between these two options. I think because of your consistent stress that there could be other options, Mel can simply refocus on what's most relevant to her experience.
- Russ comments:
RE "because of your consistent stress that there could be other options"
I think that makes it too much about the words. I would say: "because you are genuinely devoted to getting her experience right (and have consistently conveyed that devotion by a wide variety of means including undermining your own understandings by presenting options)."
- 55:23 Mel: Yeah, that I don't think that the motion is super relevant. The sensation on, on chest and fingertip is more experienced, more present than the act of motioning my fingers. Yeah.
- 55:38 RTH: Then I'm happy with that portion. Julian, you wanna ask anything more about that before I move on to the...? [JBK: Um, I'm good on that too.] So then at the same time, and *almost* equally, but not quite, maybe, I'm, I'm, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] looking at a number on my laptop screen.
- 55:55 Mel: Mm-Hmm,
- 55:56 RTH: And tell me more about that.
- 56:00 Mel: Um, uh, I, it's very focused in on that number specifically. So it was a number on an invoice, but the rest of the invoice was not, it was barely even in my, like, line of vision, y'know, I was so locked in on this very specific small number. Um, and I, but there wasn't any like analysis associated with that yet. Like I was doing that thing of like actively looking, um, or like actively engaged in that number, but I wasn't going like, *oh, should that be higher or lower* or, or any sort of whatever. It was just honed in on that number at this point.
- 56:42 RTH: And by "number" I could hear two possibilities. One is a visual *sensation* of the number I'm looking at the, I'm, I'm seeing the sen-, seeing the *display* of the number. And the other is I'm focused on what that number, on the *semantics* of that number, I guess. If this is a, a number on an invoice that means the quantity or the price or whatever. So I wanna know whether this is a *visually receptive* experience or a *semantically processing* experience, or whether that distinction isn't relevant here.

- 56:42 Russ comments: RTH was not clear. The distinction he is trying to explore is between the number as a *seen* entity (its font, color, size, etc.—conveyed by pixels on the screen) and the number as a *numeric* entity (some number of dollars, or some quantity, etc.).
- 57:22 Mel: I'm still a little bit confused. Um... like are you trying to ask whether I'm looking at the numbers as an, like an entity in and of itself, or whether I'm associating meaning with that number? No?
- 57:46 RTH: Well, I think the answer to that, that might be yes, but the, [coughs] excuse me, I wanna know whether your interest is in the visual features of the number or in the [Mel: Mm-hmm] the...
- 57:59 Mel: Definition behind it.
- 58:01 RTH: ...invoice, invoice meaning of the number.
- 58:05 Mel: I, I don't think I've, um, had necessarily put that much effort into, um, I'm locked in at the numbers. Like, yeah, am I... Okay. Am I looking at them as, uh, visual elements on a screen that are just symbols that don't mean anything? No. Am I looking at a number as a totality that, y'know, is the same as looking at the word *cat*? I'm looking at the figure 487. That one. I'm doing that. I'm looking at these symbols on my screen that represent 487 and I'm thinking 487 as I look at it. But there's no more to that. I'm not thinking whether that's the right number or the wrong number in relation to the invoice or what it should or shouldn't. I'm just like actively taking in that number.
- 58:05 Russ comments: Mel has grasped the distinction RTH is interested in (see the comment at 56:42) and answers it as a numeric entity.
- 59:00 RTH: And is the number 487, is that the, is that the right number?
- 59:03 Mel: It, yeah it is, actually.
- 59:04 RTH: Close en-, close enough. Okay.
- 59:06 Mel: Yeah. 487 and 12 cents.
- 59:06 Julian comments: The "and 12 cents" got lost in the cross-talk. I didn't hear it at the time of the interview. Russ, you didn't hear it. I only heard it later when I was able to go back over the video and isolate Mel's specific audio tracks. So then do we take this part of the experience to be about 487.12? I think we should.
- Russ comments: (It is interesting how seemingly insignificant details highlight important aspects of DES.) Our task is to grasp Mel's experience with fidelity, and by *fidelity* we mean that the words we use to describe her experience rest lightly, point to important things, do not point at non-experiential things, cover the waterfront. Fidelity is about experience, *not* about the environment. I take the environment, the

number on the invoice, to be \$487.12. The question is whether her *experience* is of 487 or of \$487.12. I think we don't know for sure. If I had heard her say "and 12 cents" I would probably have introduced an important line of questioning, because in other mentions, her saying of "487" was inflected very matter-of-factly (in what seemed an uncontroversial tone, a straightforwardly affirmative reply to "is the number 487?" By very large contrast, "and 12 cents" is said staccato, while leaning into the camera. My antennae now jangle that there is (or at least may be) *something* behind that tone shift, but whether it is *this is what the invoice says, but I don't really care; or my experience is really of \$487.12 and I have just been saying 487 to make things easy; or I have a stomach cramp; or whatever.*

If I had to bet, I would bet that her experience was of 487, *not* of \$487.12, because 487 is the most natural sounding and repeated utterance to my ear. But DES is not about betting, so we have to leave it unknown.

So in a description, should we use 487 or \$487.12? I'd say 487, because \$487.12 suggests a level of specificity that for sure we didn't establish in the interview.

Perhaps more importantly, I think it doesn't much matter. We established a sensation in the chest and a sensation in the fingertips and not making of the motion of the fingers; and we established a grasping of the number 487 (or, alternatively, \$487.12) without an explicit processing of the meaning of that number. Does it matter whether the number is 487 or \$487.12? Probably not much.

RE "I only heard it later when I was able to go back over the video and isolate Mel's specific audio tracks."

This example illustrates an important and basic fact about communication: Russ (Julian, too) doesn't hear what Mel says. Sometimes (as here) that is the result of crosstalk; sometimes it is the result of presupposition; sometimes it is the result of fatigue or other inattention; sometimes.... It always should be understood that what is sent is not always received.

- 59:07 RTH: So that, so that does, that makes the question, question easier to answer. So I see 487 as a number, not 487 as an arrangement of pixels on the screen or [Mel: Mm-hmm] a colorful display or a, or, or whatever.
- 59:07 Russ comments: RTH misspoke, saying "that makes the question, question easier to *answer*" when he intended "easier to *ask*."
- 59:22 Mel: Yeah, no, it was specifically 487 in my awareness. Yep.
- 59:29 RTH: And is 487 in your awareness in any way other than I see it on the screen and I'm pondering it? [Mel: No.] Am I *saying* 487? *Hearing* 487? *Somehow having* the words "four hundred eighty seven" present to me?
- 59:47 Mel: No, I, I don't even think it's a concept in my head. I'm literally just looking at the visual cue and registering the visual cue.
- 59:56 RTH: Okay. And, and you used the word "pondering." Is there, is there a pondering going on or is this even before the pondering? [Mel: Yeah...] This is a, I'm zeroed in on, so I'm

really asking for how, how, how is this the same or different from the pondering in the first, second, second beep?

