Alchemy Methodology - Applying the Arts to Research

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Abstract: The difference between art and research is that, whereas art can speak for itself, research must be explained. Unlike research, art invites open interpretation from the viewers, without any need to justify or explicate its existence or the artist's intentions. Research however, by its very nature, is a cognitive and rational product – at least in its final stages. The appreciation of postmodern perspectives in academia has given rise to methodologies for first-person inquiries and arts-based methods. Arts methods may provide the researcher with great insights into a research question, however the inquiry needs to be situated in a rational and philosophically aligned research framework. In this paper I present Alchemy Methodology as a theoretical framework for such research. It has been developed as an application of the pure phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, and it uses arts practice and subjective insights to inform and transform this data into universal, phenomenological insights. Alchemy Methodology is based on three principles:

- that the unconscious mind is far superior to logic and cognition when it comes to navigating the complex research question, but …
- that the unconscious can only speak through images and metaphor, which ultimately must be translated through rational thought and language
- that the arts-based methods embedded in Alchemy Inquiry, can take the researcher from the most subjective reflections to the most intersubjective, universal outcomes

This paper shows how the researcher can use arts practice to inspire unconscious responses to a research question, and frame these methods in a research construction, which is rigorous and informed by pure, European Phenomenology. It takes issue with a common misconception of phenomenology in research, arguing that twentieth century modernism has skewed Husserl's transcendental philosophy into something obscure and nonsensical.

Keywords: Phenomenology; Arts Research; Qualitative Methodology; Alchemy Methodology; arts-based research; Husserl.

'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, (1964/1929, p.34).

1. Introduction

As a student of art and literature, I was persuaded that the artist's intentions, however interesting, are separate to the art itself. To be clear, by 'art' I am referring to any or many creative genres, including visual and performing arts, as well as creative writing. The art speaks for itself. That is, the artist does not need to be able to articulate the meaning or intention, which underpins the work. Through the elements of the particular art form, the work may affect the audience, who will ultimately be responsible for any consequential analysis and evaluation. The audience may show little or no response to the art – it doesn't matter to the artist. But the opposite is true if the artist is also a researcher and the art work is used as data for the inquiry. Research is ultimately a logical process.

Research demands a more active role from any artist who is using the creative work as data for inquiry. The researcher is then responsible for making a convincing argument that the arts-informed process can be explained. As much as I applaud the swell of arts-based methods in qualitative inquiry, I wonder if this explicit aspect of the research process is sometimes diminished in methodologies such as Autoethnography. In order to evaluate a research methodology, I need to ask if the inquiry is logical. The theoretical framework, which informs the analysis and outcome, must be philosophically informed and consistently aligned, and the researcher must convince the reader that the chosen arts methods are appropriate and relevant in regard to the inquiry.

One way of approaching an arts-based inquiry is to tailor a methodology specifically to suit the individual project. Otherwise, there are established approaches, which can be used as a template for research, and I offer

one here. I call it Alchemy Methodology because metaphorically, like the alchemists of old who changed base metals into gold, through Alchemy Methodology the researcher uses mundane, personal experience to produce important, universal insights. Informed by the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (Husserl, 1981), the methodology uses subjective, arts-based data as a starting point for the discovery of universally significant insights. It follows the process of pure phenomenology, which Husserl established early last century. At that time, modernism reined, and it is thought that dominant scholars such as Heidegger were unable to embrace the transcendental nature of the philosophy (Hopkins, 2001). Now, one hundred years later, we are ready to do so. Alchemy Methodology offers a process for applying Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology as research methodology.

2. The Lost Art of Phenomenology

When Husserl was writing about Phenomenology in the 1920s in Europe, his contemporaries, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Carl Jung (Jung, 1875- 1961) and Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), were all pioneering research into the significance of image, dream and the unconscious. Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology, which seeks the archetypal form that is the essence of the research inquiry, is of the same philosophical ilk. In contrast to modernist thinking, which dominated the twentieth century, these founders and developers of psychoanalysis and phenomenology were interested in transcultural metaphors and symbols for understanding the human psyche. In the methodology which follows, subjective methods of first-person experience are interpreted through art, and become what Husserl calls 'intersubjective", that is, universal archetypes, which are the essences of phenomenology.

