

TRANSCRIPT WITH COMMENTARY

A Case of Face Blindness

Sadie Interview 3:

Third day of DES sampling

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the March 10 interview with Sadie that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/dOSUvtjI49Q>. In green are comments about and explanations of the Descriptive Experience Sampling process. If you have corrections, suggestions, or questions, please post them as YouTube comments.

RTH = Russ Hurlburt

AK = Alek Krumm

Sadie = Sadie Dingfelder

0:00 AK: Hello Sadie.

0:02 RTH: Hey.

0:02 Sadie: How are you guys?

0:02 RTH: I'm doing well. How about yourself?

0:09 Sadie: I'm doing great. It's beautiful weather. The Crocuses are blooming. Vaccines are being handed out. [AK laughs] So looking a little more hopeful.

0:22 RTH: Crocuses and vaccines, I guess! [they laugh]

0:27 Sadie: True signs of spring!

0:28 RTH: True signs of spring is right. [they laugh] So anything we should be talking about sampling-wise before we launch into today, this is going to be day 3.

SAMPLE 3.1 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

0:44 Sadie: Yeah. I got five samples this morning. [RTH: Okay.] Um, okay. Let's see. At 7:23 AM, I'm writing, um, meaning like I'm typing on my computer. I'm thinking hard, exhaling through my nostrils, feeling the air, hearing the sound. I know I'm thinking about what details to include in a story. Um, but I, I don't really have like anything more concrete than that. Yeah. And I was about 50-50 feeling the sensation of my nostrils and the thinking... and thinking.

1:31 RTH: Okay, well, let's start with the thinking then. Um, so I *know* what I'm thinking about. [Sadie: Yeah.] And is that because I know what I'm thinking about, or because that's somehow present to me at the moment at the beep?

1:46 Sadie: It was present to me at the moment of the beep. I...yeah.

- 1:51 RTH: So something, something about the story that I'm writing is present to me.
- 1:57 Sadie: Yeah. It was a book proposal, but yeah.
- 2:01 RTH: Okay. And, and when you say "that's present to me," what exactly does that mean? What, in what
- 2:12 Sadie: It's kinda hard to pin down. Like I know that's what I'm thinking about, but I don't have any more concrete experience than that.
- 2:20 RTH: So, so the word "know" is a problematic word for us. [Sadie: Okay.] So is it present to you at the moment that I'm thinking about this book proposal? Or is it that I've been thinking about this book proposal for a while? And I'm probably thinking about it now. *So I know I'm thinking about it.* I'm thinking about something...
- 2:40 Sadie: I can say even more specifically what I was thinking about, [RTH: Okay.] but I, like it wasn't in words, in any way that I, that I'm, that I was aware of. But I knew that I was asking myself a question actually about whether or not I could gloss over, um, the fact that whether or not I could gloss over a particular detail or if I *had to* include it.
- 3:12 RTH: And we, we don't need to necessarily know what the detail is. So let's, let's call that detail Pitt, Pennsylvania. [Sadie: Okay. Pennsylvania?!?] Yeah. Some detail about Pennsylvania. So I, I want us to be kind of, I want us to think about, concrete about something, but, but I don't necessarily think we have to display that for the world to see or whatever.

3:12 Russ comments: *Why Pennsylvania?* you may be asking. DES always inquires about specific experiences, and a part of the DES art is to keep the conversation concretely, unambiguously focused on the specific at-the-moment-of-the-beep experience. Sadie says she is wondering whether she could gloss over "a particular detail." If I were to ask, for example, "How does that particular detail present itself to you?" it would be grammatically unambiguous whether I am referring to the specific detail Sadie was wondering about at the moment of the beep or whether I am asking about how specific details present themselves to Sadie *in general*. Those are two vastly different things: one a concrete experience that took place at the moment of the beep, and another a (probably impossible) speculation about how things in general are experienced.

RTH never wants to be ambiguous about a distinction between a particular experience and an impossible generality. But at the same time, he wants to protect Sadie's privacy—Sadie should have the right to hold back particular details. To maintain the distinction between the concrete and the general, he provides a contrived yet concrete name: *Pennsylvania*. There is nothing magic about *Pennsylvania*; he could have said *watermelon* or *hockey* or *shadowy* just as easily. Once that artifice is established, he could ask "How does ~~that particular detail~~ Pennsylvania present itself to you?" and there would be no ambiguity: he is referring to the concrete at-the-moment-of-the-beep experience.

The most common occasion for this maneuver is when an interviewee says something like "I was thinking about asking a friend to go to a movie." RTH might say,

“Do you mean a particular friend? And if so, can we give them a name? You can use the actual name if you like, but a made-up name would be fine.” It’s hard to overstate how important such specificity is.

