

Michael D.
Michael D. Interview 10
Sampling Day 10

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the March 11 interview with Michael that is available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/gStVg_vztHA. If you have corrections, suggestions, or questions, please post them as YouTube comments.

RTH = Russ Hurlburt

AB = Agnes Bolinska

Michael = Michael D.

- 0:00 Russ comments: The comments that I have inserted in the transcript below are intended as commentary about what I think at the time I write the comment, which is generally within a day or so of the interview. They are not to be confused with the Truth with a capital T; there is no guarantee that I will agree with them if I review them at some later time, at which time I might revise or extend them; they are invitations to Michal and/or Agnes to disagree, or to amplify, or to say they don't understand, and so on. If they wish to insert their own comments, they should pick a color other than this green, and then do so. They should also feel free to correct the transcript.
- 0:01 RTH: So this is gonna be day 10, according to my account.
- 0:05 Michael: Yep.
- 0:06 RTH: Anything sampling wise we should be talking about before we look at beeps?
- 0:10 Michael: Um, no. I'll just tell you, I, I guess this will, well, it may or may not come up cuz we don't always get, we've never gotten through all of 'em. I'm not sure. Maybe we've got through all of 'em once. Um, I split it, I had to split this into two. Um, so I did three of them. I intended to do all of them yesterday evening, but that didn't happen. Um, and actually the, the, I assume we'll get to the third one and you'll see why. But, um, so I did the, I did three of them yesterday and three of them this morning.
- 0:42 RTH: So in, as in all other the things being equal, I generally say in that, in this kind of a situation, *well, let's look at today's beeps because they're the fresher ones*. But if there are beeps from yesterday that you think we should look at, then we can start there as well.
- 0:56 Michael: I mean, I don't know what we should look at. I could, we could start with the third one, cuz that'll tell you why I turned it off.
- 1:02 RTH: Alright, let's, let's, let's do that. Let's, let's do that. Let's, let's go 3, 4, 5, 6, 1, 2.

Sample 10.3 discussion starts here (beginning with the last sample from yesterday)

- 1:07 Michael: Okay. Um, so 3, um, I was lying down in my chair in my office. I had previously been holding a cold pack onto my face because of the swelling in my eyes. And, uh, but I had taken it off at this point. It, it had been on for a while. And I was hearing, what if we get to one and two, you'll see was a continuation of, I call it *background chatter*. It's sort of, it's sort of voices, but you can't tell what they're saying. Um, maybe if you paid more attention, you could tell. Maybe not. Um, so it's like, it's like being in a place with a lot of people talking. Um, and it was getting, at this point, it was, (this was last night) it was getting quite loud and annoying and I also just wasn't feeling well because of the problem with my face.
- 2:13 And I said, so right, right after the beep, right, sorry, right *before* the beep went off, so the beep was right after I said to my, spoken to myself, "Turn it off and go to sleep." I was, that was, that, that was not really particularly coincidental. I probably had said that to myself eight or ten times at this point. Um, I was trying to convince myself that it was okay to turn the beeper off and go to sleep. And when the beep went off [laughs], I did the thing (I wrote down. I, I'm, I wrote down the notes that I'm now relating to you) and then I did turn it off and went to sleep. So I was... So to summarize, I'm lying in the chair (that doesn't, that's just a situational fact), um, there was background chatter that was getting quite loud, like being in a very loud event of some sort where every, y'know, it was just like o, overwhelming amounts of talking going on. And I was becoming increasingly annoyed by it. And I had *just said* to myself, "Turn it off and go to sleep" when the beeper went off. And then (this is of course after the beep) I made these notes and, and I did in fact turn it off at that point.
- 3:28 RTH: Okay. And, and by a lot of voices, are we talking about 10 voices, or 100 voices, or 1000 voices, or indeterminate?
- 3:38 Michael: 100 or 1000, not 10. It was, it was like, it was like being in a place where there's 5,000 people all talking. 5,000 is just to give you a sense of the, the nature of the
- 3:51 RTH: Got it. And, and, and none of them is intelligible. Is that right?
- 3:57 Michael: None of them is, none of them is intelligible.
- 3:59 RTH: But I, I, my sense is that I could, if I wanted to zoom in on this guy who's standing next to me...?
- 4:03 Michael: I, I wasn't sure, actually. Sometimes when I hear background chatter, it's really just one or two people talking. And then I do feel like if I paid attention, I would know what they were saying. And sometimes I *do* pay attention. And in those situations, I often do find out what they're saying. So it was not a crazy thought. But in this situation, I'm not, I don't, I didn't have that sense that, cuz it was *too much*. I didn't have the sense that there was anything I could home in on to, y'know, to make sense of that. cuz there was just *too much else* going on.

4:34 RTH: But I'm, I'm also gathering that it's talking, it's not just white noise or...

4:38 Michael: It's clearly talking. [RTH: Mm-hmm.] Right. I, I mean, yeah, go ahead. Sorry.

4:43 RTH: And is there anything else to be said about the talking? Are these male voices, female voices, indeterminate voices...?

4:49 Michael: All kinds of voices. I didn't, I wasn't considering their, their gender in any way though. It was just *a lot of* voices.

4:58 RTH: And is there, do the voices have any qualities, any characteristics at all? Are they talking to *you*, talking *amongst themselves*? Doesn't matter? Can't tell?

5:06 Michael: They're not talking to me. At least I don't get that sense. I don't know what they're saying, so I can't say that for sure. But I, I didn't have the feeling that they were talking about it. I had the feeling of like being in Victoria Station in London. It's a big booming [RTH: Right.] uh, station and you just hear *lots and lots* of talking [laughs].

5:30 RTH: Okay. And I think I'm good about that. Agnes, you all right about that?

5:33 AB: Just one more thing. Um, you mentioned that it was getting quite loud. Um, was there at the moment of the beep any kind of experience of *increasing* volume? Or was that just, uh, like a, were you just saying that by way of background?

5:49 Michael: Um, it had gotten louder from the previous beep. So the, I, I was hearing it already had been for a while, while I was sitting in, in that chair. And, and I was, I had previously been put, had the cold, the cold pack on my face. I, that had, I had taken that off, but the, the, the, the chatter was getting louder. It wasn't getting... In the very moment that the beep went off, it wasn't in the *middle of* increase. It had already increased.

6:14 AB: Gotcha. Mm.

6:18 Michael: And I said to myself, "Turn it off and go to sleep." And that was, [AB: Okay.] that was probably the, I don't know, the 10th time I had said that to myself.

6:27 AB: Okay. Then I'm good with that.

6:28 RTH: And I, I guess I have one more question and that is that there's some, there's something about this that's annoying. And, and do you *feel annoyed*? Or is this as, as a statement of fact, these voices are annoying?

6:41 Michael: Yeah, maybe I should have thrown in the emotional, um, I didn't write anything down about that, but I, I remember it well enough. Yes, I was annoyed. Uh, I, I, I would say more frustrated than annoyed. Um, cuz I was trying to relax and it wasn't so easy to do.

7:00 RTH: And, and how does frustration / annoyance present itself to you?