- 1:00:22 Mel: Good question. Good question. Because now I'm also thinking about that. Um, I think it's probably pretty similar, to be honest, because it's at that bit before it's, um, linked to more thought. So I'm honed in looking at this thing. I'm *actively* looking at it in a similar way to the earlier beep, um, where it's not a passive experience. Like I'm, I'm so honed in on this. But there's nothing else to grab at yet. So I, I actually think they're quite similar.
- 1:01:02 RTH: Okay. Then I think I'm good.
- 1:01:07 JBK: So it's a, it's a active experience. And before you mentioned like leaning in focusing. Is, is that part of the experience or at this moment, is it more just about the number?
- 1:01:22 Mel: This definitely just about the number. I think that I've said that more in a context way. Like, so I, [JBK: Okay] to provide context, I'm like hunched over like this, definitely looking at the screen. [JBK: Okay.] But, but I've got sort of aside from the other 50% or whatever that's focused on the scratching, this one is just real blinkers on about the number. [JBK: Okay.] So the shape of my body is not super in my awareness, I don't think.
- 1:01:47 JBK: Okay, yeah. And it's, it's registered as a number, as 487, but there's no separate thinking if it's high or low or whatever. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] It's not just seeing it, it's also registered.
- 1:02:02 Mel: Mm-hmm. It's like actively engaged with the number before then it's analyzed, I suppose.
- 1:02:11 JBK: And, um, [pause] is it part of a process? I don't quite know how to ask this. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Is, is, is it part of like a pro- turning focus about to do something with it, or hard to say, can't say?
- 1:02:40 Mel: Yeah. I mean like from a context perspective, I was definitely looking at the number, trying to work out if the, like I was about to work out if that number was correct, but I wasn't doing that yet.
- 1:02:54 JBK: So you're not doing that yet, and, and no part of that is experiential. So like you, we can deduce that you were *about* to do something with it. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But it's not like you were experientially gearing up to do something with it, or...?
- 1:03:09 Mel: Mm, yeah, I don't think so yet. No. I would, this is just very much like looking, um, [JBK: Okay.] In a, in an engaged way though, but yeah, not, it was before that moment.
- 1:03:21 JBK: Okay. Okay then, then I'm good on this one.

1:03:25 RTH: Me too. So we've been at this for an hour. Do we have the time / energy / inclination to keep going or...?

1:03:35 Mel: I only have one beep left anyway.

1:03:38 JBK: For me, yes. It's up to, up to Mel, I think.

1:03:42 Mel: Yeah, we can do one more if you like.

1:03:44 RTH: Alright, let's do it.

SAMPLE 9.5 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

1:03:45 Mel: So this went off like two minutes later. There are too many short moments. That's why I think the beeper's wrong. Um, 9:06. I've written, "I had essentially just finished writing the above description. Nothing much was happening inside my brain. My legs were crossed and there was a tingling in my feet because I suspect they'd been under my pressure too long and they were asleep a bit. And that sensation was very much in my awareness."

1:04:13 JBK: So what is this tingling sensation like?

1:04:17 Mel: Hmm. Um, it's hard. [pause] Um, it's like (oof I'm rolling my eyes at even lobbing up this word), but like a *weightlessness* as opposed to a, the *weightiness* of earlier stuff. Um, like it, (I'm actually sitting like it right now), but when you have your legs crossed and you've had them crossed for a while and you've sort of been putting pressure down on your feet, um, they're sort of tingling and sort of have a weightlessness. So it's this, it's experienced in a similar way to when my feet felt really heavy when I'm standing on them in terms of, there's a very clear, uh, focus of awareness, focus of sensation in the areas of my feet. [JBK Mm-hmm.] Um, but it's sort of tingly and sort of weightless tingliness. It's not heaviness, but as a, um, an awareness of the lo... I dunno.

1:05:31 JBK: So a weightless kind of tingliness. And, and,

1:05:34 RTH: And can I, can I ask one question before I get too, too deep into this? So I'm, I think I missed the beginning of what we said about this sample. What, is, is this sample experientially just the tingling? Is that the, was everything else context? And

1:05:51 Mel: Pretty much.

1:05:54 RTH: Okay. Then proceed.

1:05:55 Mel: Because, but also for context there, I think, um, it's a little bit fraught with danger because I feel like I was probably a bit startled by the beep because I'd just finished writing my description of the previous beep. So that's why I, when this one went off, I, like, the first thing I wrote was "I'd just finished writing the above." So I don't feel like there was really any, I guess probably I was trying to say like I was, that's super meta

for me. Like, I was like, well, I just finished writing down what was happening last time and now I'm being asked to write about what was happening at that point. But, so I think I was a bit startled in terms of m- much else to analyze or articulate other than this physical sensation. Because I think that, that anything else probably would felt a bit confusing and overwhelming maybe.

- 1:06:52 RTH: And was the physical sensation present, do you think, uh, as ongoing before the beep *in your experience*? Whatever physical's going on in your foot is no doubt that that was going on before—the lack of blood flow or whatever that uh, obviously it's been going on for a while. But the question is, is the, are you experiencing this tingling which is interrupted by the beep?
- 1:07:18 Mel: Yes. Because it's even happening now. So yes, [laughs] [RTH: Okay.]
- 1:07:25 JBK: So there may, because I think you said before, there's not much going on mentally, and, and now you said there, there may have been all these other things and, and kind of still lingering stuff from having written it before, but the beep makes it so you don't know, or you're, you're not sure. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, So I guess ...
- 1:07:47 Mel: I guess when I say not much going on, I think, I mean, like, I was ve- very, like from a mental perspective, it was probably a bit autopilot-y. Like, y'know, I was A to B-ing, doing a thing, the beep went off, I was just interrupted sort of doing that. So I, yeah, there wasn't anything beyond, um, like mentally completing that task.
- 1:08:13 JBK: Okay. So, yeah, I guess we should look more at the tingling. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, and then for, for the other stuff, it might be hard because since you said the beep startled you [Mel: Mm] it might be hard to, to get to the, the rest of it. Um, so I,
- 1:08:31 RTH: I think what I would, what I would say about that is that I just got a message saying that my people were gonna be here fairly soon, so I need to finish this off. And what, so what, what, what I think we're gonna get is that this beep was primarily about the tingling and as a sensation. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And then the question, you agree with that, Julian?
- 1:08:52 JBK: Um, I still don't know what it, I still would like to go more into it, this weightlessness or the use of the word *weightlessness*. I mean, it's, it's, I still would like to know more about it, if
- 1:09:04 RTH: Okay. Go for it.
- 1:09:06 JBK: Um, or if you have to, if you have to go let people into the house or explain things, maybe me and Mel could finish this off. [RTH: Well.] Um, so should we go ahead. [RTH: Yeah I say go for it.] So, um, so the, so your legs are crossed at this moment? Or [Mel: Yeah.] they had been crossed and were? Okay. They're crossed now. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, and that there's a tingling weightlessness. Could you, could you just describe that a bit more? Or if it's even possible before I, I try to follow up on, on it? Or is it...