- 3:36 Sadie: Sure. I don’t mind, but, yeah, Pennsylvania, okay.
- 3:38 RTH: Well, if you, if, if it’s okay with you, then let’s talk about the detail.
- 3:38 Russ comments: If Sadie is willing to talk about the actual detail, then there’s no need for the *Pennsylvania* artifice.
- 3:42 Sadie: Okay. Then specifically I wanted to gloss over. So in the proposal for my, for a book, I want it, like, there’s sort of like an inciting incident that, um, well, anyway, I didn’t want to write that I was working on a *different* book when I thought about when, like, something that happened that sort of sparked me to write that the *current* book, because it felt like so much about books and not if I could just say for some reason or another, I thought about *this*.
- 4:15 RTH: Okay. So, so at the moment of the beep, is it present to you? Are these details present to you?
- 4:24 Sadie: Um, no. Not, not those particular details are present. I know that I, um, I know that that’s the question I am trying to answer. [RTH: Okay.] Um, ...I...
- 4:35 RTH: And when you, so this, so this is the word *know* that I’m trying to figure out. So are, is...
- 4:42 Sadie: For me, the, the, um, like there’s an, I have no particular experiences, like nothing’s really present for me right then. Like if a mind-reader were to read my mind right then, it would just be like, like nothing. Like snow or something, [laughs] at least from my conscious mind.
- 5:06 RTH: So at the moment of the beep, what’s present to me about *thinking* is that I am thinking about.... That I’m *thinking*.
- 5:17 Sadie: I’m just thinking. That’s all. That’s really it.
- 5:17 RTH: And, and that is pr.. The fact that I’m *thinking*, the experience of thinking, is somehow present, 50% of my experience, even though the specifics are not present. And that’s, even though I can tell you in a sort of a third party sense, what I’m thinking about—I’m thinking about whether I should gloss over this stuff. But the glossing-over-stuff is not itself present to me. [Sadie: Right.] Is that right? [Sadie: That’s correct.] So, so my experience is half divided between some nose stuff, which we haven’t yet talked about, and, and the experience of thinking, a directly-before-the-footlights-of-my-consciousness experience of thinking; that’s there. [Sadie: Um hmm.] And I can say what I’m thinking about, but *that* is not present to me at the moment of the beep. [Sadie: Right.] Okay. So about the thinking itself, there’s really nothing more to be said except that I am directly aware of the fact of my thinking. [Sadie: Right.] Okay. You have more to say about that, Alek?

6:36 Sadie: No. Oh, sorry. I'm not Alek!

6:38 AK: No, I don't think so. So I'm thinking, but I'm not thinking about... The, about part's not really in my experience. Am I getting that? [Sadie: Yeah.] Okay.

6:38 Russ comments: There is a remarkable range of the experience of thinking. Here, Sadie apprehends herself as thinking, but the specifics of *what* she is thinking about are not directly present (known only after the fact). At sample 2.2, Sadie directly (at the moment of the beep) apprehended the content of her thinking (about whether what she is saying is true) even though there are no words or other symbols present. At sample 2.3, Sadie directly experiences the words that are the content of her thinking ("It's just too big a group"). At 3.4, Sadie is typing but that is happening on autopilot. Such experiences point to Sadie's ability to process information on multiple "levels," some directly experienced and others not. RTH will refer to this different-levels-of-processing finding again at 31:22.

6:52 RTH: Okay. And then there's the nose part.

6:55 Sadie: Yes. Let me look. Okay. I just exhaled through my nostrils and I felt the air and I heard the sound.

7:05 RTH: Both the sound and the, and the feeling.

7:10 Sadie: Yeah, and the, and the air, like, uh, at the same time.

7:13 RTH: And was, are those aspects both present to you experientially? [Sadie: Yeah.] So this is not a matter of *knowledge* that my air is going out. This is a matter of *directly sensorially apprehending*.

7:28 Sadie: 'Cause I kind of like puffed it out. Like I'm like...

7:31 RTH: Okay. Okay. And that is both the sound of it and the feel of it. [Sadie: Right.] And are those equally present in my experience? I'm both hearing it and feeling equally?

7:45 Sadie: I think so.

7:46 RTH: Okay. And so I hear the sound. And what, what... Are there details that I could, that we could know about that?

8:13 Sadie: Um...Like I, I dunno. I mean, I definitely, I wasn't, I think I, I mean, I, yeah, I just heard it.

8:21 RTH: Okay. So you hear the air rushing out of my nose. [Sadie: Yes. Yeah.] And I also feel it. [Sadie: Yeah.] And w what, what do you feel?

8:32 Sadie: Um, I didn't write anything down, so I would just be kind of guessing.

8:38 RTH: Okay. So let's not do... let's, let's not go there. [Sadie: Okay.]