- 7:11 Michael: Well, I guess, I guess in, in my frustration I didn't write this down so I could answer that question, but it would be based on a recreation of the experience, rather than any direct description or recollection. So I know how frustration feels to me normally. I, but I couldn't say *for sure* that that's how it felt in that moment.
- 7:11 Russ comments: I'm delighted with Michael's making the careful distinction between what he *directly recalls* as being experienced at the moment of the beep and what he *surmises* as being experienced at the moment of the beep. That is the heart of DES.
- 7:33 RTH: Well, let's, let's have the conversation about, about what you *think it was*, gi, given that, and, and we'll, we'll bracket it away and, and say this is probably not the way it actually was, but, but we haven't had much practice in talking about that kinda stuff.
- 7:33 Russ comments: RTH honors Michael's reluctance to speculate, but also wishes to build the skills of asking about and describing emotion, if there is emotion to be described. That is, he wants to guard against overlooking the experience of emotion *just because* it is difficult to describe.
- 7:48 Michael: Right. So, um, well, I, I would say if, if I were forced to reconstruct it, that, um, that it, it, it feels like pressure on your head. So frustration feels like something is pressing in on my head.
- 8:07 RTH: And do you mean that liter, literally? I feel a pressure on my head?
- 8:11 Michael: Yes.
- 8:13 RTH: And your hands go this way. Does that mean pressure?
- 8:16 Michael: The pressure is like all, I can't, my hands aren't big enough to cover my whole face, my whole, my whole skull. But every point of the skull feels like there's something pressing this way.
- 8:28 RTH: Equally all the way around?
- 8:29 Michael: Yes.
- 8:32 RTH: Okay.
- 8:35 Michael: What now? I I, I would, I'd be, I'd bet a good bit of money that that's how I felt at the time, but I did not write that down. Okay.
- 8:42 RTH: And, and I understand. I understood that. And, and so I was just, I was asking these questions as a way of figuring out how I should answer, how I should ask those questions in the future or whatever. [Michael: Right. Okay.] And, uh, and so I think I'm good about it. Agnes, you happy with number 3?

8:42 Russ comments: This has been (since 7:11) a good example of RTH and Michael honoring each other's interest in faithful description.

9:00 AB: I'm happy with it.

9:02 RTH: So we're gonna go to number 4.

9:04 Michael: Number 4. This is, [RTH: Which is day..] this is this morning,

9:08 RTH: First beep today.

Sample 10.4 discussion starts here (the first sample from today)

9:09 Michael: Yeah. Um, so I was sitting at my desk (this is again, this background) um, sitting at this desk right here where I'm sitting right now. And I had been working, but I, I looked at my phone to see, um, whether I had a message from someone I'm expecting a message from. And I had a message from *somebody else* that was an invitation to play disc golf. And I was reading the message and this person had written to me, and this is, this is what I was, what I had really just read and was reacting to at the moment of the beep. The sentence was, "I'm playing with Adam Thursday." I had been reading that. I was not *hearing* anything. It was just the words that were present to me with no auditory aspect to them.

9:56 And I had, initially, as I was reading it, I had initially read "Thursday" as if it were the person's last name. Like, I'm playing with someone called "Adam Thursday." And then I realized my mistake, and I kind of gave a slight chuckle. Um, and because of a discussion we've had earlier, I, I thought pretty carefully about how did that feel. And I think I felt it kind of in my midsection. So there was a kind of sense like, like tensing up of your, the muscles in your stomach in that area, so I felt that, I felt the chuckle there in my belly, but I also heard it, I, I, I chuckled out loud at myself for reading that as "Adam Thursday." Um, and there was still, um, there was still chatter. It was not as bad as it was last night, but it was still there. I would say much more backgrounded as if you had gone into the bathroom [laughs] (I couldn't think of a better way of saying this) at Victoria Station. And so now it's kind of, y'know, the bathroom door is closed and you can still hear all that hubbub that's going on, but it's much more subdued distance.

11:28 AB: So "I'm playing with Adam Thursday." Is that part of the experience, or was, or was, are you telling us that by way of background?

11:41 Michael: Well, I mean that, that, that sentence, I had read it prior. I, I had finished reading that sentence prior to the beep. I would say *just prior*. At the beep I was chuckling. So, but it, the chuckle came like *right after*, cuz I realized very quickly that I had read it the wrong way. So that, I mean, the sentence was still very much present to me, even though I wasn't in the act of reading it, because that's what I, I was laughing at my reading of that sentence. So I would say that the fact that I had just read that sentence was part of the experience. I mean, that, that the chuckle doesn't make

sense outside of the context of realizing that I had misread the sentence, but I had finished reading it, y'know, very shortly before the beep.

11:41 Russ comments: Michael has given, to my ear, two very different descriptions of this sentence: (a) "the sentence was still very much present to me" and (b) "the fact that I had just read that sentence was part of the experience." Description (a) is about the *sentence* itself ("the sentence...was present"). Description (b) is about *Michael* ("the fact that I...was experience[d]"). That is, (b) describes a meta-experience: there was an experience, and now there is the awareness *of the fact of* that I had that experience. If I were a betting man, I would bet that description (a) is the more apt. But I am not a betting man, and I am not a mind-reader, so we will have to try to help Michael sort those things out.

12:32 AB: You mentioned earlier that, that the words were present with no auditory aspect. [Michael: That's correct.] Right. That's how you described it. Um, can you help me to understand what that was like for you, for the words to be present with no auditory aspect? Um, present in what sense?

13:03 Michael: Um, present in the sense of silent reading, I guess. Um, I, I, so yeah, I was, I was *thinking* the words as I was reading them, but there was no, I wasn't mouthing the words. I wasn't internally reproducing the words. I was just reading them with comprehension. I don't know if I, I dunno. It's, it's, I'm trying to describe the absence of a certain kind of experience. I'm not sure how to do that. [laughs]. I mean, it's, I, I, bet it, I bet if you, if you were in, I mean, so I, I may step outside the role of interviewee for a second. I, I would think that if you were interviewing someone whose experience of words wasn't so frequently laced with auditory content, that maybe it wouldn't even occur to ask what is it like to read these without auditory content? Um, maybe I'm wrong about that. But, um, but I would say, I would say I, I, I can't get inside anyone else's head to know what it's like for them to read silently. But I, I, I would say it feels like maybe what, that's what normal silent reading is, is just seeing the words and comprehending them, but there's no sound involved.

13:03 Russ comments: There are lots of ways that people experience reading. It is common that people experience themselves as (usually innerly) *speaking* the words they are reading, and sometimes that speaking involves hearing. It is also common (less common, I think) that people experience themselves as *hearing* the words they are reading, sometimes heard in their own voice, sometimes in the voice of the writer, sometimes in the voice of the character, sometimes in some other voice. Sometimes there is a perceived rhythm of the words without speaking or hearing. Sometimes there is the experience of understanding the meaning without any direct experience of the words. Sometimes there is a visualization that depicts what the words are conveying without any experience of the words themselves. In short: There are lots of ways that reading is experienced.