1:09:45 Mel: Very hard to describe. [Laughs.] Um,

1:09:55 JBK: Is it, first of all, is it both feet or one of the feet?

1:09:58 Mel: Both feet. It's helpful for you now that I'm sitting in exactly the same position and I can feel exactly the same thing, so I'm trying to describe it. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Um,

1:10:08 JBK: I still think you should try or, or just not presume that it's exactly the same, and try to go off of the first, the first one, if that's possible for you to say.

1:10:18 Mel: Well, it's not possible. That's well beyond my recollection capability. [laughs]

1:10:23 JBK: Okay. Um, so it's both feet. Are they both equally, equally strong in terms of the sensation?

1:10:33 Mel: Yeah. I don't, I don't recall thinking that one was more severe or intense than the other.

1:10:42 JBK: Is it more surface-y or more in depth or the whole foot, or a specific region or hard to say.

1:10:50 Mel: Um, it's not surface-y. No, it's the opposite to that. Yeah. It's, it's the whole foot region. Um, and it's, um, yeah, a, a, a tingly, I dunno how else to describe that, but my foot sort of feels like that. And it feels sort of, yeah, weightless in the sense that it feels tingly, but therefore like the, um, the edges of my feet or whatever feel like it would probably be really hard to define like this, this general sensation sort of spreads out into the area rather than like a clearly defined like, oh, that's around my foot. It's just like those, that area becomes tingly.

1:11:41 JBK: Mm. So the edges would be hard to define. So it's in your foot, but it, it makes it so maybe even your foot is, isn't the container for the sensation, but it kinda like a fuzziness even *around* the foot?

1:11:56 Mel: *Fuzziness* is a nice word. Yeah. I would also say that. Yep. Um, yes to what you just said.

1:11:56 Russ comments: In his description of this sample, Julian wrote "She feels a tingling sensation in her feet. (The sensation extends even a bit past them, as if the borders of her feet aren't clear....)" To my sensitivities, that sentence is more definitive than is warranted. The sentence might be correct, but that still doesn't make it warranted. In the I'm-no-mind-reader department, my impression (rightly or wrongly) was that during Mel's 1:10:50 turn, Julian recalled the sensation-might-be-outside-the-body possibility that we have discussed previously (see the comments at 31:05 in the transcript for interview 7). Indeed, what Mel said suggested that possibility. However, I think Mel's suggestion of that possibility was fairly substantially hedged (including "it's not possible [to recall]. That's well beyond my recollection capability" at 1:10:18), so, I think, Julian's 1:11:41 turn is more confident that is deserved. My sense (and here I recognize that I am skating onto the thin ice of reading between the

lines, so I happily acknowledge that I might be mistaken) is that arising in Julian is a version of *Aha! That's outside her foot! I'm smart for noticing that*. I'm no mind reader, and if I am mistaken about that, I hope Julian will forgive me. But if I am in the ballpark of right about it, then I hope that Julian will come to recognize the early warning signs that portend that sense arising in him, and become able to recognize that arising earlier and earlier, because (as I said in my comment at 9:09) *I'm smart!* arises as the outer skin of a delusion. To the extent that one's interest is genuinely in fidelity, *I'm smart!* is *always* a delusion. *I'm smart!* means *I have put it in the right category!* But there is no real category—to believe so is to be too much about the words.

My original sniff of delusion came from Julian's too-confident response. But in addition, the heart of JBK's 1:11:41 question is the *even around the foot* part. However, Mel's 1:11:56 response is to assent to the fuzziness, a portion of JBK's 1:11:41 question that was *not* at the heart of the question. That is, JBK's question was "You're saying x and **Y**, right?" and Mel's response is "Yes. x is a good word." I think such responses generally (or maybe just often) are (or are partially) denials of **Y**. So to my ear, there are several hints that presuppositions are in the vicinity. That doesn't make me right—I'm not a mind-reader either of Julian or of Mel—so I accept that I may be wrong about all aspects of this comment. (See the related comment at 1:35.)

In short, I am not claiming to be correct about this comment. I am suggesting the possibility that there might be some value in exploring it, with the acute recognition that I might be on the wrong track and cause some unnecessary consternation. But the moral to the story is that when the presentiment of *I'm smart!* or *I'm right!* arises, that is the time to be *extra* cautious, to drag one's feet extra hard, to work in whatever way possible to genuinely cultivate the preference for being *refuted* rather than confirmed. That is where fidelity begins. Fidelity exists when you know that sensation can be experienced either inside the body or outside it, and know the thousand or so other possible distinctions might be made, and you are genuinely indifferent to which side of the distinction happens to apply in any particular case. But until you reach that level of genuineness, then you have to be alert for your personal carings and work against them.

Here, it would have been desirable to lead Mel (and Julian!) slightly in the opposite direction; for example, JBK could have asked whether the tingling was in the soles of her feet or the tops or elsewhere (leaving the external to her feet as part of the open "elsewhere" but not explicitly suggesting it). In that case, had Mel said, "it's not really confined to my feet," then we would have had some solid evidence.

One might worry that by not suggesting the exterior-to-the-feet possibility, we might have missed it. Yes, we might have. *Then*, after we have given her the free opportunity, we could have said something about the possibility of sensation being outside the body *as part of the iterative process*; next time, if it occurs, she will have learned something.

One might ask, but what if it occurs only once? Then we missed it. Oh well. But it occurred only once. (There is a similar comment at 9:09.)

In short: If you're right, you're wrong. The object of DES is *not* to be right. The object is to help *Mel become* a better and better describer of her experience.

Julian comments: Before I read Russ's previous comment, he emailed me with a diary assignment. It was the same as the assignment at 9:09 except about the passage from 1:10:23 to 1:12:03. In brief: watch the passage and reconstruct what went through your mind. Russ also said, "I'm mixed about whether I should mention this now, given that quite a lot of water has passed over the dam, but I do so on the possibility that it might be useful. Don't spend too much time on it..."