What is an archetype? Neville (2005) explains that archetypes are primary forms which govern the psyche, and transcend time and culture:

> For Plato, archetypes were ideas or forms of natural objects held to have been present in the divine mind prior to creation. For St Augustine they were 'principle ideas' which are themselves not formed, but contained in the divine understanding. In the Buddhist-Hindu systems, they are the first forms of manifestation that emerge from Void Spirit in the course of creation. Kant and Schopenhauer were more immediate precursors of Jung in dealing with this idea. For Jung, archetypes are typical and universal 'modes of apprehension' which appear as images charged with great meaning and power, images which exert a great influence on our individual and collective behaviour. (Neville, 2005, p. 125.)

Neville (2005) directs us to the Greek Gods as examples of archetypes:

> Golden-Haired Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and sensuality; Winged Eros, god of relationship and of the creativity which is generated by relationship; Ares, a raging war god (and beaten in battle by Athena); Artemis the huntress; Hermes the Cowboy, "god of travelers, shepherds, thieves, merchants and scholars" (Neville, 2005, P.292).

Many students today have been led astray by distorted interpretations of phenomenology brought about by Heidegger (Hopkins, 2001), a student of Husserl, who saw the philosophy through the lens of worldly ontology. Husserl had always described his Phenomenology epistemologically – that is, as a way of knowing. Influenced more by the modernist positivism of the century, Heidegger attempted to describe Phenomenology as a way of being in the world. This latter, ontological perspective distorted the terminology created by Husserl, and Phenomenology, as it is widely practiced today, appears more as an imitation of some kind of interview-based, Grounded Theory. Because Husserl's metaphysical terminology had been retained by Heidegger, but the epistemological focus was changed to an ontological one, what had been an aligned philosophical approach for understanding human endeavor had become distorted. Only Husserl's original Transcendental Phenomenology, or 'pure phenomenology', as it is referred to by Spiegelberg (Spiegelberg, 1982), makes sense. It is this original, pure phenomenology that informs the research methodology of Alchemy Methodology.

3. Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious

I contend that the unconscious, an ancient part of human consciousness, is the part of our psyche that has evolved to cope with the massive input of stimuli. If we are to believe the psychoanalysts (Freud, 1900/ 2010) (Jung, 1953), the unconscious can access and organize data in a mythical, symbolic way, which is more

comprehensive than conscious rationality. The world has always been a complex place, and we have evolved with a means to cope with chaos. Our unconscious minds deal with the details of daily experience during sleep, as in dreams we weave tangible patterns and symbols from seemingly endless daily detail. Psychotherapists use dream analysis, hypnosis and sometimes art works created by the patients to understand their inner worlds. At first, the array of seemingly unrelated memoirs and feelings may seem to make no sense. Freud used a process called 'Free Association" in which he asked the patients to speak randomly about anything that came into their minds, without censorship of any kind. By listening to the flow of the conversation and attuning to key symbols, he could analyse the underlying narrative as it emerged. The unconscious, which is so much smarter than the rational self (Goleman, 1992), will know the way through the chaos. But the unconscious speaks through myth and image, so ultimately, the rational self will need to become skilled at interpreting the cryptic clues. Let us look at some experimental evidence of the computer-like competence of the unconscious, when it comes to dealing with enormous amounts of data. Goleman (1992) observes that experiments in the ability of the unconscious mind to synthesise ideas and patterns is quite superior. He explains the testing process as follows:

> The cognitive unconscious, long thought by most cognitive scientists to be fairly simple-minded, may in fact be extremely intelligent, according to new findings by Dr. Pawel Lewicki of the University of Tulsa. In a major study, he had volunteers sit at a computer screen and push one of four buttons that corresponded to quadrants on the screen in which an "X" appeared, seemingly at random. Actually, the X followed an extremely complex pattern determined by 10 simultaneous rules; for example, that after moving twice horizontally, the X would then move vertically. Despite the complexity of the rules, Dr. Lewicki determined that the volunteers unconsciously learned them because their performance became progressively quicker, then rapidly deteriorated after the rules were suspended and the X started moving truly at random" (Goleman, 1992).