14:30 AB: So I'm trying to ask [laughs], I'm trying to ask you a question in as with as few assumptions as possible with as, um, um, in the best way that I can. And, um, one, like what occurs to me in this conversation is that we've, in previous beeps, um,

we've talked about, um, the auditory, like the kind of productive aspect of, um, thinking a thought versus hearing a thought versus seeing, like, like seeing words. And you've, you've said "not auditory," you haven't mentioned visual. And so I'm trying to understand, um, what

14:30

Russ comments: AB stumbles, acts unsure, says she's trying, etc., doubtless because of the critique I have been providing in previous interviews about what are good DES questions. To my ear, what she says here is excellent: She is genuinely expressing her difficulty in trying to grok Michael's experience. My guess is that AB's genuineness about AB will help Michael to be genuine about Michael. The evidence (as usual) will be in Michael's next turn. (Spoiler alert: In my view, Michael *does* pretty directly convey his experience there. Ergo, AB's 14:30 is a good question.

[Perhaps as an aside, *Columbo* was a TV detective show (probably before Agnes's time—1971-1978 as a series, and then a few movies thereafter) where Lieutenant Columbo "uses his humble ways and ingenuous demeanor" (as IMDb describes it) to solve crimes. Columbo was frequently expressing his own ignorance (something like "I don't understand how your car was in the garage but you were driving it across the bridge"). (Episodes can be found on YouTube.) There is something about that which is similar to Agnes's question here, and is often a good question.

I don't want to suggest that expressing ignorance is a useful technique; I think ignorance and its expression is a genuine reflection of the DES situation.



15:19 Michael: That, okay. Okay. Okay. So, so when I was reading them, I was not reading them at the moment of the beep. I had already read them, and I, I wasn't even looking at them any longer. [AB: Mm-hmm.] I had looked up, I don't think I was having any particularly salient or memorable visual experience. Um, but while I was reading them, I was, it was a visual experience I was looking at them. [AB: Mm-hmm.] I was seeing them with comprehension. But I was *no longer* seeing them at the moment of the beep. [AB: Mm-hmm.] Um, so really what was in what was part of my experience at the moment of the beep was just the *content* of those words and my misreading of them, rather than the words themselves. It was really all about, at the moment of the beep, it was all about the misreading of the, of the word "Adam Thursday," or the words "Adam Thursday." So I think those two words were still present to me at the moment because I was, I had just, I was just sorting out the fact that it's not his last name. Um, but they weren't present to me auditorily in any way. It's just the *words and their meaning*.

16:28 AB: So like the semantic content of the words, [Michael: Yeah. Yeah.] and how present, but not the,

16:33 Michael: That's probably a good way to put it.

16:35 AB: Okay. Then I'm good with that aspect.

16:42 RTH: So I, I guess I have one question. When, when you encountered the words *originally*, I'm looking at, I'm seeing the words "I'm playing with Adam Thursday." That has been so far described as a visual thing. Is there, is there any speaking, any sense of speaking about that? [Michael: No.] So I'm not, I don't feel myself as speaking those words. [Michael: No.] Do I feel my, do I, and is my *visual* sense the sense of unfolding and, and by unfolding, I mean one word follows follow another word?

17:14 Michael: Yes. Yes. It was that it, it was as if you're scanning the words, yes.

17:20 RTH: In the sequence of as if they were being spoken. That, that...

17:24 Michael: Well, but I, I, I, yes and no. I mean, they were as if they were being spoken in the sense of they come in an order, but the, but it was, but they did not come at, at the pace of speaking. I think I, I think I read them much more quickly than anyone would say them.

17:42 RTH: And, and beyond pace, is there in, in speaking, I, I think there, there's some grouping of words. Like what I just said in speaking, I think, I think it's sort of a unit then "when speaking" is sort of a unit, then whatever, is there that kind of unitization? And I guess, and the answer must be yes, because you, you apparently unitized "Adam Thursday."

18:07 Michael: Yeah, I, yeah. I think the, "I'm playing" and the "Adam Thursday" were, were two slightly distinct groupings, if you like.

18:16 RTH: Okay. But that's before the beep. And at the, and *at* the beep that

18:22 Michael: At the beep, I was chuckling.

18:24 RTH: At, at the beep *somehow* that the sense of what I have just done is present to me...

18:32 Michael: Yes.

18:32 RTH: ...even though that sense is not particularly articulated. It's, but it's not absent either.

18:40 Michael: Yeah. I mean, I, y'know, it was just, it, it was just a minor funny moment of realization. [RTH: Right.] What I, how I had misread it. Yeah.

18:49 RTH: Right. Then I think I'm good.

18:52 AB: So, um, the other, like, at the beep, the other components of your experience were, um, the, the chuckle, which was manifested in your midsection tensing up, as well as an auditory component. [Michael: Mm-hmm.] And, um, the background chatter was still there. Um, what was like the relevant, uh, relevant, *relative* salience, if any of those? Um,

18:52

Russ comments: RE: “the chuckle, which was manifested in your midsection tensing up”

For my taste, that characterization is too clean, too definitive, not tentative enough, not adequately honoring of the subjunctification of Michael’s original description, which was (9:56) “Um, and because of a discussion we’ve had earlier, I, I thought pretty carefully about how did that feel. And I think I felt it kind of in my midsection.” That is a pretty highly subjunctified description, with at least four subjunctifiers: “Um”; “because of...”; “I think”; “I felt.” It is generally a good idea to be as tentative in your recapitulation as Michael was in his original. If you had done so, Michael *could have* refined the description, saying something like “There’s no need to be tentative—that’s the way the experience was.”

As it is, any refinement has to be in the direction of *more* tentativeness, and that would be much harder for Michael to do; he would have to say something like “Well, I said it was in my midsection, and it probably was in my midsection, and it certainly was not experienced elsewhere, but in any case I’m not sure.” That is a more difficult kind of refinement to make.

So the general rule is: don’t get out ahead of Michael in terms of clarity or confidence.

Agnes comments: I didn’t intend my characterizations of Michael’s experiences in this question to do anything other than *refer* to those aspects, so that I could ask about their relative salience. Is it important to make such characterizations messier, less definitive, and more tentative, even when they are only serving this role?

Russ comments: Yes, presuming by the comparatives (...*er*, *less*, and *more*) you mean by comparison to what *you* actually said. That is, I *don’t* recommend that you be messier, *less* definitive, or *more* tentative *than Michael was*; I recommend that you more-or-less match Michael’s messiness/definitiveness/tentativeness.

Michael doesn’t hear your intention—he hears only your words. (That is true of all communication, but we are here focusing on Michael and Agnes.)

The problem is that if you reflect what Michael has said, and in so reflecting you leave out (intentionally or not) some aspects, Michael might draw the conclusion that those aspects are not important (or at least are not important to you), and therefore may be disinclined to talk about them as the conversation continues. Furthermore, the messy, non-definitive, tentative aspects are hard to describe, so it may be a relief to Michael to have AB suggest (by omission) that we don’t have to work at this aspect of the description.