Here's my reply:

We can discuss this, but I do think it's too late to do a play-by-play reconstruction of my thought process.

I was trying to find out about this tingly sensation. My main operating premise was: well, I know what it's like when my foot falls asleep but is it the same for Mel?

I was trying to ask specific questions—skin-y or more deep. And so on.

There may be a part where I was caught in a red herring and maybe that's why you suggested the exercise.

Mel at 1:11:17: "Yeah, weightless in the sense that it feels tingly, but therefore like the, um the edges of my feet or whatever feel like it would probably be really hard to define like this, this general sensation sort of spreads out into the area rather than like a clearly defined like, oh, that's around my foot. It's just like those that area becomes tingly."

I may have misinterpreted that. There are a couple ways it could be interpreted:

- a) It's not a clearly defined area, it's not like it stops right where the foot meets the ankle.
- b) It's not clearly defined. Yes, my foot is fuzzy-feeling but it's not in a clear shape.
- c) It's not clear and defined. It's fuzzy, not even contained to the edges of my feet, extending beyond that.

I ended up asking about c) and putting it in my description. We've also had some other conversations on other days where I mentioned that feelings and sensations could extend beyond the body. Or even where I thought RTH's questioning was too limited and didn't allow this possibility.

But was there a thought in my head: *oh, this will show Russ, feelings CAN extend the body?*

I don't think so. And if there was, I don't remember it.

BUT, do I think options a) and b) are more likely? I'd actually lean more on that side. I think I did over-articulate in my written sample where I talked about the feeling extending beyond the foot. I did ask Mel about this, I think trying to be skeptical (probably not foot-draggy enough, but my "around" at 1:11:56 sounds somewhat skeptical). She answered Yes but more about the fuzziness. Which could mean that part was close to her experience but the rest didn't resonate.

Going back over the transcript I was also wondering if I over-articulated this. Not sure why I didn't change it. Maybe I wasn't sure either way so I let inertia win, and

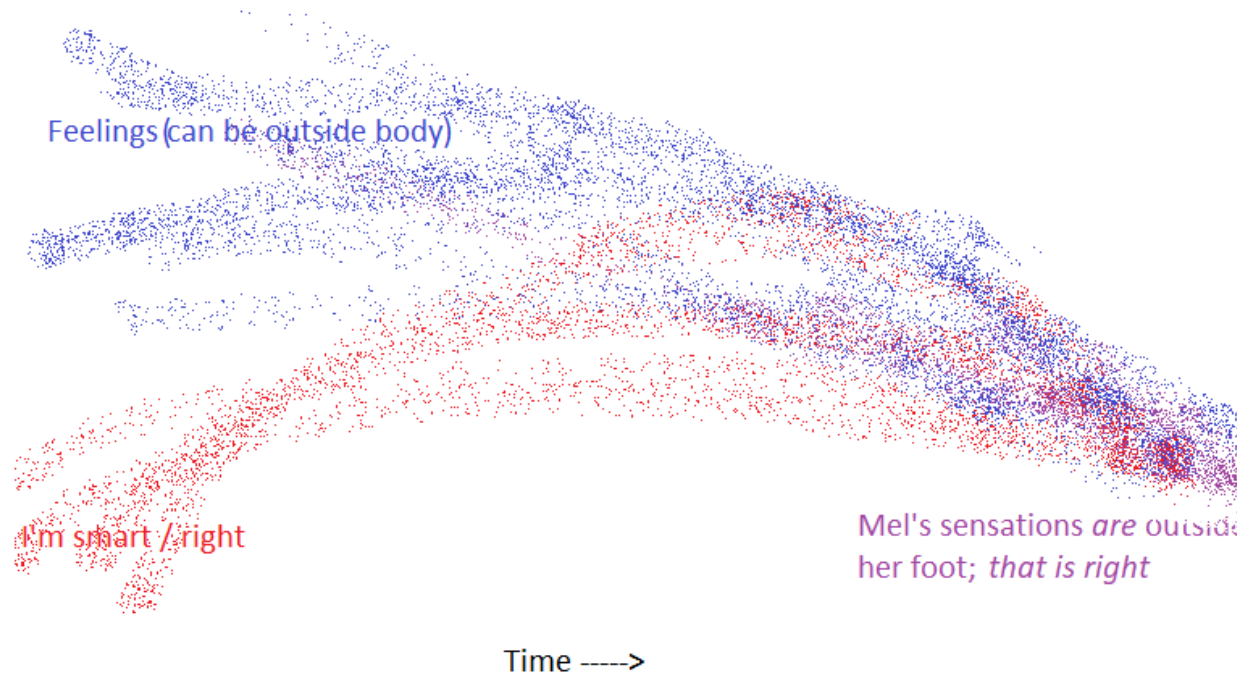
the sample description stay as it is. But I'm happy to go with a less over-articulating, more foot-draggy version for this description.

After reading your comment above, I anticipated many of your points. I went too fast into the extending beyond the feet. I wasn't able to remember if I had a *I am right* or *I am smart* kind of experience but it's possible. Your suggestions for how the interviewing could have been more careful are very helpful.

Russ comments:

RE "But was there a thought in my head: *oh, this will show Russ, feelings CAN extend the body?*

Presuppositions are delusions, and they do *not* appear as thoughts in your head. Here's a schematic of what I am trying to convey, presuming that I am at least partially right about this (I am not presuming this to be true; just using it as a concrete way of conveying what might happen):



In blue is the actual situation. Feelings / sensations occur in Mel. I indicate them as dots: muscle tensions, tear duct secretions, vocal potentials, and so on. Together some pattern of these micro processes can be recognized as a feeling, more or less like independent birds can together be said to be a flock. Some aspects of that pattern can indeed be outside the body.

In red is Julian's desire to be smart, to show Russ. Julian will hide that from himself, for whatever self-serving reasons. And it's not a conscious, logical process; it is the postural changes when I'm right; it is the adrenal glands doing their thing; it's the focusing of attention; and so on. I schematize that with all the dots, more or less independent micro processes that together can be said to be *I'm smart / right*, more or less like independent birds that together can be said to be a flock.

In the middle times, Mel says something that might indicate that she had sensations outside the body. The DES task is to try to help Mel discover whether hers speaking is clear, or wrong, or ambiguous, or clouded by her own presuppositions or lack of experience in describing her experience, or her trying to be a nice guy, or whatever.