- 8:38 Russ comments: DES does not want Sadie to *reconstruct* what was experienced at the moment of the beep. There is no guarantee that a reconstructed experience is the same as (or even similar to) the original experience, so DES tries to stick to recollections of at-the-moment-of-the-beep experiences. Therefore RTH is happy that Sadie is explicitly declining to reconstruct the exhale.
- 8:41 [RTH continues] So, so I feel so I, but I'm gathering that this is a feeling of air rushing out of my nose.
- 8:49 Sadie: Yeah, and the sound of air rushing out of my nose.
- 8:50 RTH: Right. And that, and that is inside my nose? I feel it inside my nose, as opposed to, I feel the air on my lip or something?
- 8:58 Sadie: No, no. I felt it on the inside of my nose.
- 9:00 RTH: Okay.
- 9:04 AK: And you mentioned that you were exhaling hard. Is this like a very intentional thing that I'm doing right now? I'm...
- 9:13 Sadie: It was, it was intentional, not *very* intentional, but like, I, I had like a little tickle in my nose and I'm a little bit, got some allergies and a little bit congested. And so like, just a tiny bit of my brain was like snorting, like, uh, just a tiny bit of my experience was snorting. Like, I, wasn't not a tiny bit, like it was 50%, [AK: Yeah.] but it wasn't like I didn't devote any brain power to it. So it sort of felt... [AK: Okay.] It sort of felt semi-automatic.
- 9:42 AK: You're feeling the results of it, right? [Sadie: What?] I, what I was trying to understand is...[they talk over each other] [RTH: Go ahead.] Who is that?
- 9:52 Sadie: So you guys crossed for a second.
- 9:55 AK: Can you hear me? [Sadie: Yeah.] Okay. What I was, um, wondering about is whether [inaudible] or whatever of exhaling had been to feel those sensations. Sometimes we'll do things, um, *in order to create* a sensation. Um, it sounds like that's *not* what you were doing. You're trying to clear your nose. Is that right?
- 10:23 Sadie: Yeah, I think so. Yeah. [AK: Okay.]
- 10:25 RTH: And I'm gathering that the trying to clear is not like a conscious decision--*Oh, I should clear my nose here! I'll exhale hard!* [Sadie: Yeah.] But rather my nose is sort of automatically, in its way, clearing, [Sadie: Yeah.] doing what it has to do. The word *intentional* is a very difficult word, I think, because the philosophers, I think, would say, well, *everything we do is intentional*. So now you're on a slippery, slippery slope where that word, that word doesn't ever help you out. [Sadie: Okay. Yeah.] [AK inaudible] But there are times, there are times when, when I, when I *do*, before the footlights,

intentionally do something, and then that word is a useful word. [Sadie: Uh huh..] [AK: Right.] Number 2.

10:25 Russ comments: The nose sensation is an example of sensory awareness (actually, *two* sensory awarenesses—the sound and the feel). Sensory awareness seems to be emerging as a salient characteristic of Sadie’s experience.

11:20 AK: Number 2.

SAMPLE 3.2 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

11:25 Sadie: Let’s see. 7:26, I’ve just finished rereading the beginning of a sentence that I had just written and deciding how to finish it. Um, and the last word I read before the beep was the word “this,” um, but I didn’t hear it at my head. I, I didn’t have the experience of producing it, because I was reading it. Um, but in a... yeah. And at the same time... Okay. And then at the time I was thinking like, in that same sort of inchoate way as before, and I can tell you what I’m thinking about, which was, um, I was trying to think of better anecdotes than the first one that came to my mind. Um, um, and yeah, so those are the two experiences I have at 7:26.

12:18 AK: [inaudible] and by the two things are: thinking of a better anecdote, and is this, is reading the other one?

12:31 Sadie: I guess it’s reading. It’s definitely. And I know that I was at the word *this*, like I was, I was, that the last word of I’d written.

12:41 AK: Okay. And am I more into one of those aspects than the other?

12:48 Sadie: Um, I’m definitely, I think I’m thinking more than I’m *this-ing*.

12:53 AK: Okay. And 60-40 more? 90-10 more?

13:03 Sadie: Um, I don’t know, 80-20? [laughs]

13:06 AK: Okay. Quite a bit more. So about the thinking. How, how is that present to you?

13:24 Sadie: Well, the word *this*, written on my like computer screen, was definitely present. But there was certainly no, like, internal sound. There are no *sound* experiences. And I didn’t, I wasn’t thinking about what the word means or anything like that. Um, it, yeah, it kind of was just a word that I really wasn’t caring about that much, but I just read. But I was reading, I was looking at that word. So I was, I *knew* that I was thinking about it.

14:04 AK: Okay. Okay. So let me just get my bearings. So the, the *this* portion is the smaller portion of your experience, correct? [Sadie: Yeah, yeah, yeah.] Okay. And are we certain that it’s *in* your experience? I don’t want us to be *assuming* that it is just because it’s the last thing you read.