The moral is that by cleaning things up unwarrantedly, you run the risk of entering into a collusion where you agree not to discuss the difficult aspects.

(The good news is that Michael is a very competent describer, with ten days of practice in DES interviews, in which we have trained him to be sensitive to the muddy details of his experience, so he *probably* understands what AB wants to know regardless of how AB says it. But we got there by being attentive to such details all the way along.)

Part of the art of DES is the ability to *refer* to some aspect without over-specifying, oversimplifying, over-clarifying it. Here, for example, AB could have said (instead of “the other components of your experience were, um, the, the chuckle,

which was manifested in your midsection tensing up, as well as an auditory component”) something like: “then there was that chuckle / tummy / auditory / whatever thing.” That makes the reference plain and takes him back to that aspect without prejudice. That is, it encourages Michael to go back and take a run at describing this phenomenon again with suggesting which way that run should go.

- 19:27 Michael: So I, I, after a good night’s sleep, um, unfortunately it didn’t go away, but it was *much less*, it was much more in the background, the chatter. [AB: Mm-hmm.] And, and although I hadn’t by that point completely successfully pushed it *all* the way into the background. It was not, I, y’know, it’s like 20% at this point. So it’s, it’s there, I’m aware of it. It’s no longer really bothering me that much. I’m kind of succeeding in, in, in, in, um, what’s the word? Um,
- 19:27 Russ comments: Regarding the general rule about discovering what is a good question by considering the answer: AB asked a two-part question, the (too-clean in my view) midsection-tensing part and the background-chatter salience part. Michael answered only the background-chatter part. I of course don’t know why he didn’t answer the midsection-tensing question (I’m no mind reader), but I can say that Michael does *not* provide evidence that the midsection part was a good question. That *may* mean that that part was a bad question, but of course lack of evidence is not evidence of lack. These things are not black and white.
- 19:58 RTH: Suppressing it?
- 19:59 Michael: Yeah. Suppressing or ignoring or something like that. Yeah. Um, so, so that was like down to, *as opposed to* the previous night when I would say that was like 80% present to me, it’s more like 20% now. Uh, I, by now, I mean at the time of this beep.
- 20:22 AB: And, and would you describe that background chatter as, um, being somehow continuous or the same as the background chatter from the previous beep except quieter? Am I...?
- 20:38 Michael: Yeah. It felt like I woke up and it was still going on. Like I, like I laid down on the bench in Victoria Station, and when I woke up, I was still in Victoria Station.
- 20:53 AB: I’m good with that.
- 20:56 RTH: And in your first metaphor about that, it was like you went into the bathroom at Victoria Station or something.
- 21:02 Michael: Right.
- 21:02 RTH: That that metaphor would have a sort of an *over there*, the voices are *out there* as opposed to *in here*. Is that...?
- 21:08 Michael: Yeah, that’s right. That’s, I, that, that’s, that’s what I was trying to capture with that metaphor. Yes.

21:15 RTH: And by *out there*, is there a directionality to that?

21:19 Michael: No. You're still surrounded by it, but it's, it's like, it's in the next room now, instead of right, instead of you being right there in the middle of it.

21:27 RTH: So I'm still *geometrically* in the middle of it, but *auditorily*, it's not as present to me.

21:37 Michael: *Auditorily* there's a wall between me and it. But, but it's still all, it's still, there's no specific direction that it's coming from.

21:45 RTH: There wasn't in the, there wasn't in yes, in yesterday's beep, and there's not in today's beep.

21:49 Michael: Correct. That's correct.

21:50 RTH: And, uh, and by a wall, do you mean that...

21:54 Michael: I'm trying to describe the nature of the sound. So, so the, it's the, it's the difference between *I'm in a room surrounded by people talking*, versus *I'm in a room by myself and people in the rooms all around me are talking*.

22:08 RTH: But that's to describe the characteristics of the *sound*. [Michael: Yes.] I don't feel, I don't see, I don't understand a wall...

22:16 Michael: No, none of that. That's, that's right. None of that is intended to be a description of my experience apart from just trying to get across the difference in the nature of the sound itself.

22:26 RTH: So the, the sound is *muffled as by a wall* or something like that?

22:30 Michael: Yes. Yes.

22:33 RTH: And, and is that true in the sense that it's not *just softer*? It's...

22:40 Michael: Yes. It's, it's a, it's a pretty good metaphor, I would say.

22:44 RTH: Okay. And I think I'm good about that.

22:44 Russ comments: In my view, this is a pretty good example of how to deal with metaphor in DES. Metaphors are fine as long as we are clear about which aspects of the metaphor are useful and which not. So about the bathroom metaphor, we have established that it is the wall that is important, not any other characteristic of the bathroom; that the wall describes only the sound, not some physical separation; that it is not the over-there-ness of the sound as it would be in a real bathroom; that the sound is muffled, not merely softer; and so on.

22:51 AB: So I wanted to ask also about, um, the chuckle, the chuckle component. So you mentioned the, that you experienced that as like a tensing up in your midsection and you also heard it. [Michael: Mm-hmm.] Um, last time we had something like this, in your experience, um, I think we somehow collectively settled on, like, it, it as a kind of *ejaculation*. Was that the kind, was that present in this chuckle as well?

22:51 Russ comments: See the comment at 18:52. AB's question is still too clean, for my taste, but she does use one subjunctifier ("like"), which inserts at least a bit of uncertainty into her question. But notice that Michael still does not answer that question—now we have more evidence that there is something about the question that does not help Michael answer it.

23:27 Michael: Yeah, it was a very brief chuckle. It was like, huh! [AB: Mm-hmm.] Like that. [AB: Mm-hmm.]

23:34 AB: Then I'm, I'm good with that.

23:38 RTH: Me too. Number 5.

Sample 10.5 discussion starts here

23:41 Michael: Okay. Number 5. Um, I was working on a document, um, and, uh, on the computer. And, um, there was, uh, I, I had misplaced a file that I needed to continue working on the document. And I had, um, I was, I think I was *in the middle* actually, of saying the sentence, but I finished the sentence before I turned the beeper off. So it must have, maybe came towards the end. I dunno. Uh, I said, "where did I put that?" referring to the file that I was looking for. So I, I *spoke* those words and that was, that was a productive act of speaking. And I also *heard* myself *saying* them.

24:35 I was looking at the computer screen and I was visually searching for the correct window where that file was likely to be. I had, I probably had, it is a complicated document. It's, it's piecing together lots of different things. So I probably had like four or five different windows open on my computer. And I was scanning to, to find the one where I thought the document would be. I had not, I had not at this point found it, though. So I was in the act of searching visually for the, for the document, for the, for the window that the document would be in. (Sorry.) And I had just said, where did I, I was, maybe I was in the middle of just saying, or maybe I just finished saying, I'm not sure exactly where the beep comes relative to this, but somewhere in the middle or right at the end of the sentence, "where did I put that?"

25:25 RTH: And so is it fair to say that, that this experience involves both a saying and a searching?

25:32 Michael: Yes.

25:33 RTH: And is it, are these 50—50 or 60—40 or 100—100, or does it matter?

