

Soliloquy: A Methodology for First-Person Research

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Abstract: As ways of knowing move beyond the limitations of twentieth century modernism, Qualitative researchers are embarking on the depth of understanding that can come from first-person research methods. These include Autoethnography (Ellis, 2004), Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990), Narrative Inquiry and some approaches to Performance Ethnography. This paper recognises that although quantitative methods remain vital for information about the *what, how many* and *where* of an inquiry, the *why* is often better served through qualitative indicators, including first-person research methods. *Soliloquy* is a methodology for doing research within one’s own experience. Informed by the pure phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, *Soliloquy* aspires to be a systematic research application of Husserl’s philosophical phenomenology. It presents a step-by-step model for reflective inquiry, which uses arts-based methods for data collection, analysis and also for the presentation of research outcomes. It is a research approach that is highly suited to artists and entrepreneurs. In the paper, *Soliloquy: A Methodology for First-Person Research*, the key notion of *apodictic truth* is explained, and used to account for the possibility of credible, intersubjective truths emerging from highly subjective and personal data. Rather than seeking themes from second-hand descriptions, researchers are invited to prepare the way for archetypal objects to emerge through unconscious synthesis of data – like in a dream, or through arts practice - thus potentially creating universal insights into the research question. Furthermore, the specific methods of Experiencing, Epoche retreat, Epiphany, Explication and Examination are explained, and illustrated with examples from previously published research, through which *Soliloquy* has been trialed and refined.

Keywords: Soliloquy, subtextual phenomenology, first-person research, autoethnography

1. In the beginning...

Knowing comes before thought. Then comes language. The sensation of the tree precedes the rational and learned information: “Ahh – yes...” and then, so quickly that the gap is almost imperceptible - “Eucalyptus Citriodora (Lemon scented gum): large, quick-growing tree with smooth, white bark and lemon-scented leaves”(Demand Media, 2010). It is the glorious, “Ahh- yes” moment that is, nearly always, reduced to the limitations of language. In this paper I will present a research approach that attempts to utilize ways of knowing that are not hindered at the onset by language.

Soliloquy is a methodology for first-person research that I have been refining over a number of years. When I originally published the first version of the methodology, I called it *Subtextual Phenomenology* (Vallack 2010a; Vallack 2010b; Vallack 2009), as in its earlier carnations it was intended only for phenomenological research. It still serves as an approach to doing pure phenomenology, but in my own practice, I am now also finding it useful as an adjunct to other first-person approaches such as Autoethnography and some Performance Ethnographies. The explicit framework offers further philosophical clarification to the first-person approaches, perhaps making the rigor and theoretical alignment more apparent. I argue that Soliloquy works as a research methodology for pure phenomenology, and that it can also be mixed to compliment first-person methodologies such as Autoethnography (Ellis, 2004), Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990), Narrative Inquiry and Performance Text/ Ethnography (Mienczakowski, 1998). For the big-picture thinkers, I will firstly present the framework of Soliloquy Methodology, before I discuss the components and implications:

Table 1: The theoretical framework of *Soliloquy* methodology for first-person research

Soliloquy – a Methodology for First-Person Research	
Epistemology	Objectivism (Not Subjectivism or Constructionism): The epistemology that informs this methodology assumes the existence of archetypal(Jung, 1953-1963) objects, independent of the researcher’s thought, that may become conscious during the inquiry
Theoretical Perspective	Transcendental Phenomenology: This is Husserl’s pure phenomenology, which is always researched from personal experience (Husserl, 1981). Husserl says, “Subjectivism can only be overcome by the most all-embracing and consistent subjectivism (the transcendental). In this (latter) form it is at the same time objectivism (of a deeper sort)...” (Husserl in McCormic & Ellison, (1981), p.34). Transcendental Phenomenology must be a solo activity.