14:23 Sadie: Yeah. No, it *was* in my experience, but, um, it was like perhaps more *visually* in my experience than anything else.

14:33 AK: Um hmm. I see the word, I see *this* on the screen.

14:37 Sadie: Yeah, exactly.

14:41 AK: Okay. And I'm registering that. It's not just that my eyeballs are aimed at the word? I, I am seeing it?

14:46 Sadie: I'm, I'm seeing it. Yeah.

14:48 AK: Okay.

14:52 RTH: The whole sentence that just ends in the word *this*? Or just the word *this*?

14:52 Russ comments: FYI, we are going to spend quite a bit of time over the remainder of this interview trying to sort through this distinction:

- (a) reading a sentence (and the beep happens to interrupt that reading at the word *this*); and
- (b) seeing/reading the word *this* (which happens to be in the middle of a sentence).

Experientially, this is an important distinction, but as you will see, it is difficult to keep it straight in the interview.

The distinction is between (a) the experiential focus on the entire sentence; and (b) the experiential focus on a single word.

We have wrestled with apparently this same issue in sampling day 2. Recall that Sadie's initial description of sample 2.2 included [at 3:57] "And right before the beep went off, I just thought that the "it," in "I'm told the mom supports it." Much of interview 2 (between 5:27 and 7:21) involves trying to understand the experience of "it." As discussed in the 6:38 comment to interview 2, AK and RTH had, perhaps, somewhat different perspectives on the role of "it."

This issue highlights three important aspects of DES.

- (1) DES values joint interviewers because each may have differing perspectives;
- (2) DES values candid, forthright discussion of different perspectives (as in the comments at interview 2 6:38 and 11:57);
- (3) The aim of DES is *not* immediately to try to resolve such differences—sampling day 2 did *not* prefer one interpretation to another. Instead, DES relies on the iterative nature of DES, the confidence that if an issue is important, it will arise in subsequent sampling. There are two advantages of this confidence: first, interview 2 will have provided some practice (albeit unresolved) at discussing this word-or-sentence issue, which, in the fraction of seconds after beep 3.2, might advance Sadie's ability to focus on the issue; and second, because the content of the experience differs from that in 2.2, discussion of 3.2 might provide a new perspective with which to triangulate onto the phenomenon in question.

DES is a patient enterprise. If something is important, we will get another chance at it.

14:57 Sadie: Uh, no, just the word *this*.

15 RTH: So you, for some reason, chunked out the word *this*, and your experience is focused in on *this*, as opposed to the sentence that includes *this*.

15:09 Sadie: I wouldn't say I was *focused* on the *this* particularly, but I was just reading the sentence in like a sort of, y'know, linear way, like, and, um, and I was at the *this* when I got the beep. So like halfway through the sentence.

15:32 RTH: So the question that I, that I or we are trying to figure out here is, are you aimed at *this* as being like, for whatever reason I have pulled the *this* out of the sentence, and *this* is the, *this* is what I'm aimed at? Or, am I just making my way down the sentence and the, and, and I sort of see the whole thing, but my, as I, as my attention moves down, the beep happens to catch me on the *this* portion. [Sadie: The latter.] [AK: Okay.] So it's not about the word *this*. It is about the sentence that I'm reading, which happens to be caught at *this*. [Sadie: Right.] Okay. [AK: I got that.] And that is 20% of my experience, or something like that. Most of my experiences about the thinking. [Sadie: Yeah.]

15:32 Russ comments: That sounds pretty definitive: Sadie is reading a sentence and the beep happens to interrupt her midsentence at the word *this*.

16:21 AK: Okay. So let's go to the thinking. How is that present to you?

16:32 Sadie: (Um, sorry. I just heard a crazy sound. Oh, well, anyway.) Um, how does the thinking present? Gosh, I just hate, I hate to say "know" again, right, because that's verboten. But I'm *conscious* of the fact that I'm thinking. [AK: Um hmm.] Um, but, and, but other than that, I can't tell you much about it. I can tell you what I'm thinking about or what I'm trying to answer. The problem I'm trying to answer. And I didn't know that, like, I wasn't, that wasn't actually [inaudible] experience until the beep beeped. But that's just like con,... Contextually, I could tell you about that. But my only experience as the beep beeped was just *that* I was thinking.

17:24 AK: Okay. So does that make this sample pretty similar to the previous one? I'm in this thinking mode but actually what I'm thinking about is not directly present to me? Am I getting that right?

17:40 Sadie: Yes. Exactly. I mean, there's two different, very different things I'm thinking about, but yeah, same experience.

17:50 AK: Uh huh. And in both experiences, the, the *details* of the thinking are not present. [Sadie: No.] I'm just pondering. And if you ask me later, I can tell you what it's about. [Sadie: Yeah.] Okay.

