

Mel Keiser's Melga Blank's Lecture

by Melga Blank by Mel Keiser

INTRODUCTION

On 17 May 2016, the artist Mel Keiser presented a lecture and discussion as fictitious academic Melga Blank as part of her exhibition, *Museum of The Mels*, held at Wedge Projects in Chicago. She titled this artwork *Melga Blank presents "Who is The Mels?: An Introduction to Self-evolution"* and described it as a performance lecture. The work consisted of Mel Keiser, dressed in all white trimmed with black in a blazer, button-down, slacks, and glasses, with a matching podium and cup of water. She read a prepared lecture accompanied by projected drawings and animations. She spoke to an audience of many dozens.

On 17 May 2016, Dr. Melga Blank presented a lecture and discussion as part of the inaugural opening of the Museum of The Mels. She titled her lecture, "Who is The Mels? An Introduction to Self-evolution." The lecture outlined Blank's founding of the new discipline of self-evolutionary biology, defined its main concepts and methods, and introduced the species she discovered capable of this self-evolution, The Mels. Her lecture was accompanied by projected diagrams and visual representations. She spoke with an audience of many dozens.

What follows is an excerpt of Mel Keiser's Melga Blank's lecture notes. Annotations by Mel Keiser gesture to the "vanished presence" of the artist and the fictional presence of the more-believable academic. They are reminders that the implicit self is made of "selves wrapped in selves wrapped in selves."

Guide to Mel Keiser's Annotations

/ = breath

// = pause

/// = long pause

bold = emphasis

underline = deliberate

bold underline = stress

() = emotive cue

▶ = advance slide

◆ = activate slide

THE LECTURE

(warm) **Hello** / and welcome to / “Who is The Mels?: An Introduction to Self-evolution.” // My name is Dr. Melga Blank. // (authoritative) I am the Head Curator / here at the Museum of The Mels. / **Today** / I will present my research on The Mels / and self-evolutionary biology. /

(intent) ► **Traditionally**, / taxonomy has been restricted /to cataloging physical variations / passed from parent to progeny. // (passionate) By looking **inward** as opposed to **outward** / ► I use The Mels as a **case study** / proving that cohesive narrative identities / formulated to support **fulsome self-sameness**, / mask the ► **births** and **deaths** of discrete selves, / thus redefining the **origins** and **substance** of identity. ///

(factual) ► Mistaken for **years** as a single person / known by the common moniker “Mel Keiser,” / The Mels are actually a **clade**— / ► a group of individuals descended from a common ancestor through self-evolution. //

(passionate) This is where **one** first-person consciousness / ► conceives, / gestates, / and births a **distinctly new** / first-person consciousness. / It is a semelparous act, ► resulting in the death of the **previous consciousness**. //

(matter-of-fact) To date, there have been **six** deaths within The Mels: / ► one in 2003, / two in 2007, / again in 2010, 2014, / and most recently in 2018. / These

births and deaths all take place / within the **continuous physical material** of The Mels, / ► called **the Mel-body**. // In physical evolution, / members of a clade are differentiated by physical traits, / but this approach cannot identify the differences / **between each mel**. // As a solution to this problem, / I founded **self-evolutionary biology**: / ► the systematic study of self-identifiers / in order to **catalog** and **predict** changes / in **discrete** first-person consciousnesses. ///

/// DRINK SIP OF WATER ///

(proud) The system of self-identifiers **I invented** / to track the conceptions, gestations, births, and deaths of The Mels / divides the **characteristics of first-person consciousness** into / (list) ► basic biological facts (fact-identifiers), / ♦ morphology (appearance-identifiers), / ♦ categories of concatenated action (behavior-identifiers), / ♦ perceived truths (belief-identifiers), / ♦ aggregate emotional states (feeling-identifiers), / ♦ accessed ideas or information (knowledge-identifiers), / and ♦ social connections or interactions (relationship-identifiers). // (fascinated) ► Each **mel** is a **unique**, / **complex**, / ► **interrelated system** / of these self-identifiers. // This system ♦ **fluctuates** / as a mel encounters objects, / individuals, / ideas, / and experiences over time. // (explanatory) ► When a large enough proportion of these self-identifiers **changes** ♦ / **or** / when a

small amount of them change **significantly**, / (declarative) it can be **concluded** / that the **process of self-evolution** is underway. // Like micro-evolution of sparrows / selecting for larger bodies for increased resistance to **cold**, / ► the varied self-identifiers of a **mel** / are selected for or against / during the conception and gestation of a **new mel**. // Or occasionally, / they **mutate into something new**. ///

/// DRINK SIP OF WATER ///

(instructive) As a way to better understand self-evolution, / let's look at the self-identifiers / of the common ancestor of The Mels, / the pre-mel. / ► **Melissa-Louise-Keiser**. // (deliberate) As the pre-mel, / **her** self-identifiers are of **particular import**. // They do not **literally dictate** / the self-identifiers of future mels, / but they **do** define ► possible variations of self-identifiers / and the corresponding probabilities of those variations. // By studying Melissa-Louise-Keiser's **self-identifiers**, / mapping which self-identifiers were passed onto the first of The Mels, Mel(v.1), / and under what conditions, / the process of **self-evolution** becomes clear. //

(declarative) We begin with the behavior-identifiers of Melissa-Louise-Keiser. //