In the middle times, some of Julian's micro smart processes latch onto some of Mel's ambiguities, and Mel's nice-guy tendencies amplify those latchings, and that amplifies Julian's micro smart processes, and so on, until, at the right side of the schematic, it seems to both Mel and Julian that the ambiguities have been resolved and everything is coordinated.

This process all takes place without any explicit noticing, no *oh, this will show Russ, feelings CAN extend the body*. But that doesn't mean that the process doesn't exist.

So when I wrote above, "I hope that Julian will come to recognize the early warning signs that portend that sense arising in him," I had in mind his heightening his sensitivity to the middle times in the schematic, when the ambiguities begin to overlap; to develop a taste for recognizing that possibility earlier and earlier in the process, and for developing the foot-dragging skills earlier and earlier.

I re-emphasize: in this I am *not* presuming that my diagnosis of *I'm smart* is correct; I use it as an example of how I think the process occurs and what can be done about it.

1:12:03 JBK: Okay. Um, is it a tingly pinprick? Is this a blood, like a foot-falling-asleep kind of sensation? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] or is it

1:12:16 JBK: Foot falling asleep. Although even that presumes, we have similar sensations for that.

1:12:20 Mel: It does. I know. [laughs]

1:12:23 JBK: Maybe not.

1:12:23 Mel: It's not, um, it's not painful. It's not pleasurable, though. And it's not like pin-pricky, uh,

1:12:34 JBK: Okay. And, and the weightlessness. Um, I'm curious, Russ, do you have more questions about this?

1:12:48 RTH: No, I'm, I'm good, but I'm, I am running outta time here. So Mel, we got a beeper issue. You and I need to figure out how, when we're gonna talk about that.

1:12:48 Russ comments: If I had time and inclination, I would perhaps have tried to undo what I took to be a too-much-about-the-word *weightlessness*. JBK's use of the word in 1:12:34 is about weightlessness as a stand-alone thing or process or experience, whereas Mel's use of weightless is always or almost always qualified or comparative.

For example, her first use is at 1:04:17 is "lobbing up this word, but like a weightlessness *as opposed to a*, the weightiness of earlier stuff." That is, or at least might be, not about weightlessness itself, but rather weightlessness as *a contrast*.

Those are (or at least might be) very different things, rather like the difference between “light” and “lighter.”

All her other uses of weightlessness are connected to tingliness: “tingling and sort of have a weightlessness” (1:04:17); “it’s sort of tingly and sort of weightless tingliness” (1:04:17); “weightless in the sense that it feels tingly” (1:10:50).

So JBK’s question (“And, and the weightlessness”) is, to my ear, too much about weightlessness as its own thing. If I had had the time, whether I would have thought it worth the effort (or possibility) at this point in the interview to extricate those possibilities is another matter.

1:12:59 Mel: Yep.

1:12:59 RTH: So when, when can we, when can we talk about.

ANSWERS TO EXERCISES FOR THE READER

19:14 DON’T READ THIS UNLESS YOU HAVE SEEN EXERCISE FOR THE READER (2) at 29:19.

Restating Exercise for the reader (1) [from 19:14]:

Is Russ’s characterization on the mark, or does it miss something important?

Russ’s answer: It seems pretty faithful to me.

Restating Exercise for the reader (2) [from 29:19]:

If your answer to Exercise (1) is, broadly speaking, that Russ’s characterization is pretty faithful to Mel’s experience, then go back and read Julian’s comment at 19:14. In diary fashion (that is, as a private message to yourself), write down your reactions as you read it. (Really! Write it down! It’s not good enough to pretend.)

Russ’s answer: This comment is in the *it’s not about the words* department.

My understanding of Julian’s comment at 19:14 is: (A) Mel was *definitely* active; (B) the active/passive distinction is problematic; but (C) it was *clear* that Mel *was* active. I don’t think you can take (B) seriously and still be confident about (A) and (C). The problem, as I diagnose it, is that (A), (B), and (C) are all caught up on trying to distinguish and believing in the possibility and desirability of distinguishing between the words *active* and *passive*. All three positions make the words into spring-loaded traps: we edge a little bit in the direction of action and *Whap!!* we’re in the *active* trap.

I think Julian’s 19:14 comment does not do Mel justice. It is driven by someone’s (probably Julian’s) theory, not by the desire to be faithful to Mel’s experience.

RE “To Mel this was *definitely* active.”

To my ear, *Julian* forces it to be either active or passive; *Whap!!* Julian chooses active. *Mel* is in the mode of I don't know, maybe a bit more active than passive, but I'm not really sure about that distinction.

RE "But I think it may be impossible to pin down any one thing that is meant by an active/passive distinction."

I agree! So don't try to pin it down!

RE "I don't think it's an empty question to ask. Mel here was clear that her pondering was active."

I agree that it is not an empty question—it was a quite useful question. But the utility of a question does *not* depend on there being a clear answer.

The moral here, and it is an important moral, is that words are useful grunts, gestures that say, with a limited range of convenience, look here! There is something to see here! But it is *not* about the word itself; it is about the encouragement to look.

Julian's Answer to Exercise 1: Your characterization seems right to me. She means active as in—well, it's more than nothing, more than waiting. I originally wondered if I missed something since you twice inserted the term active. "Pondering" became "active-featureless-pondering". I wondered if I had presuppositions. To me Mel's experience didn't seem *so* active, but maybe I was imposing my vision of what active meant. Anyways, yes I think you were on the ball with your characterization.

Julian's Answer to Exercise 2: I'll put my original notes in italics, and then under them deciphering what was going through my head leading to writing them.

To Mel—am I pinning it on her.

Strikes me as: I don't see it as that active

[My original comment was eventually about taking Mel seriously that it was active. But re-reading this, it seemed like I was doubting her. I start with "To Mel this was *definitely* active." I'm pinning it on Mel rather than committing to my version.]

Theorists, whatever

Blah blah

[Even though I was saying we should move past theorists, I was still spending too much time writing about them. So I just skimmed through the rest of this section.]

Mel was clear

We should take seriously. Should we?

[Of course we should take Mel seriously. But not in the way I meant when I wrote: "Mel here was clear that her pondering was active. And we should take this seriously." We don't have to reify every word she says. As you say Russ, these are "grunts" in some direction. To take her seriously is to go past this to get at her experience.

Distinction as a tool

[I was reading through: "Rather than using Mel's descriptions to pin down some shared universal definition of passive/active, rather we can use that distinction as a

tool to try to gain access to Mel's experience." This seemed right enough to jot down the main point. When we ask active vs. passive, we shouldn't want an answer. But maybe we can find out something about Mel.