18:08 RTH: So we're sort of breaking up audio-wise here. And so let me make sure I got that. So is the exper..., What's directly present to you in experience *exactly* the same on, thinking-wise, on beep 1 and 2, even though the content is known to be much different—the first one is something that you're going to gloss over, and the second one is, is, uh, about a better anecdote?

18:33 Sadie: Yeah. The experience is, I mean, I don't want to say *exactly* the same, but it's hard for me to say how it's different. But it's *very* similar.

18:47 RTH: Okay. I apprehend myself as thinking, [Sadie: Yeah.] and that is *highly present* to me in this beep, like 80% of my experience is I'm apprehending myself as thinking, [Sadie: Yeah.] even though the content thereof—can I find a better anecdote?—isn't present to me?

19:09 Sadie: It's not present to me. No. [RTH: Okay.]

19:19 AK: I'm good.

19:20 RTH: Me too. Number 3.

SAMPLE 3.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

19:24 Sadie: Number 3 is 8:12. Oh, wait, [laughs] I'm sorry. The previous one was the word *this*, but otherwise exactly the same. And at 8:12 was when I was reading and I read the word *that*, and there was, I didn't have any inner experience except for *that*. I was at the word *that* in the sentence that I was reading.

19:24 Russ comments: In our wrestling with the distinction between reading a sentence and reading a word (see comments at 14:52 and 15:32), Sadie, here, is quite contradictory. "I didn't have any inner experience except for *that*" implies the experience is of a word, whereas "I was at the word *that* in the sentence that I was reading" implies that the experience is of a sentence. The DES art will be to accept that we have not clarified the distinction, and to treat both aspects of the distinction even-handedly.

19:55 RTH: So at *this* beep this was at 8:12, is that what you said?

19:59 Sadie: Yeah. 8:12.

20:01 RTH: Okay. And we'll call this the *that* beep.

20:04 Sadie: The *that*! Yeah. I'm sorry. The other one was *this*.

20:08 RTH: Okay. And so at the present beep, beep 3, [Sadie: Um hmm.] I'm reading something on my computer screen [Sadie: Um hmm.] and that's the only thing that's in my experience. I don't have any other aspects of my experience at this moment.

20:23 Sadie: Nothin'!

20:24 RTH: Okay. And, and is my experience of reading the word *that*? Or is my experience of reading the sentence that includes the word *that*?

20:24 Russ comments: The listeners can judge for themselves: Is that an even-handed question? Or does it favor one side of the distinction? It seems pretty even-handed to

us. It is a starting-over kind of question, encouraging Sadie to come to this experience afresh, but now with the distinction between of-the-word and of-the-sentence already fleshed out.

20:35 Sadie: No. It's just the one word *that*. That's just where I'm at. I'm at the *that*.

20:35 Russ comments: Again there seems to be two contradictory expressions. "Just the one word *that*" implies the experience is of a word, whereas "that's just where I'm at." implies that the experience is of a sentence. We still have work to do.

20:41 RTH: So I understand that you're at the *that*, [Sadie: Okay.] but the question is, do I experience myself as reading the sentence that includes *that*? Or does it feel like I'm just reading the word *that*? My experience... That,

20:41 Russ comments: As an instance of the even-handed-questioning skill, note that RTH here puts the *sentence* interpretation first and the *word* interpretation second, both reversing the order of his previous question (20:24), therefore not favoring one interpretation over the other. This ordering also is an example of what DES calls "dragging your feet": Sadie has apparently somewhat preferred the *word* interpretation (at 20:35), so RTH somewhat prefers the *sentence* interpretation. If Sadie continues to prefer the *word* interpretation, she will have to work against RTH's slight preference for the *sentence* interpretation (that is, she will have to pull him along while he drags his feet). If she does so, that will provide additional evidence that she actually does intend the *word* side of the interpretation. (Dragging your feet is one of the ways that DES tries to work against the omnipresent urge toward confirmation bias.)

20:57 Sadie: Just reading the word *that*, not the [inaudible]. I mean, obviously I *am* reading the sentence, but I was at, I was at *that*, and that, that was my experience right before the beep, was just reading that *one word*.

20:57 Russ comments: Sadie has come down on the *word* side of the distinction, in a way that we find believable because of RTH's foot-dragging...

21:10 RTH: So this is a one-word-at-a-time experience? And that the word-at-a-time at this particular moment is *that*? [Sadie: Yeah.] And I understood you to say about the *previous* beep that, that it *wasn't*, like I had abstracted out the word *this*, but there I was more into the *whole sentence*, and the sentence happened to be at *this*. [Sadie: Right.] So this experience is quite different from the previous one?

21:10 Russ comments: ...but RTH continues the foot-dragging.