25:42 Michael: I, yeah, I don't think they were, they were, they were, I mean, obviously these are kind of, in some sense, trivial experiences. I, none of them was particularly

powerful. I was just, it was, and they're so closely connected. I, it's hard for me to... [RTH: Okay.] I mean, the way that I put that is the, is the verbal version of what I was doing with my eyes. [laughs]

26:05 RTH: Okay. And, and the *saying*, does that have this characteristics of speaking aloud?

26:14 Michael: Yes.

26:17 RTH: And we have in the past said, well, sometimes I don't know whether I'm speaking aloud or speaking.

26:24 Michael: Right. I have no idea. I, I was in my office by myself,

26:28 RTH: So I'm,

26:29 Michael: I'm not paying attention to that.

26:30 RTH: I, that part of me that monitors whether this is a lot or not, is not active or whatever.

26:33 Michael: That is not active at the moment. No.

26:40 RTH: Okay. And, and is there any difference in this, speaking as if I had been there and you were asking me "where did I put this?" [Michael: No, it would've...] as far as audit, as far as the, the worded, worded properties of it?

26:55 Michael: Yeah. No, it was just like that. I was saying it to myself, but I could have been saying it to somebody else.

27:03 RTH: Okay. And I am visually searching. Is there anything more to say about that?

27:07 Michael: Y'know, I thought, I thought about this quite a bit actually. Um, cuz I thought, well, what is, what is that as a visual experience? What is that exactly? Um, like what was I seeing? What was the content? And I couldn't come up with anything. I knew I was looking, I knew I was looking with my eyes [laughs], and I knew what I was looking for, [laughs]. But I, I couldn't say like, at the moment of the beep or just before or whatever, I was seeing the title of this window, or I was seeing the background on my screen or what, y'know, whatever the, like I couldn't paint a picture for you, literally paint a picture of what I was seeing. But I was, so it was kind of almost like, it was almost more this experience of *searching* rather than the experience of *seeing*, although obviously my eyes were doing some work! [laughs]

27:54 RTH: Okay. And the, and the, the file is open in a window. Is that, do I understand that correctly?

27:59 Michael: I believed I, well, it turns out that it was, but I, I, and I believed that at the time. I wasn't sure. So I think, I think if someone had said to me, "oh, Michael, that window's not open," I wouldn't have been shocked. [RTH: Okay.] But I, I was

searching for, I was searching my screen, I, I was searching the windows that were already open on the screen...

28:16 RTH: ...to see whether the document that I was interested in was somehow there.

28:19 Michael: Right. And I did **believe** that it was there, but I wouldn't, I wasn't sure of that. So if someone had told me, "oh no, it's in the window you haven't opened," I would've been Oh, okay.

28:30 RTH: Which sounds like something that I would do pretty much regularly all day long.

28:34 Michael: Yeah. I mean, me too. It's not a very uncommon experience.

28:37 RTH: Okay. Then I think I'm good about that. [AB: Me too.]

Sample 10.6 discussion starts here

28:42 Michael: Number 6. Okay. Uh, I'm still working on that same document. Um, it's a, it's a, um, this, maybe to give you some sense of what, what I'm dealing with here, because the, the nature of the document is more important. In this case. It's a, um, it's a document I'm doing as a favor for, for someone that is, um, uh, it's got a bunch of music in it. And the music is written in, in, uh, chant, Gregorian chant notation, square-note notation, usually it's called. And um, it's one of these kinds of programs where it's not a, what you see is what you get kind of a thing. You have to type in a bunch of code, and then you tell the, you tell it, okay, now make my document and it churns for a while, and then it creates this hopefully beautiful document that has all this music, et cetera, et cetera.

29:36 And it, and so, so I was working on the code part of that. I wasn't looking at the, the finished document. I was looking at the code part. And I had realized before the beep that I needed to type in a particular bit of text, um, just five characters of "[EM1]". And I needed to type that in several specific spots in the document. And so my eyes were scanning my, were, were scanning, and what I was scanning for is the next parenthesis in the file, because a, an open-parenthesis was a sign about where I needed to paste this text. I had to paste it in like 40 different places. So I was visually scanning, looking for the next open-parenthesis. Uh, at the time of the beep, I hadn't, I was between, I had pasted, I had pasted the code a, a moment ago, and I hadn't yet found the next spot where it was gonna be pasting. So I was visually scanning the text for an open-parenthesis. I was not scanning semantically at all. It was a pure syntactic thing, just looking for open-parenthesis. So the meaning of this code that I was scanning was not present to me. I was, it was a pure act of syntax.

30:54 And, um, yeah, that's it. That's all I was doing. I had some other texts here about how I was, how what I had been doing while I was pasting it, but I just realized that that was not part of the experience at the moment of the beep. So I was also, as I was pasting it, but this is not part of the beep, I was, I was saying, "boom!" every time I found a spot where it needed to go and I was typing, I was, I would hit control V for pace. cuz I was just pasting this thing in and I would say "boom! boom! boom! boom!" as I was typing it in. But I, and I wrote that down, but then I just realized

now that I was not saying that at the time of the beep, I was scanning for the next thing and I hadn't yet found it.

31:43 AB: So your experience at the time of the beep, um, was entirely comprised of this scanning for the open parenthesis.

31:54 Michael: Yes.

31:55 AB: Okay.

31:58 Michael: In this syntactic way. Right. [AB: Yeah.] So the le the, the, the, the, the symbols on the screen are *not* conveying any *meaning* to me at the moment. They're just symbols.

32:10 AB: So this reminds me a bit of a previous beep in which we talked about you.... I think you were also scanning for either an open or closed parenthesis of a logic exam or something like that. Um, is this experience, [pause] sorry, I just, um, I'm just realizing that I forget what we even said about, about that, but it's, it's just,

32:40 Michael: Well, I'm, for, I'm forgetting entirely. So you, you could make up anything and I would believe you.

32:44 AB: You, um, I mean, yeah, maybe I shouldn't make it up. Um,

32:52 RTH: So what I would say in general about that is: if you cannot be absolutely specific about what you're calling, recalling, then I wouldn't go there. And it's for just exactly the reason that Michael just said: [AB: Okay. Okay.] "I'll, I'll believe anything that you make up," he said. [they laugh]

33:05 AB: Okay. I won't make it up.

33:07 RTH: And, and we don't wanna do that!

33:08 AB: Okay. I won't make it up. Maybe then instead I'll just ask, um, kind of what's, what's in my, um, what I'm thinking about right now. Um, so is your experience, then, of the scanning for syntax one... [pause] Sorry, I'm now like super self-conscious about saying the wrong thing based on our previous document! [laughs]. [RTH: And that's...] cuz all I wanna say is, is this correct? But I'm not supposed to say that [laughs]. I'm like, um, I'm finding it difficult to like, articulate what I'm trying to say.

33:08 Russ comments: She refers to the discussion in Michael's day-9 transcript at 39:22 and 39:38.

33:49 Michael: Well, for, for what it's worth. I mean, I commented on that also.