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	Contrary to popular, existential beliefs, pure Husserlian phenomenology is always first-person research (Husserl, (1964/1929)).
Methodology	<i>Soliloquy</i> - formerly known as <i>Subtextual Phenomenology</i> (Vallack, 2010a, Vallack, 2010b, Vallack, 2009) This is a practical research approach, informed by the philosophical phenomenology of Husserl, which I created some years ago. Whereas it was previously used to do phenomenology, it has been revised to be relevant to other forms of first-person inquiries. The new name is an indicator of this focal shift.
Methods	These are the steps involved in the research process. This is what the researcher does. The methods are not necessarily in chronological order. The process may or may not be linear: Experience – first-hand, subjective knowledge of the researched phenomena. The researcher becomes immersed in the experience to be researched. The <i>Ah-yes</i> moments are known before they are mentally categorised. S/he sits with the chaos of data, without the reasoning. Epoche – Husserl’s term for the stillness of consciousness. As if in a lucid dream, the self-researcher withdraws from lifeworld chaos, and passively waits for the story to present itself. This silencing of the conscious mind makes way for unconscious images and patterns Epiphany – the moment of Ah-ha, and the archetypal form, which is presented to the researcher from hir unconscious. It may appear as an image that s/he is drawing, or an archetypal form s/he sees in meditation, or as a story s/he already knows, or as a song in hir head... reason cannot access this gift until later – after it presents itself in its own way. One cannot make it happen; it must be allowed to happen. Explication – Sometimes entwined with the Epiphany, this is the manifestation of the phenomenon – as art or image or archetype or some other concrete outcome of the Epiphany. The creative process itself will make way for Explication – through creative writing an Archetype that was first glimpsed in early free-association scribble may appear, through painting a shadowy image may consolidate on the paper, for example. Examination – And here is where the rational mind comes into play. Until now it had politely moved aside to allow Lady Intuition to shine. Now Reason re-enters, no longer as the bully, but as the servant. His role is to translate the new and complex information, so that it can be understood in a logical way. He communicates the connections that have emerged from the unconscious, which might otherwise be unthinkable.

2. Epistemology and the notion of intersubjectivity

As researchers, we must address the question of how we know things, that is, of epistemology. *Soliloquy* embraces Husserl’s (1964/1929) idea that we know things intersubjectivity, “...I experience the world not as my own private world, but as an intersubjective world, one that is given to all human beings and which contains objects accessible to all...” (Husserl, (1964/1929)). Transcendental objects of experience, are common to all individuals, regardless of culture or time. Through transcendence, I can empathise with your experience when it is like (but not necessarily identical to) my own. And it is also about how researching my intensely subjective experiences may produce universal insights. It looks at knowing through the conscious, the unconscious, and (to use Jung’s term) the *collective unconscious* mind.

Traditionally, modern thinkers trust only reason as the tool for research, but we know so much more than the limited capacity of our cognition. Dynamic psychologists such as Freud and Jung have convinced even the most positivist thinkers that the unconscious (Jung) or subconscious (Freud) can be a resource for emotional and behavioural information. Dream analysis highlights patient attitudes that may at first escape conscious acknowledgement. The process of luring unconscious information into the light of consciousness is pursued by therapists through such methods as hypnosis, dream recall, and free-association. These are the methods used in *Soliloquy*.

Husserl, Jung and Freud were contemporaries. What the theories of these three masters have in common is the explicit notion that human experience is patterned, and understanding the patterns will shed light on the experiences of individuals. Jung (Jung, 1953-1963) talks about archetypes – a priori forms that show aspects of human nature. Similarly, like Plato before him, Husserl refers to transcendental forms (Husserl, (1964/1929)), which like archetypes, are common throughout cultures and civilizations. And what this means for the first-person researcher is that all of this forethought has paved the way for the notion that subjective experiences of an individual have universal implications because of the intersubjectivity of that experience. In other words, for example, my experience of fear feels the same as yours, even though I am afraid of spiders and you are

afraid of snakes. Fear is the intersubjective phenomenon that may be researched through your subjective data on snakes or my encounters with spiders.