21:40 Sadie: Oh! No, no, no. It's exactly the same. It's that I was, I was just reading the word *that*, but I wasn't like *thinking* about the word. Just like before, I hit the word, *this* in the sentence, um, but I that's, I mean, like in my experience was like I was at the *this*, I know exactly where I was there, where I *was*. Um, anyway, they're the same; *they're the same* experience. Same, very similar.

- 21:40 Russ comments: This example illustrates what makes DES (and, really, all human communication) difficult: at every turn, there is some indeterminacy about what the questioner is asking, as well as about the answer to the question. Here, Sadie apparently understands RTH as asking about whether she is *thinking about* the particular word, when that is not at all his intention. That is not a failure-of-understanding on Sadie's part nor a failure-of-clearness on RTH's part; it is the imperfect match of two people with very different histories trying, short of perfection, to communicate with each other.
- 22:10 RTH: Okay. So [pause] I'm understanding that in 3.3, you're at the word *that*, and in 3.2 you're at the word *this*. So there's no question about that. [Sadie: Right.] The question that I st... don't have clarity on (and maybe it's not possible to get clarity on it. Maybe, maybe this is a question that doesn't resonate or whatever.)... Does it seem like I am reading a *sentence* in my experience? Is my experience of reading a sentence? Or is my experience or reading the word *that*?
- 22:10 Russ comments: RTH has noted the imperfection in communication evidenced in 21:40, so he hits the Reset button on the entire conversation, inviting Sadie to begin again. Note the continued foot-dragging: he continues to lead with the *sentence* interpretation (even stating it twice), thus requiring Sadie to pull against that interpretation if she prefers the *word* interpretation.
- 23:04 Sadie: My experience is, is just that word.
- 23:09 RTH: So as a matter of *reality*, you could say, "I'm reading the whole sentence." I'm processing the sentence. I'm not analyzing the word *that*. [Sadie: Right.] Um, I'm comprehending, I'm reading with comprehending, reading with comprehension the sentence. [Sadie: Yes.] But as far as my *experience* is concerned, my *experience* is of the word *that* rather than, uh, the *portion* of the sentence. [Sadie: Yes.] Okay. And that was true also about the word *this* in the beep 2?
- 23:42 Sadie: Right.
- 23:45 RTH: Okay. And so does that mean that as far as your *experience* is concerned, it seems like you're processing experientially one word at a time. [Sadie: Yes.]. Okay.
- 23:45 Russ comments: Note that "And so does that mean that" is, again, RTH giving Sadie the opportunity to back away from or retract her *word* interpretation...
- 24:04 Sadie: [pause] I know that doesn't really make sense though. 'Cause like I'm a very fast reader and I know people read in chunks, but that's my experience anyway.
- 24:04 Russ comments: ...but she doesn't do so. Instead, she sticks with her guns, even though she acknowledges that it is a bit weird. Readers are invited to draw their own conclusions, but we think this interview is consistent with the view that pretty-darn-skilled interviewers have provided a pretty-darn-even-handed set of questions that, without leading, allow Sadie to provide a pretty-darn-believable description of a quite controversial experience.

24:12 RTH: Well, it's very interesting. We, we have sampled with some people who, who are describing the experience—and it's a difficult thing to describe as, as is evident here. We've been working at it for 10 minutes or something to try to get this detail straight. And I would say, we, we have called this kind of experience something like *word-by-word*. I'm reading word-by-word in my experience, [Sadie: Yeah.] even though...And, and this is why it's important to keep the experience separate from *everything* else. You're no doubt processing the words that you've already read and processing the words that haven't, that you haven't yet gotten to—I mean your eyes are saccading around or whatever. And, and you're, and there's all kinds of verbal processing going on. But, but the question is what's in your *experience*? [Sadie: Right.] And I'm, I'm understanding us to be saying my process, my *experiential* is: I get this word and then I get the next word and then I get the next word and then I get the next word. And then the beep comes and I happened to be on the word *that*. [Sadie: Yes!] [AK: Hmm. Interesting.] I think I'm good about that.

24:12 Russ comments: The “word-by-word” discussion RTH refers to is really called *word—word*—*word* in chapters 2, 3, 4, 8, and 18 of his book¹ with Marco Caracciolo.

¹ Caracciolo, M., & Hurlburt, R. T. (2016). *A passion for specificity: Confronting inner experience in literature and science*. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press.

SAMPLE 3.4 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

25:33 AK: Me too. Number four.

25:35 Sadie: Um, okay. I was about to write a sentence. I know that was going to begin it with the word “I’ve,” but I wasn’t specifically thinking about.... My experience with that word was not in my experience—I just *know* it if you ask me. Um, so it’s more like, I just *know* I’m thinking, or I know I’ve got a solution, actually. And that’s it.