33:53 AB: Um, yeah, I saw your comment this morning.

33:54 Michael: And I mean, I, if you say, is it correct, you're, you're not putting me in a box. I will. I will, I will. You're not putting me in a box. I feel completely free [laughs], if you offer me to two choices, I, I feel completely and utterly free to say neither of those choices is good [laughs].

33:54 Russ comments: This is a good example of "it's not about the words." I had been worried about A's using the words "is that correct?" for the reasons I described. But now that we have had that discussion, have established that AB and Russ are always aiming at fidelity and not either/or choices, *now* I don't care a whit about whether she says "is that correct?" Those words have a different meaning now than they had before. I think that is true of all words; this is just one example.

My students are frequently frustrated with me, imploring me to "just tell them what to ask!" But that is not possible, because the words one uses tomorrow are shaped by the words used today. So I resist telling people what to ask. Even if I am correct in today's situation (which has its own difficulties, because the words as uttered by AB (arising out of her personality, history, relationship with Michael, etc., etc.) do not really have the same meaning as the same words uttered by RTH (colored by his personality, history, etc.).

34:12 AB: Excellent. Okay. Well, let me just say like, let me say, let me say an example of what I think this might be, and you tell me why I'm wrong. [they laugh] [Michael: Okay.] Um, so one way of interpreting this might be of this vi, this experience of visually scanning would be of the open parentheses somehow being salient and other features of the visual field, not. Tell me how I'm wrong! [Being wrong is a reference to the day-9 discussions.]

34:46 Michael: Okay. So that's actually no, that, that, that's, um... You're only half wrong, Agnes! [they laugh heartily]

34:59 Michael: So I, I could have done better of describing the nature of the searching. I was not just searching for an open parenthesis because if it, if all I had to do is put this text after every open parenthesis, I would not have been doing it by hand. So I was searching for a *string* of characters that would be rather complicated to describe, but it begins with an open parenthesis. And then there's some other syntactical qualities that it has to have, which I could describe if you want. But I knew what, I mean, I've used this program a billion times, so I knew exactly what I was looking for. And it, it starts with an open parenthesis and then there's a complicated description of what has to come after that. But the *first* thing you're looking for is an open parenthesis, cuz that's gotta be the fir, that's gotta be the first part. Um, and so I was really scan, I wasn't just scanning for an open parenthesis, although that was the most important thing I was, that's gonna trigger a further, a further analysis of what I'm seeing. Right? So I don't see an open parenthesis. I just keep looking. So maybe that's a slightly richer description of the nature of the scanning.

34:59 Russ comments: Exercise for the reader

Was AB's 34:12 question a good question? My answer at the end of this transcript.

Agnes comments: I think you're going to say 'no' because Michael's answer isn't sufficiently focused on his experience. And I agree that it wasn't well enough formulated. What I really intended to ask was the next question. I think Michael's answer to that question helped me to better understand his experience.

- 36:06 AB: So I was trying to ask like, I mean that's, I guess that's helpful. But, um, it sounds to me like your, I guess, describing more precisely what you were scanning for, not just one open parenthesis. Um, what I was trying to ask about was the nature of that scanning experience *per se*, rather than what the scanning was focused on finding. Um, so for instance, I mean, was everything else apart from the thing that you're trying to identify a blur? Was it just not [Michael: Okay. Yeah.] in your experience at all? Was it like that... That's kind of what I'm asking about.
- 36:56 Michael: Not, not a, not a blur in the sense of literally blurry [laughs], but a blur in the sense of passing before one's eyes very quickly. Um, and not with a, with no, with *zero interest* unless it happens to be an open parenthesis. So they're all clear, there's no visual blurriness in the literal sense of blurry. Um, but there's no pausing whatsoever to even contemplate what character is this unless it's an open parenthesis. So it's a, it would be almost like if you're seeing, I don't know, if you're on, if you're on the highway and you're playing a game where you have to find a, a red car, all the other, you see all the other cars, you're scanning them, you maybe you couldn't even say what color they were. As long as they're not red, you're just not even paying any attention to any further facts about it. Similar to that.
- 37:55 AB: Okay. So I'm good with that.
- 38:00 RTH: So lemme tell you what I understand about this. I'm engaged in a syntactic task. And that syntactic task has some complications to it. But the main aspect of it is that the, there has to be an open-parenthesis. And, and what I mean by a *syntactic task* is that I, I am not at all aware of what the meaning of this phrase is gonna be. It's gonna produce a square note on the fourth line or whatever. I don't know anything about that. But the, but that's not present to me. [Michael: Right.] This, this is, this is a sequence of characters examined, being examined syntactically.
- 38:44 Michael: Yeah. And in fact, there's not, there's it, it what it, what, what, what I was producing, the visual result of what I was doing was gonna be to line up a bunch of tab stops. But I wasn't picturing that. I wasn't thinking about that. I, I, I had initiated the task, picturing the tab stops being all aligned. But while I was doing the task, the, the, the *result* of the task or the *point* of the task was not at all in my mind, it was a pure syntactic exercise.
- 39:15 RTH: Okay.
- 39:17 Michael: I could have written or like a regular expression to do it for me, but it would've taken me much longer to do *that* [laughs] correctly than just do it by hand.
- 39:24 RTH: Right. I got it. Been there, done that. Then I think I'm good about number 6. [AB: Me too.] Number 1, which would be the first one from yesterday.

Sample 10.1 discussion starts here

- 39:38 Michael: Right. So my son and I were working on trying to fix the ceiling in my house. Um, [laughs] as a total side note, the motivation for this is that in a month, you all are gonna be at my house, [laughs] and I was, I'm trying to clean up a few tasks that have been lying around for quite some time, including a ceiling in my living room that's sort of starting to fall a little bit. Um, only a little bit—don't worry, it won't fall in your head. Um, and I was trying to gain access to the spot *from above* rather than, rather than fixing it from below, which is gonna be difficult. So I had just cut... So I was upstairs, the upstairs of my house was not built as an upstairs, it's an attic that has been refinished into a few rooms.
- 40:35 So I was up there and I was, I had just cut a hole in a wall upstairs. And, well, I, I hadn't finished cutting the hole. I was at the midst of cutting the hole where I thought I was gonna be able to see the ceiling from the top side. And my son was with me. And I, I was working on the hole, and I said, and this was out, this *was* out loud, out loud, "James, hand me the saw, please." The beep went off, I think in the middle of that sentence. And at the same time (so that's, that was a speaking experience. And I hear, I heard myself say it) I was also visually looking at the work I'd been doing on the wall, and I was assessing whether I would be able to insert the saw that he was about to, to hand me into a spot where I would be able to finish cutting the hole. So I was visually assessing the wallboard, and which, which is not actually wallboard. It's like this old older material that's much harder to cut through. Um, which, which is why I wouldn't be able to just take a saw and jam it straight through, which you would be able to do with wallboard. So I had to, I had to be more strategic about how I was going to get this saw into a spot where it could cut. So I was assessing the, the, we'll call it wallboard, even though it's not, I was assessing the wallboard for where I could stick this saw in. And I was saying to James, "James, hand me the saw, please."
- 42:17 Al, al, also, I forgot about this, but I wrote it down and now I remember it (I'm reminding myself) there *was*, at this point, a little bit of that chatter that was gonna get worse later, later in the day. But it was very much background. I was barely, I was really barely noticing it, but I must have been noticing it because I wrote it down. I'm pretty good about not writing stuff down or I, what I do is actually, if I'm writing something down that's not, that's not something that I think was part of my direct experience, I put it in square brackets. Um, and this is not in square brackets.
- 42:57 RTH: And that's exactly what I do too. Square, the square bracket tool or whatever.
- 43:02 Michael: Okay. Yeah. That's a good convention.
- 43:04 RTH: The, so there's three-ish things going on. Two of them more or less prominent. One is "James, hand be the saw please," spoken and heard. [Michael: Right.] And the other is visually figuring out whether I'm gonna be able to get the saw through that hole.
- 43:22 Michael: Right. Well, it wasn't a hole. It was, I, I had been cutting with the, um, uh, with the utility knife. I was kind of, I I, I wasn't trying to cut all the way through it with the