3. Scientific thinking in the wider context

Scientific thinking has not always been the foremost way of knowing, and Gebser (Gebser, 1986) would argue, it is not the last. Philosopher, Jean Gebser informs us that as human consciousness has evolved, we have learned to know things in different ways. The following summary of his thesis shows that until the last 400 or so years, magical and mythical consciousness played an important part in human perception. *Mental mode*, the dominant form of sense-making that is used in western society today, has a unique characteristic whereby it gives no credence to any other way of knowing. Most of us were taught this at school - any idea that cannot be reasoned and tested cannot be deemed valid. But Gebser argues that the ancient ways of knowing are still with us and relevant, albeit somewhat repressed. According to Gebser, intuition and storytelling (frequently used in first-person research) are important tools for knowledge.

Here is a summary of Gebser’s evolution of consciousness:

GEBSER’S EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS :Ways of Knowing...
 INTEGRAL – When we know that all ways of knowing are valid
 MENTAL – When we know through cognition and
 MYTHICAL – When we know emotionally, through story and metaphor and archetype
 MAGICAL – When we just know – intuitively, but don’t know why
 ARCHAIC – When we were at one with the environment and there was a vague awareness

Figure 1: Author’s summary of Gebser’s theory of *Evolution of Consciousness*

Archaic Consciousness is the instinctive sensation that is known to single-cell organisms, as environmental changes are detected. We still have this structure of consciousness, yet some of us are more attuned to it than others. For example, some might know *in their bones* that it will rain. Mahood describes Archaic Consciousness as, “a zero-dimensional, non-perspectival world which could be likened to a state of deep sleep...non-differentiation and the total absence of any sense of separation from the environment” (Mahood, 1996).

Magical consciousness, according to Gebser, is “when the...wakeful consciousness is sufficiently depressed so that the surroundings are no longer present...where even the psychic reality of dream and image vanish...individuality is obliterated in the magic realm” (Gebser, 1986. p.163).

The transitions from Mythical to Mental and to Integral Consciousness are described as follows:

“The clothing of knowledge in myth is what characterized the transition to the mythical structure of consciousness, the two-dimensional, unperspectival state of consciousness that can best be likened to a dream.... This structure is superseded by the mental structure, whose appearance coincides with the rise of Greek civilisation.... Thinking is primary, and in its latter stage, rational thinking is primary. But this structure, too, is yielding to a mutation which Gebser identifies as the Integral structure of consciousness. This is described as a four-dimensional, aperspectival world of transparency. This is a time-free, space-free, subject and object free world of verition.” (Mahood, 1996, p.15-6).

Whereas most research methodologies, even most qualitative methodologies, work only with mental mode reason, Soliloquy deliberately aims to embrace more intuitive and creative levels of consciousness. The following table shows how the methods are linked to Gebser’s levels of consciousness.

Table 2: Parallels between *Soliloquy* methodology and Gebser’s *Evolution of Consciousness*

Parallels Between <i>Soliloquy</i> Methodology and Gebser’s <i>Evolution of Consciousness</i>		
Gebser’s STRUCTURES OF CONSCIOUSNESS	Characteristics of this level of consciousness	Methods of Soliloquy Methodology that relate to each level of consciousness
ARCHAIC	Presentiment	The EPOCHE – Stillness awaiting sensation

Parallels Between <i>Soliloquy</i> Methodology and Gebser's <i>Evolution of Consciousness</i>		
MAGIC	Space-timelessness. No individuality. United with everything. Gebser says: "When the ...wakeful consciousness is sufficiently depressed so that the surroundings are no longer present ...where even the psychic reality of dream and image vanish, his individuality is obliterated in the magic realm."..(Gebser, 1985, p.163).	EXPERIENCE & EPIPHANY through MEDITATION DREAM & DAYDREAM
MYTHICAL	Archetypes. Animated, primal images, which Gebser says are: "...reflections of the inner, dark and unfathomable forces in man which we call the powers of the soul or psyche." (Gebser, 1985, p.165).	EXPLICATION through TRANSCENDENTAL FORMS given images emerging through art, meditation, dream, music
MENTAL	The discovery of causality. Method replaces mystery. Abstraction and philosophising.	EXAMINATION DATA ANALYSIS & COGNITIVE ASPECTS INVOLVED IN MEANING-MAKING
INTEGRAL	Gebser, when describing the integral consciousness structure, may as well be talking about the methods of Epiphany and Explication in <i>Soliloquy</i> . They are both about transcending from the subjective to attain the intersubjective: "Epochs of great confusion and general uncertainty in a given world contain the slumbering, not-yet-manifest seeds of clarity and certainty. The manifestations of the aperspectival world above show that these seeds are already pressing towards realization. This means that we are approaching the zenith of confusion and are thus nearing the necessary breakthrough." (Gebser, 1985. P.532) "Consciousness of the self was the characteristic of mental consciousness structure: freedom from the "I" is the characteristic of integral consciousness structure." (Gebser, 1985. P.532)	The transcendental phenomena existing throughout the methods of <i>Soliloquy</i>