26:15 AK: Um hmm. So is the, the center of this experience is the *I’ve got a solution*? [Sadie: Yeah.].

26:24 RTH: Or is it the solution? [AK: Oh!]

26:28 Sadie: Well, you’re right. It’s the solution itself.

26:36 RTH: So this is about, this is about the solution, not about Sadie having it. [Sadie: Right.] Okay.

26:42 AK: Okay. And how do you, how do you experience the solution? Is this a think-y kind of thing? Or I’ve got a image? Or...

26:54 Sadie: I just, um, it’s not an image for sure. And it’s not, um, it’s nothing really specific. I just, I just know I, something clicked into place, metaphorically, and I’m ready to go.

27:18 AK: And I know that before the footlights of consciousness? I am, I experienced my having a solution, my solution.

27:28 Sadie: Yeah. I think that was the experience.

27:33 AK: Okay. Are there words involved?

27:38 Sadie: No! And that's what it was sort of weird. 'Cause I know that, what I'm going to write. My fingers were like actually, when I looked after the beep, they were like on the right letters. And um, but I didn't have that, the word, it was not like present to me. [AK: Um hmm.] And honestly now I can't even remember the rest of the sentence.

28:01 AK: Mm hmm. So a fact of the universe is that I am poised or starting to write this. [Sadie: Right.] But in my *experience* is the, is I, is, I'm not quite sure if I get that yet. Is it, is it the, some notion or some feeling or ("feeling" is kind of a fraught term) but I, I guess I'm just trying to understand if this is a *think-y* kind of thing? Or I just, uh, I just have a *sense* that I know what I, where I'm headed? Or... I don't know.

28:43 RTH: So can I, can I have a shot at this? [Sadie: Yeah.] In beep 2 (and also to some lesser degree in beep 1), you were thinking about something. [Sadie: Yes.] And you didn't know what you were thinking about at the, at the moment of the beep. [Sadie: Yes.] And yet you knew in general what you were thinking about, you were thinking about a better anecdote. [Sadie: Yes.] How is the present experience similar to or different from that?

29:10 Sadie: Um, in the present sentence, if you, if it had beeped like a coup..., a second earlier, I would have gotten something very similar to the first two, where it would have been like, okay, I'm trying to solve like this particular problem. But I just solved it. And I was just about to implement it, my solution. And so my experience was that, that, that sort of... I wasn't, I wasn't thinking about the problem anymore, but I was just about to like launch into action. And I didn't have any real, not much experience. Like I didn't have a sense of thinking, [pause] particularly.

29:56 RTH: So, so I've, I've focused my thinking down to the solution, kind of a deal. Is that...? [Sadie: Yeah. I think...] The solution is coming... The solution is known. I recognize that the solution has arisen out of the thought process. [Sadie: Yes.] Even, even though it's not like the solution itself is *present* to me, although it's obviously there, I'm about to type it. [Sadie: Right.] But in my *experience*, what's in my experience is sort of a crystallization of the thought process in the direction of, I've, I've, I've solved this problem, I'm, I'm about to,

30:35 Sadie: Yeah, I have. Yeah. And a lot of the times I have the experience of (not, not necessarily here because I didn't write it down), but, um, of not, I don't know what I'm thinking until I write it or, or say it out loud a lot of the time.

30:35 Russ comments: "A lot of the times..." is a signal that Sadie has strayed from describing experience at the moment of the beep to some kind of generalization (perhaps faux² generalization) about experience on the whole. DES brackets such generalizations—does not let them color the actual descriptions of at-the-moment-of-the-beep experience. The good news here is that Sadie knows the difference between description

of experience and generalizing about experience (as evidenced by her “not necessarily here because I didn’t write it down”).

² Hurlburt, R. T., & Akhter, S. A. (2006). The Descriptive Experience Sampling method. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 5, 271-301.

30:52 RTH: Right. [AK: Hmm.]

30:55 Sadie: In fact, I’m always impressing myself. I’ll write like an essay and I’ll be like, “Whoa, those were such good ideas! Who knew (!) that I had those in my head?!”

31:02 AK: [laughs] Okay. That’s great.

31:06 Sadie: Like, y’know, the saying like *writing is thinking*? Like, I really feel like that’s literally true for me. Like I almost need the prosthetic device of a paper to think through things.

31:22 RTH: Well, there... It is for sure the case that for everybody, there’s a whole lot of processing that goes on that’s outside of the direct footlights of consciousness. I think there are perhaps substantial individual differences of how much, how much is *in* the footlights of consciousness. Some people who say they’re thinking, know exactly what they’re thinking about. They recognize it. And other people like you today are pretty inchoate about that. The thinking is going on without a direct apprehension of the content of it. [Sadie: Yeah.] And y’know, I’m not taking a position as to which I think is better or worse or whatever. This is just the, uh, the way people are different from each other.