utility knife. I was just trying to score the area so that when I was able to cut through, I wasn't going to damage anything outside of the area I was trying to remove. And I was looking at the score marks that I had made to see if I could find a spot where I had gotten deep enough where it would be plausible that I could push the saw all the way through.

43:52 RTH: Got it. And I'm taking that to be a visual...

43:55 Michael: That was totally visual. Yes.

43:58 RTH: I know what I want. I wanna be able to put the saw through there. I'm looking for a place where I can do it. Yes. But it's not like I'm imagining the saw.

44:08 Michael: No, no, I wasn't imagining the saw. I was just literally, I was seeing literally what's there, um, which is the score marks, which are *uneven* because, y'know, sometimes some areas they're deeper and some areas it's more superficial. And I was looking for a deep spot.

44:21 RTH: Okay. And I'm saying, "hand me the saw, please." Yep.

44:31 Michael: Yeah. To my son. Yeah. Is

44:32 RTH: There anything, anything more to be said about that? Other than I'm speaking it aloud and I experienced myself as speaking it and hearing it?

44:38 Michael: No, it was pretty unremarkable speaking. It was just exactly what it sounds like. I, he was behind, I, I was kneeling at the time. I wasn't aware of my own kneeling this [laughs], but, um, and he was standing, so it was not, it was, it was easier for, he was standing behind me where all the tools were, and so it just made sense for me to ask him to hand it to me instead of me standing up and turning around.

45:01 RTH: Okay. And does it make sense to ask about what, what portions of your experience these were? Or are they just...

45:12 Michael: Yeah, the, the, the chatter was pretty, was pretty insignificant. 10, 15%. Um, I would say that the request for the saw was not super significant. Maybe that's 25%. I, well, what I was really focused on at the moment was trying to find a spot where I could put the saw. So we'll go 60—15—25 or something like that.

45:42 RTH: Okay. Then I think I'm good.

45:45 AB: I have a question about the chatter in the background. Um, so in the previous discussions of the chatter, um, it was the, the first one that we discussed today, it was very loud and it was like being at Victoria Station. The second one you discussed, you, you described it as being in the bathroom. This one was in the background. Um, was it, did it have any of the qualities of either the first one or the second one, or none of the above, or something else together?

- 46:23 Michael: Yeah, I was, it was a much milder version of the first thing. Um, it was not loud. Um, it was not overwhelming in any way. Um, it would, it was, and, and, y'know, if you were to ask me at the time to put a number on the, like, how many voices are you hearing? I wouldn't have been able to, but I, it, but I, I would've probably said something like, more than 10 and fewer than 100, or something like that. Um, y'know, more like, I dunno, being, being in, being in the classroom before class starts and the students are, y'know, somewhat quietly chattering to each other and you're not paying attention to what they're saying. But you can hear that there's some little bit of chatter going on in the classroom or something like that. Um, this is very common. I mean, I don't know how common it's been in our beeps, but it happens a lot. And I wasn't paying much notice to it. I mean, I don't pay much notice to these things as it happens. It got much worse throughout the day, but I didn't know that was coming. Um, I, I wasn't paying very much attention to it.
- 47:31 AB: So that sounds qualitatively different from, um, the first one we discussed today where it was loud and annoying. [Michael: Yes.] And many, many voices. And
- 47:43 Michael: Well, it was the same, it was the same, it was the same. Like there, there's, they're not coming from any particular direction. It's like you're in the middle of it. [AB: Mm-hmm.] That was the same. [AB: Mm-hmm.] Um, but it was just much, much less.. [AB: Mm-hmm.] It was quiet, it was not loud, it was quite quiet. [AB: Mm-hmm.] Um, and I wasn't annoyed by it at all.
- 48:05 AB: And I'm good with that.
- 48:07 RTH: And by... And I didn't quite understand whether some of this stuff was metaphor or whatever. So does it seem like there are fewer voices here, that one was louder there. It's not only louder, but there's more of more voices?
- 48:25 Michael: I, I think the, I think it's too indeterminate to ans, to.... I wasn't thinking about how many voices are there, anything like that. Um, which is why a mo, a little while ago, I said, if you were to ask me, I would've said something like more than 10 and fewer than 100. But I wasn't contemplating the number at that time. It wasn't feeling like the, I mentioned the number and the other one because it started to feel very overwhelming. And it, and it started like the, the, the sheer volume and number was beginning to kind of weigh on me. But at this point, it's just in the background. It's, I'm paying *very little* attention to it. It's not, it's not, it's definitely the kind of chatter that's more than a couple people. So my, my, my best way of describing it was the, the classroom analogy. Maybe that's about the best way, but that's the best way I had at the moment. Um, I dunno what el, I, I'm, I feel like I'm not addressing your question
- 49:23 RTH: And I'm, well, I'm, I'm not getting an answer to it, which might be because there's no answer *to it*. And, and we're, we, and I haven't figured that out yet. But, but, so, but we do have two, we have two or three examples here where things seem, at least in my head, sort of similar. So we've, we have loud voices, many of them, quite disturbing. That's the first beep we talked about today, I think. Then we have voices that are not as loud and somewhat muffled as if through a wall. And now we have

voices that [clears throat] are maybe fewer voices, maybe just softer voices, maybe... So I'm, I, what I'm trying to do is to figure out what, how these voices sound. And, and we have, I understand that we have to use metaphorical terms, but I'm, I'm trying to understand exactly the range of all of those metaphors.

50:22 Michael: Okay. So one thing to say first is in the [coughs] excuse me, I haven't gotten rid of this pollen yet. Um, the, I think I heard you say a moment ago that the first one was there were many voices there, there were lots of voices, many of them annoying or something like that. There was no individual annoying voice. What...

50:48 RTH: If I, if I said that, that I misspoke. I didn't mean, I did not, did not intend that.