(instructive) ► A **behavior-identifier** / is a congregate of actions defining a behavioral category / **essential** to the definition of a first-person

consciousness. // **Behavior-identifiers** create their own / enmeshed system of related self-identifiers. // (explanatory) By way of example, / ► take the behavior-identifier of a self understood to be “**an academic.**” // (innocent) This behavior-identifier may have **associated** appearance-identifiers / such as ♦**blazers** and ♦**glasses**, / knowledge-identifiers such ♦**submission of a peer reviewed article**, / and belief-identifiers such as / ♦**I deserve my own office.** ///

(authoritative) ► **Melissa-Louise-Keiser** / simultaneously developed three behavior-identifiers / during her eighteen-year lifespan: / ♦**Writer-mel**, / ♦**Actor-mel**, / and ♦**Artist-mel.** // (concerned) As each behavior-identifier developed, / ► it required an increasing amount of Melissa-Louise-Keiser’s / first-person consciousness, / **until—** / during her self-evolution into Mel(v.1)— / ♦**one** behavior-identifier was selected for **and inherited** by **Mel(v.1).** // (matter-of-fact) I will begin by describing these behavior-identifiers / and how they developed. ///

/// DRINK SIP OF WATER ///

(narrative) ► The behavior-identifier / **Writer-mel** / emerged when Melissa-Louise-Keiser was in kindergarten. // (light) She wrote a short story / ► about a puppy who prevented a **burglary.** // Her kindergarten teacher advised / the mother-of-Melissa-Louise-Keiser’s body / to **encourage**

Melissa-Louise-Keiser's writing. // At the mother-of-her body's / subsequent **encouragement**, / (aside) and in a **win-win** proposition for them both, / (narrative) Melissa-Louise-Keiser thus learned to occupy herself / ► by writing stories in her **closet**. // A few years later, / in 1998, / she **entered** an essay / in the National P-- Reflections Contest, / ► where she won **national recognition**. // (conclusive) This solidified / Melissa-Louise-Keiser's belief / in her ability as a writer, / further cultivating the behavior-identifier / **Writer-mel**. ///

(narrative) ► **Actor-mel** first appeared in 1995, / as the result of an incidental friendship / with actor and peer, B.R., / who shared his enthusiasm for acting / with Melissa-Louise-Keiser. // (matter-of-fact) ► As Melissa-Louise-Keiser already had the relationship-identifiers / ♦ **little-sister-mel** / and ♦ **youngest-daughter-mel**, / acting easily aligned with feeling-identifiers / and belief-identifiers she already had, / like / ♦ **I feel valuable when I'm getting attention** / and ♦ **Performing gets me attention**, respectively. // So Melissa-Louise-Keiser joined B.R. / in taking **acting lessons**. // (empathetic) Initially, / nerves caused her to shake so badly on stage / that she **couldn't speak**, / but she subsequently earned leading roles in high school performances, / ► including ♦ H. in M----- N----- D----, / ♦ V.C. in T-- L----- I-----, / and ♦ E.W. in O-- T---. ///

(narrative) ► **Artist-mel** developed early in Melissa-Louise-Keiser's lifespan. / She frequently copied drawings / by the older-sister-of-her-body. //

(authoritative) ► While Melissa-Louise-Keiser was in the **schema** phase of her drawing development— / rendering objects in composite poses, / intuitive perspective, / and hierarchical scale— / ► the older-sister-of-her-body / was in the **realistic** phase of drawing, / where drawings are increasingly naturalistic. // (factual) Copying drawings by the older-sister-of-her-body / **catalyzed** Melissa-Louise-Keiser's artistic development, / making her one of the better draftspeople in her school. // **From there**, / Melissa-Louise-Keiser was supported by a series of **mentors**— / ► including / (warm) most notably / the **beloved MR.J.**— / (matter-of-fact) growing **more confident** in her artistic abilities / almost to the point of **delusion**. // For example, in a to-do list written by Melissa-Louise Keiser in 2002 ► entitled, / "Things to Do Before I Die," / one entry is to "paint a painting so powerful / it brings someone to tears." // Further, / in an interview / with one of Melissa-Louise-Keiser's classmates from 2003, / the classmate recalled a time / ► that as Melissa-Louise-Keiser **drove through a red light** / she claimed she ♦ "couldn't die, / [she had] too much to give the art world." ///

(aside, but matter-of-fact) It should be noted / that although Melissa-Louise-Keiser was perhaps / artistically advanced when compared to

her peers, / it must be said that in the context of art history / her artwork was, / **at best**, / ► of questionable artistic quality. ///

/// DRINK SIP OF WATER ///

(engaged) ► As I will explain next, / sometime in **2003 to 2004**, / the behavior-identifier / **Artist-mel** / **outcompeted** the other behavior-identifiers / to become Mel(v.1)'s **core** / **behavior-identifier**. // (factual) ► However, / many of the subordinate self-identifiers / associated with **Writer-mel** and **Actor-mel** / were resorbed / and passed on to **Mel(v.1)** / and **subsequent mels**. // (explanatory) An example of this can be seen with Mel(v.4/5), / who showed evidence of retaining / self-identifiers related to **Actor-mel**, / such as the feeling-identifier / ♦ **Costumes get me attention**. // This can be seen in Mel(v.4/5)'s **heroic** but failed attempt / to interest her students in medieval manuscript illumination / ► by donning monk's robes and a tonsure wig. // This is just one example among **many...**¹

Figure 1. Slide 20: The behavior-identifiers of Melissa-Louise-Keiser through phase space and self-identifier diagrams.

Figure 2. Slide 30: An example of Melissa-Louise-Keiser's advanced draftsman skills at age 5, a self-portrait.

¹ Remainder of lecture omitted.