31:22 Russ comments: This is an expression of the bracketing mentioned in the comment at 30:35. RTH accepts that there may well be differences, but is himself pretty indifferent to them...

32:06 Sadie: Yeah. And for me personally, um, if I’m not able to just do this without thinking, if it doesn’t just happen, it means that I need to go back and do more research or something. Like I’m not really prepared to write yet. [RTH: Right.] [AK: Hmm.] Like the writing will come out all clunky and bad.

32:28 RTH: So what I’ve got about sample 4 [Sadie: Um hmm.] is: I have progressed, apparently, from the thinking into the recognition of, that a solution has been arrived at. [Sadie: Yes.] My thought, my thought process has conformed itself to the solution, and I w and I somehow feel the solution-y aspect of my thinking. [Sadie: Yes.] And the words are beginning to come out of my fingers. And they’re the first of those words, there’s going to be “I’ve,” [Sadie: Yeah.] but that’s not actually present to me. That is a fact of the universe that my fingers are about to write that. [Sadie: Right.] And then I’m going to... Then later on, I’m going to find out whether that was a good solution or not, I suppose! [Sadie: Right. (laughs)] At the moment it’s, at the moment, it seems like it’s a solution and, and it’s coming. [Sadie: Yep.] [AK: Great. I’m good.] Number 5.

32:28 Russ comments: ...and therefore returns the discussion to sample 4 without being influenced by the excursion into (possibly faux) generality. He acknowledges that the excursion has taken place (“Then later on, I’m going to find out whether that was a good

solution or not, I suppose!") but returns the discussion immediately to experience at the moment of the beep.

SAMPLE 3.5 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

33:39 Sadie: Okay. Wow. Okay. So this was at 9:16 and the s sound that was part of a word. Like actually, what was actually in my experience at that moment was I had my tongue between my top two teeth. And then once it beeped, I realized, Oh, that I was like thinking of a word that started with an s. But in terms of like the, at my actual conscious experience right before the beep, it was just like the feeling of, um, my tongue pressing into my teeth. And that feeling was mostly in my tongue, not my teeth.

34:14 RTH: So at the moment of the beep my tongue feels my teeth, basically. [Sadie: Yes. Yeah.] And that occupies mm, 100% of my experience? [Sadie: Yeah.] And I can say from the omniscient standpoint, I guess you would say, that this is the beginning of a word that starts with s. [Sadie: Yes.] But that's what the word that starts with s is not present to me at this particular moment. What's present is the sensation of my tongue, my tongue-sensation so far, I guess, is what we were saying. [Sadie: Yeah.] And is that tongue sensation of pressure against the teeth? Or of the way my teeth feel? Or neither one...?

34:56 Sadie: It's really just like pressure on the tongue, I guess.

35:01 RTH: So my tongue feels pressure [Sadie: Yes.] that's caused by, in the real world pressing against the teeth. But I, I feel my tongue pressing against. [Sadie: Um hmm.] Not so much pressing against my teeth, but, but my feel my tongue pressing.

35:16 Sadie: Yes. It could be pressing against anything, I guess.

35:24 RTH: Okay. And so there's obviously some process going on, which is going to produce a word that starts with s, [Sadie: Yeah.] but that processing is not available to my direct apprehension.

35:40 Sadie: Right. Also I was not writing. I was like standing in the kitchen. Like I was thinking about something. It, for some reason, I was like sounding out the words while I was thinking, I guess, or at least that, that beginning of that word. But again, I had no conscious experience with any of that. I just know that from context or like once I thought about it.

36:03 RTH: Okay. So, so the previous beeps you've had the *experience* of thinking, even though you didn't know the content. [Sadie: Right.] *Here, you are inferring* that you were thinking, [Sadie: Uh huh.] even though you don't even have the experience of thinking, but you must've been. [Sadie: Yeah.] But there's so, so we've, what we've got in on this day is a range of the experience of thinking ranging from zero in this beep up to quite present to me in the second beep I guess it was (80, 80% of me), [AK: Um hmm.] but in no case was the content present. [Sadie: Right.] Okay. [AK: Cool.] I think I'm good.

36:50 Sadie: That's all. That's all. I only had five this time, I think.

36:55 RTH: Ok. Great.

36:56 AK: No worries.

36:59 RTH: So I think this is interesting. I'm in favor of doing this again. We, uh, we in agreement about that?

37:04 Sadie: Totally. Yeah.

37:07 RTH: All right. Then, uh, I'll leave that up to you all and you'll tell me when it's going to be. It's interesting.

37:18 Sadie: Yeah, totally.

37:20 AK: Sounds great.

37:21 RTH: All right. Thank you very much.

37:24 Sadie: Bye. Have a nice day.

37:26 RTH: Same to you.