4. Apperception and apodictic truth

Apodictic truth is the whole truth, not just that which is seen from a subjective, single perspective. You see the apple from the other side of the table, for example, yet we share a sense of the 'appleness' of the thing. Apperception is the recognition that although we may perceive given objects from differing perspectives, ultimately each perspective has its own truth.

Apperception is the ability to hold two seemingly contradictory ideas at the same time, and believe in them both. It relates to *Soliloquy Methodology*, because to do it requires the researcher to believe in two, co-existing types of reality. Firstly there is the lifeworld reality – the busy chaos that one embraces at the start of the research process. This is the commonplace reality in which we live our daily lives. But there is also the eternal, archetypal truth one may arrive at through the *Soliloquy* process. Is this not a paradoxical, yet equally legitimate reality? To put it another way, my subjective experience is one reality, but the universal object that is known apodictically as a result of the personal experience is another, equally valid reality. Let us explore the concept a little more, because *Soliloquy* hinges on it:

One might ask, "Which is real, the lifeworld or the transcendental plane?" Consider then the possibility, which we take for granted daily, that the lifeworld might be that which constitutes reality. *Surely*, one might contend, *we live in the real world – we touch, taste, smell, see and hear all that exists around us. Surely the lifeworld is reality?* Consider then this argument: The lifeworld is transient. At any given moment, that which we know as reality has passed. Nothing exists in a fixed state, as all is in flux. However, in the transcendental realm,

permanent forms exist and remain, beyond daily entropy. Existing in this reality are eternal truths, archetypes and universal essences. They go by many names because they have been recognised throughout cultures and time, as ongoing structures of reality. *Surely this constant realm is reality? And that which we know as the lifeworld, a mere series of passing impressions?* This is not an idealist view, as it purports that archetypes exist beyond the mind of the individual, as is the want of true realism. These intersubjective objects are independent of one's awareness, understanding or belief in them. *Soliloquy* seeks these objects, and is therefore a methodology informed by Objectivism.

In the methodology of *Soliloquy*, the first-person researcher works apperceptibly – first with the reality of the subjective, lifeworld, before transitioning to research outcomes in the form of apodictic, transcendental objects of phenomena – the intersubjective insights

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have addressed two common criticisms levelled at first-person research- that it is too subjective and/or that it lacks outcomes. In answer to these issues, I have suggested that the most subjective data becomes universally relevant as apodictic truths emerge and the researcher sees the ever-present, intersubjective properties as research outcomes. I have argued that scientific method is not the only valid way to approach research, citing Geber's evolution of consciousness theory in support of intuitive (magical) and story-based (mythical) approaches to knowing. These issues are importantly related to the methodology, *Soliloquy*, which uses various levels of consciousness to unveil the research outcomes.

I have also argued the need for researchers to be explicit about the rigor in their methodologies. I am presenting a theoretically aligned methodology for first-person research, which I call *Soliloquy*. Apparent rigor is especially important for first-person researchers, as it is still a controversial practice in some academic circles. First-person research is motivating, for both the researcher and the readers, and it has much to offer. As Caulley would say, it is not 'boring!' (Caulley, 2008). But it is vital that the theoretical framework of that methodology has philosophical continuity and logic. I hope that arts-based researchers, entrepreneurs, others who are comfortable working outside of the arena of mental-mode modernism, will find *Soliloquy* methodology useful.

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