Presuppositions? When is it a presupposition? Ah hah

[I was reacting to: "It did help me understand her experience and get past some presuppositions." When I first wrote the sample descriptions, the experience didn't seem so active. Then RTH made *active* a much more prominent part of the descriptions, so I reconsidered. I wondered if I had presuppositions about what *active* meant. But then maybe I overcorrected and made it too much about *active*. This comment was about the battle to get over presuppositions. How to tell if something is actually a presupposition or if my original instincts are right? There's no way. Or no easy way. So I guess that's the conflict of DES.

Or maybe an answer is that contact with experience itself abrades presuppositions. But there's no way to work out just in your head whether something's a presupposition or not.

Waiting didn't do justice.

[I'd originally written something along these lines and it seemed right. To Mel, the experience was more than just waiting for something to come.]

Ok, still too lost in theory.

[In general, about my comment. There was a lot in my comment that seemed unnecessary. But two parts did strike me as right enough to jot down. *Distinction as a tool* and *waiting didn't do justice*. So my end message is I shouldn't try to work out an answer to the active / passive question. It's just a tool that *may* be able to let Mel talk about her experience. And one thing she did say was that it was more than nothing and that it was more than just waiting. So rather than answer if it's active or passive, those are some concrete things we can say about her experience. And that's pretty much what you wrote in your characterization, Russ.]

Russ comments:

RE "But there's no way to work out just in your head whether something's a presupposition or not."

I totally agree that there is no way to work out whether something is a presupposition. But here are hints:

(a) The stronger you feel that it is *not* a presupposition, the more likely that it *is* a presupposition. Here's why: The only entity that knows for certain whether something is a presupposition is the omniscient being; the more confident you are about something, the more you are arrogating to yourself the abilities / judgments that are reserved for the omniscient being. We mortals cannot know anything for certain. I'm no biblical scholar, but that is my interpretation of Genesis 2:17: "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Presupposition (aka delusion) seems to me to be the belief that you have within yourself the knowledge of good and evil. So it seems to me that one can come to recognize the feeling of certainty as a sign that delusion (presupposition) lurks nearby.

(b) [a corollary of (a)]. The stronger you feel that you are right, the more likely that delusion (presupposition) lurks nearby.

(c) [a corollary of (a)]. The stronger you think that someone else is wrong, the more likely that delusion (presupposition) lurks nearby.

(d) I think it is possible to develop a taste for recognizing the early signs of delusion (e.g., recognizing, in the middle time of the schematic above, the early signs of the personalized reduction of ambiguity, and, with practice, moving earlier and earlier the recognition time). That is what I meant by “I suggest that you bottle that feeling so that you can recognize it when it arises” in the *Email exchanges in the course of writing the descriptions of these samples* section at the end of the Interview 8 transcript.

(e) If you can find someone you trust who has your best interests at heart and who has different sensitivities from yours, take them seriously over the long haul.

(f) Cultivate different channels from your main channel.

SAMPLE 9.2 COMMENTARY ARISING AFTER THE INTERVIEW: ABOUT FEATURELESS VS. CONTENTLESS

Julian comments: I wonder, Russ, why you would describe Mel’s pondering as “featureless” (in sample 9.2) but you were resistant to describing samples where Mel was carried away by the movie as “content-free” (see, e.g., samples 8.2, 8.3, and 8.4 (*Saltburn* scenes), and “EMAIL EXCHANGES IN THE COURSE OF WRITING THE DESCRIPTIONS OF THESE SAMPLES” at the end of Transcript 8).

Russ comments:

RE “I wonder, Russ, why you would describe Mel’s pondering as ‘featureless’... but you were resistant to describing samples where Mel was carried away by the movie as ‘content-free’.”

Russ thinks that the movie scene was directly apprehended at those samples, and therefore the movie scene was the content. See the top panel of the schematic below. Mel’s experience was not at all content-free—she was carried along by the two characters’ conversation [or whatever the scene was—I just nabbed a screen shot as if that were the scene Mel was watching]. What was free about that experience was that Mel had *not* particularly focused on the guy’s bow-tie, or on the gold of the dome, or his hair, or etc. I think those things contributed to the particular way in which Mel was carried along, even though none of them was particularized in Mel’s experience.

In sample 9.2 (the featureless pondering sample), Mel is pondering something (the next sentence to write) that is not at all directly apprehended (see the bottom panel). The pondering deserves to be called featureless because other than the inchoate sense of actively considering something—the something has no features—no hint of a sentence, no words or partial words, no other features.

Context: Mel is watching a movie (sample 8.2)



Context: Mel is pondering what to write next (sample 9.2)



Some vague sense of active considering / pondering / contemplating

That is, I think Mel's carried-along-by-the-movie experience is hugely different from her considering-what-to-write-next experience, even though sets of words such as *nothing particular is present* can be fairly said to apply to both. That's why DES is not about the words.

Note that I am not claiming that Mel's visual experience was of exactly what appeared on the screen. Her experience may have been something like this:



Or like this:

Or like any of thousands of other ways that the screen could be experienced. The point is that at the moment of the beep Mel was not directly apprehending any particular aspect of the movie scene, but she *was* being carried along by the movie, which means she did not apprehend herself as particularizing any particular aspect of the movie.



Julian comments:

I am unsure about this. I think it's possible that Mel was experiencing the movie in this way. Another possibility was that her experience watching the movie was in no way colored by what was happening in the movie at that particular time. I don't think we adequately investigated the difference yet.

I'm well aware that Mel's experience during the samples in question isn't focused on a bowtie or the dome or curly hair or whatever. My question goes to if anything about the movie during these samples enters into experience. Does some plot occurrence—one character's growing infatuation with another, for instance—at all color Mel's experience? I don't think we've answered this yet.

When Mel says that two samples are indistinguishable to her,

- a) does she mean: "the two samples are the same to me. I'm completely absorbed in the movie. Just, each sample comes at different points in the movie. So in one, I'm completely absorbed during one scene, and this takes on certain contours of what's going on and that scene. In another, I'm completely absorbed in this second scene, and this has some flavor of what's going on in that scene."
- b) Or does she mean: "the two samples are the same to me. I'm absorbed in the movie. There is no difference that I can tell between the two. Nothing happening on screen leads to any discernable difference. Nothing about what's happening at those times with the plot leads to any differences in texture of experience, as far as I can tell."

There are other options too. (b) could mean there was no difference (or extremely slight differences). (b) could mean that there were larger differences, but Mel couldn't apprehend them.

It's also possible that the distinction between (a) and (b) isn't useful for describing Mel's experience and doesn't apply here. I'm still open to that but don't think we've adequately investigated yet.