50:48 Russ comments: The sentence Michael is referring to is in 29:23 "So we've, we have loud voices, many of them, quite disturbing," and the issue is the highlighted comma. In oral communication, of course, there are no explicit commas. I had intended this sentence to mean "We have many loud, quite disturbing voices." Michael's understanding, which was a very reasonable interpretation of what I said (but is not what I meant) is "We have many voices, and many of those voices were quite disturbing." This is an example of the ambiguity of communication.

50:52 Michael: Okay. Uh, it was just the whole, the whole fact, the whole situation was annoying, but

50:56 RTH: Got it. That's, that's the way I understood it. And if I didn't say that, [Michael: Sorry.] then...

50:59 Michael: Alright. And maybe I misunderstood, but anyway, I just wanna clarify that in case. [RTH: Got it.] Um, I, I, I think it, I think it was just *less of everything*. It was less volume. It was less overwhelming. It was less, probably fewer voices. But I'm not sure putting a number to it makes a whole lot of sense, to be honest. Um, so, so I was trying, I, I was trying to indicate that by saying the, the, the, the, the first one was like being in Victoria Station where there's like, y'know, 5,000 people and they're all having their own conversations and it echoes off of every wall, et cetera, et cetera. And then this was more like being in a classroom where the students are all chattering. There's 10 different conversations going on. You're not hearing, hearing any of them in the sense of, of comprehending what's being going, what's being said. Um, but so everything's just dialed down. The space is smaller, the number of people involved is smaller, the volume is smaller.

52:04 RTH: But there's no *muffled* sense.

52:06 Michael: No, it's not really muffled.[coughs] (Excuse me, sorry. The pollen's killing me.) Um, no, it wasn't muffled like that, like I was describing before. It was, it was like being in a classroom where students were talking.

52:20 RTH: It was just less of everything.

52:22 Michael: It was *less of everything*.

52:23 RTH: But I wasn't paying, I wasn't paying direct... In neither case, actually, it seemed like I wasn't paying attention to the specifics. So it doesn't make, wouldn't make sense to say that there are fewer people. It's just that the...

52:34 Michael: Yeah, that's, that's right.

52:35 RTH: the people, the people ness of it is less,

52:39 Michael: The multiplicity of voices was lower, or something like that. [RTH: Yeah.] And it, and here's another, a possibly informative thing. So a lot of times when I, when I hear this background chatter, I, it feels like if I *were* to pay attention, I would know, I would find out what was being said. (And I used to actually try to do that. And it never, it wasn't a good thing to try.) Um, and I did that. So, so this experience, this, uh, um, uh, last night, um, was like that, whereas the, the, the one we talked about first did not have that sense at all. That I could listen in if I wanted to. It was just too much. There was no way you could actually home in on one thing and listen to that one thing. Whereas, for example, if you're in the classroom and students are chatting, you, you *could* direct your attention towards one of those conversations and probably understand what they're saying. Not, you don't have to do that, but you have the sense like this, it, it feels like I could do that if I so chose. [RTH: Okay.] And I did feel that way. I'm not explicitly, I wasn't, I didn't have that thought, but the nature of the sound was such that yes, it would be possible to home in and listen, whereas the, the Victoria station case, not possible.

53:58 RTH: And that's conflated with the number, the number of conversations....

54:02 Michael: And so I'm, I'm, yeah. So I was using the number of voices to some maybe capture that sense of, *could you listen in if you wanted to*

54:10 RTH: Ex... semantic availability or something.

54:13 Michael: Mm-hmm. I never put it that way, but that makes sense.

54:13 Michael comments: From my point of view, the most remarkable thing that happened during this session was a gradual clarification of what the "number of voices" really means. I guess it was clear from the beginning that speaking in terms of the 'actual number' could be misleading (given that I threw out the numbers 100, 1000, and 5000 in the space of 20 seconds). What is much clearer to me now (i.e., only vaguely appreciated before) is that 'number' is largely standing in for other phenomenological features of the experiences, most specifically: (a) how overbearing and impersonal does it feel (ranging from not at all overbearing and somewhat intimate or personal to borderline unbearable and anonymous to the point of being incomprehensible). This is not to say that the 'number' is not also somehow capturing something that would be more literally described as "a count of the distinct speakers", but the most important experiential difference between 10 and 5000 is not a difference in 'the count' so much as those other aspects of the experience (dominance/intrusiveness and degree of impersonality/legibility).

So, much like those legendary societies that (allegedly -- I'm skeptical that it's this simple) count "1, 2, 3, many", I think that voices are counted something like "1,2,3,students in a small class before class starts, busy cocktail party, Victoria Station". Or something like that.

54:21 RTH: Okay. And I think I'm good about that. [AB: Me too.] [Michael coughs] And it is 9:30 in my life, which means we have reached an hour. We can go for one more beep as far as I'm concerned. Or we can say..

54:36 Michael: This is, I, I don't, I don't think the next one's gonna bring anything interesting or new.

54:40 RTH: Okay.

54:42 Michael: I, I could be wrong, of course, but [laughs]

54:45 RTH: Well, I would say let's call, call it at an hour. Shall we do it again?

54:49 Michael: Okay.

54:51 RTH: And sooner or later, I suppose, we, we need to discuss how many more of these we're gonna do.

54:57 Michael: Yes.

54:57 RTH: It doesn't have to be today, but,

55:00 Michael: Well, I was, I *was* saying to Agnes the other day, these, these meetings are fine. Um, I don't, I don't find them to be onerous *particularly*. Um, sometimes it makes me say things I'd rather not think about, but, y'know, that's fine. Um, I will *admit* that the, the wearing—maybe I'm overly influenced by the fact that I just felt like I had to shut it off last night [laughs]— um, but I wear wearing the beeper is starting to feel a little onerous, um, just because it's, y'know, three or four hours of your life. Um, and it's not the, of course it's not the case that you're just wearing the beeper for those three or four hours, [laughs], um, y'know, I'm doing things like fixing ceilings and whatever. Um, but it does intrude upon those activities when it randomly decides that it wants your attention. I'm not saying we can, can't do it again, but I'm, I'm just letting y'know that I'm starting to grow a little bit weary of wearing the beeper.

56:00 RTH: Fair enough. Well, shall we schedule one more and then, uh,

56:06 Michael: Yeah, that's fine

56:08 RTH: and that, maybe that would be the last one?

They compare calendars.

From 34:59

Exercise for the reader

Was AB's 34:12 question a good question?

Russ's answer:

By the general rule of judging the quality of the question by whether Michael's answer was about his experience at the moment of the beep, I think Yes! It was a great question. It helped Michael provide details about his experience that he had not provided earlier.

Why did that question work? My speculation (I'm no mind reader) is that AB's absolutely genuinely distressing ignorance encouraged Michael to be absolutely genuinely forthcoming.

And as a bonus, his joke ("You're only half wrong, Agnes!") signals a very deep level of co-investigator alignment. There is something about this series of interviews that is working on a deeply, fundamentally human level.

Agnes comments: Well, I feel good about this! I think this is the first time Russ has assigned this exercise for the reader regarding one of Agnes's questions and the answer was that it was a good one (:

Michael's answer: I thought it was a good question.