Russ comments:

RE "I wonder, Russ, why you would describe Mel's pondering as 'featureless'... but you were resistant to describing samples where Mel was carried away by the movie as 'content-free'."

Yesterday, I wrote my previous comment in response to that (printed in green immediately preceding here). Today, having slept on it, I don't like what I said. So let me try again. Today I think that Julian's wondering is the result of too-much-about-the-words. (I emphasize that I am not being personally critical of Julian; I think most of philosophy and psychology is too much about the words.)

RE "When Mel says that two samples are indistinguishable to her, does she mean..."

I'm going to give a little lecture about words, which is, as I have said before, a bit ironic when my aim is to undermine your too-much-about-words. That said...

As far as I can tell, Mel has *never* said that two samples are *indistinguishable*. She has frequently said that two samples are *the same*. *Indistinguishable* is Julian's word, not Mel's. So what? *The same*, as Mel and most other people use the term, is a grunt in the service of a *description*. *Indistinguishable*, is an attempt at *theory*. I think Julian does not keep description and theory adequately separate, and that is an instance of what I call too-much-about-the-words.

People say "the same" in contexts. For example, if we were having a discussion about cars: (Corvettes, Honda Accords, Ford F150s, Acuras, Kia Souls, Toyota Camrys, Cadillacs, etc.), it would make sense to say "The Accord and the Camry are *the same*." That is a *description* that would have very little ambiguity in the range-of-automobile context. By contrast, it would *not* make sense to say "The Accord and the Camry are *indistinguishable*," because indistinguishable means *not able to be distinguished*, which is obviously not true. *Indistinguishable* is generally a claim about perception; *the same* is a generally description (here, of two particular vehicles). *Indistinguishable* lives in the realm of theory; *the same* lives in the realm of description.

I am *not* trying to make a distinction between the words *the same* and *indistinguishable*. I'm trying to make a distinction between *Mel* (also, I think, Russ) and *Julian*. Mel uses *the same* as a grunt to describe Mel's experiences-as-before-the-footlights apprehensions at 9:03PM, and at 9:41PM, and 9:41PM. Julian uses *indistinguishable* to characterize Mel's experience-as-an-entity (or as a process, or as a thing broadly described) and to theorize about whether it has changed at 9:03PM, and at 9:41PM, and 9:41PM. I think Mel's is a describe-phenomena effort; Julian's is an analyze-entities effort.

RE "Or does she mean: ...Nothing about what's happening at those times with the plot leads to any differences in texture of experience?"

That is a question about Julian's interest, *not* about Mel's at-the-moment-of-the-beep apprehended experience. To answer that question would require (a) some kind of meta-awareness; (b) a separation of Mel's experience of the plot from her experience of her own experience; and (c) a speculation about causation. Mel is not in a position to be able to do any of those things.

To the extent that Julian is interested in any of those things, his ability to attend to Mel's descriptions of her at-the-moment-of-the-beep experience will be degraded.

RE "I wonder, Russ, why you would describe Mel's pondering as 'featureless'... but you were resistant to describing samples where Mel was carried away by the movie as 'content-free'."

Returning to this question: Mel is trying to describe her experience. She directly apprehends herself as pondering, but that pondering doesn't have any particular characteristics—no suggestion of alternatives, no words, no images, only a mostly inchoate leaning into unknown potentiality—so it seems reasonable to describe this as featureless pondering. By distinct contrast, Mel was carried along by the movie. There were no words or images, but there was no intimation that the movie plot/action/whatever was unknown or inchoate. So I see reason to say she was carried along by the movie, but no reason to say that this being carried long was content-free (so I could not say she was content-freely carried along by the movie). Whatever the content was (as she grasped it) was carrying her along. The carrying-along was not particularized in the sense of not producing an image or words, and so on, so it would not offend my sensitivities to say she was non-particularizedly carried along by the movie (but I generally intend "carried along by" to mean "non-particularized carried along by").

Julian comments: I wrote the above over three months ago from when I'm writing this. My current understanding has changed somewhat. I don't have a desire to call Mel's experience featureless or contentless or whatever. I see your points that this is a theoretical overreach. But I do *still* think her movie watching experience here is different from "garden variety" being carried along. I do think that when Mel calls three samples of watching the movie the same, she doesn't mean: the same except for obviously a bit different since this sample's a car chase and that sample's a love scene, so it tinges my watching experience somehow. I do think she means that the samples are extremely similar so she can't even discern how on-screen action tinges them to be different. That doesn't mean experience is *exactly* the same. We don't have to say that. That doesn't mean that Mel has one universal kind of absorption. We don't have to say that. It doesn't mean that her carried along experience is completely featureless/contentless/whatever so we don't have to write that. But I do think that how on-screen action tinges experience isn't obvious.

Russ comments:

RE " But I do think that how on-screen action tinges experience isn't obvious"

To my ear, asking how X tinges Y still makes experience (Y) a thing-like entity, and to the extent that influences you, you will have a difficult time hearing Mel with fidelity. Mel is carried along

by the movie; it is not fair to try to break that into parts, into experience that is (or is not) tinged by the movie.

Following sampling, Russ wrote this description of sample 9.2:

9.2 [Mel was writing on her computer and had decided she wasn't satisfied with a sentence. She's staring at the screen, in the process of reconsidering what to write.] She's active-featureless-pondering what to write; that is, she understands herself to be actively considering/contemplating what to write, but no new sentence or hints thereof, no thoughts about a sentence, no specifics about the old sentence are present.

Julian comments:

RE "She understands herself to be"

Doesn't writing "she understands herself to be" do the same thing as "she described herself as," which you admonished me for (see the end of interview 1: COMMENTARY ABOUT SAMPLE 1.4 ARISING AFTER THE INTERVIEW). In other words doesn't "she understands herself to be" cast doubt without making this doubt direct? Or do you doubt parts of this experience? So I would change this description to read:

9.2 [Mel was writing on her computer and had decided she wasn't satisfied with a sentence. She's staring at the screen, in the process of reconsidering what to write.] She's actively-featurelessly-pondering what to write—that is, she's actively considering/contemplating what to write, but no new sentence or hints thereof, no thoughts about a sentence, no specifics about the old sentence are present.

RE "considering/contemplating"

I think considering/contemplating is a bit strong in that people normally have associations with more particularizing when they consider or contemplate.

Russ comments:

RE "She understands herself to be"

I did indeed intend "she understands herself to be" as an underminer of "actively considering/contemplating," so the situation here is the opposite from my comment at 1.4. There, I thought you quoted Mel as saying something that you yourself believed was true, but instead of taking responsibility for your belief, you quoted Mel so as to protect yourself in case Mel and you were mistaken, something like *I never said it was true—I just quoted Mel*.

Here, the situation is very different. I agree with your "I think considering/contemplating is a bit strong" (for the reasons you state), so I did not want to write "she's actively considering/contemplating." Instead, I undermined that phrase with "she understands herself to be actively considering/contemplating." That, to my ear, turns a too-strong description into a true description. Mel was *not* engaged in center-of-the-target considering/contemplating (here I am agreeing with you in that that is too strong), but she did understand herself to be in that general ballpark. That's what I thought, and that is what I wrote.

RE "She's actively-featurelessly-pondering what to write"

Preliminarily, I don't understand your usage of the hyphens. If your intent was to create a compound word, then standard grammar does not use hyphens after -ly adverbs. If that is your intent, then removing the hyphens gives "She's actively featurelessly pondering what to write." But that makes the sentence too cleanly about pondering—the problem is that the pondering is outside (or at least mostly outside) of Mel's direct experience.

My original solved that problem by creating a compound word: “She’s active-featureless-pondering what to write.” That odd creation puts the reader on notice: *I’m not describing garden variety pondering but rather something where I have to create a compound word*; and then I undermine that with appositional “that is, she understands herself to be actively considering/contemplating what to write, but no new sentence or hints thereof, no thoughts about a sentence, no specifics about the old sentence are present.”

There may well be better ways to convey the relative inchoateness of Mel’s experience at this sample, but I think your revision makes the experience far too clean and far too directly apprehended.

SAMPLE 9.3 COMMENTARY ARISING AFTER THE INTERVIEW: ABOUT META-EXPERIENCE ETC.

Following the interview, Julian wrote this description of sample 9.3:

Sample 9.3a: [Mel is pressing delete on her phone] She is watching letters get deleted one by one. (This experience is mostly visual. She’s maybe experiencing this visual component as satisfying but this isn’t certain. She’s maybe also experiencing the sensation of my thumb pressing down, but this isn’t certain.)

She’s also thinking: “Take Chey”. [this is the first part of the sentence, that she’s leaving in and not deleting] (The thought is about those exact words. The words are present but in a diffuse, conceptual way. Mel is not innerly hearing this and it doesn’t unfold over time.)

Russ comments:

RE “She’s ... experiencing this visual component as satisfying.”

Note that this sentence describes a meta-awareness. If anything was satisfying, it is the letters disappearing. It is *not* the visual component that is satisfying.

RE “The thought is about those exact words.”

Note that this sentence describes a meta-awareness. One could hold that the thought was *not* *about* the words; the thought was *in* words. Or one could hold that the thought was about the words, but not about *those exact* words (even though those exact words were present).

The moral: if one wants to describe phenomena, one needs to be exquisitely differentiated with respect to the distinction between phenomena and meta-awareness.

Julian responds: I agree that my phrasing is meta and confusing, but my understanding of the experience is the same as for the sample as it stands. I say this since I think we’ll have to do a lot of such untangling for other days of samples. You often interpret my questioning as meta and I often defend that I didn’t mean it in that way. Agreed that I need to work on phrasing.

RE: “The words are present but in a diffuse, conceptual way.” I think that is not true for Mel. For Mel, the words were distinctly present, even though she had a hard time articulating *how* they were present (probably because of the common presupposition that words have to be spoken, heard, or seen, and they weren’t any of those). I suspect (but I am no mind reader) that the words are diffuse and conceptual *for Julian*, which may explain why he did not pursue the “Take Chey” part.

Julian responds: I think you're right about this one. Something led me to think this was a thought about words but without words present. I'll have to go to the transcript to see why I got the impression of something diffuse here, something of a gist.

A few months later, Julian adds: I now do agree that mentally untangling the meta will better let me verbally untangle the meta.

So I would rewrite this sample as:

Sample 9.3b [Mel is pressing delete on her phone] She is satisfie(dly) (?) watching the letters successively disappear. (This experience is mostly visual. Whether it is a *satisfied* watching isn't certain. She's maybe also experiencing the sensation of her thumb pressing down, but this isn't certain.)

She's also thinking: "Take Chey." [this is the first part of the sentence, that she's leaving in and not deleting] (The experience is those exact words, but they are not innerly spoken or heard and the words do not unfold over time.)

Julian comments: I would delete the "(?)" from "satisfie(dly) (?)." A main reason is Mel mentioning it again later in the interview, even after I said I wasn't sure about it. Of course, there's still room for doubt. But there's room for doubt everywhere so I'm experimenting with syat being syat bold. Also the satisfie(dly) part was given as much doubt as the thumb pressing before. But I think the thumb deserves more doubt than the satisfie(dly) part.

I would also change the description from saying it was mostly visual to also wanting to encapsulate the satisfaction (oops sorry for the noun). I originally put "emotional" but that felt too strong somehow. I put "vibey" even though Mel didn't use this term. Even though it's not a "technical" term, it somehow fits better.

That makes the description:

Sample 9.3c. [Mel is pressing delete on her phone] She is satisfie(dly) watching the letters successively disappear. (This experience is mostly visual and vibey (satisfie(dly)) with the two linked and not separate. She's maybe also experiencing the sensation of her thumb pressing down, but this isn't certain.)

She's also thinking: "Take Chey." [this is the first part of the sentence, that she's leaving in and not deleting] (The experience is those exact words, but they are not innerly spoken or heard and the words do not unfold over time.)

Russ comments:

RE "oops sorry for the noun"

This shows that you are sensitive to avoiding nounification / objectification. (See 35:32.) Good! But...

RE "This experience is mostly visual and vibey (satisfie(dly)) with the two linked and not separate."

...nounification / objectification is a hard habit (presupposition that runs deep) to break (bracket). "With the two linked and not separate" still reflects a nounification / objectification (even though you are trying to avoid it)—you can't have *the two* without first having nounified / objectified the two.

RE "I took away the (?) from satisfie(dly). A main reason is Mel mentioning it again later in the interview"

I think that once the satisfiedness was objectified, everything thereafter is dubious. That dubiousness spawned the question mark, which I still think applies.

Therefore, I disagree with the changes to the description.

RE "there's room for doubt everywhere so I'm experimenting with syat being syat bold."

In test theory, the best estimate of the true score is the observed score times the reliability coefficient. I take that as a metaphor for lots of important things in life: the more reliable your observations, the more warrant there is for having confidence in your descriptions. So the object is not to be bold; the object is to be a reliable observer, which then provides warrant for confidence in description.