This is an important, scientific perspective of the intuitive unconscious, but the focus of this paper is not to explain the workings of the non-cognitive dimensions of the mind, but rather to use its synthesising capacity for research analysis and the presentation of research outcomes. The unconscious can seem to be elusive, however through Art and free-association, researchers can access the patterns revealed by the unconscious. After many years of exploring Husserl's Phenomenology (Husserl, 1981), I have put together Alchemy Methodology, which draws together both the unconscious and the rational minds of the researcher – arguably both left and right brain hemispheres – to address first-person research questions in this increasingly complex world. Working solo, on a phenomenon within one's own experience, is the only way to do authentic phenomenology, according to its founder, Husserl (McCormic and Elliston, 1981). Furthermore, Jung explained the process of working with the unconscious like this:

> The point is that you start with any image; for instance, just with that yellow mass in your dream. Contemplate it and carefully observe how the picture begins to unfold or to change. Don't try to make it into something, just do nothing but observe what its spontaneous changes are. Any mental picture you contemplate in this way will sooner or later change through a spontaneous association that causes a slight alteration of the picture. You must be careful to avoid spontaneously jumping from one picture to another. Hold fast to the one image you have chosen, and wait until it changes by itself. Note all these changes, and eventually step into the picture yourself, and, if it is a speaking figure at all, then say what you have to say to that figure and listen to what he or she has to say….Thus you can analyse your unconscious but also give your unconscious a chance to analyse yourself, and therewith you gradually create the unity of conscious and unconscious (Jung 1973, cited in Neville, 2005. p.91).

It is only through first-person experience that the unconscious can reveal patterns that may reveal potentially universal insights. So how might one understand the complex world through subjective experience? How does alchemical phenomenology work? As a researcher, I need to be able to logically justify my theoretical framework, even if the methods I use will be intuitive. I have argued that if I was just doing Art, then Art could speak for itself, but with research, its essentially intellectual nature requires researchers to be explicit regarding the theoretical underpinnings of their approaches. Alchemy Methodology is informed by Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology. Husserl was ahead of his time, and the prevailing modernism struggled with his concept of "intersubjectivity" (Husserl, 1964/1929). To Husserl, intersubjectivity occurs when, for example, my subjective experience is typical of the experience that others have of the same phenomenon. My

experience then ceases to be merely subjective, as it aligns with intersubjective experience – one that is experienced and know universally.,

4. Alchemy Methodology

To be succinct, I have summarised the theoretical framework of Alchemy Methodology in the following table. I will then explain each of the methods and describe an example of how I have used the methodology in my own research.

Table 1 shows the structure of Alchemy Methodology and an overview of the philosophical alignment in the research design. Objectivism is compatible with Transcendental Phenomenology, because the latter seeks intersubjective objects of the research experience. The listed methods serve the theoretical perspective, because they are the steps to accessing the researcher's unconscious mind, which will present the intersubjective essence as a visual or mythical archetype.

Table 1: The Theoretical Framework of Alchemy Methodology

The Theoretical Framework of Alchemy Methodology – a Whole-Brain Approach for Arts-Based Research	
EPISTEMOLOGY	OBJECTIVISM
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY
METHODOLOGY	ALCHEMICAL PHENOMENOLOGY
METHODS	o Experience o Epoche o Epiphany o Elucidation o Explanation

Although students of methodology frequently use the term 'epistemology' in varying ways, here I comply with Michael Crotty's thesis (Crotty, 1996) that in the context of research methodologies, there are three basic epistemologies (or ways of knowing), which can inform a research paradigm. Crotty (Crotty, 1998) points out that the epistemology of any given research design is based on one of the following three ways of knowing:

- Objectivism, which assumes that real or abstract objects exist, whether or not the researcher is aware of them. Scientific method assumes objectivism, and usually seeks tangible, external objects. Alchemy Methodology also works with the epistemology of Objectivism, but the external objects being sought here are ideal or abstract;
- Constructionism, which assumes that although knowledge objects exist independently of the thought of an individual, it is the individual who creates meaning from these objects. To the constructionist, my meaning may be quite different to your meaning, even though they are drawn from the same experience. Most qualitative methodologies are based on constructionism;
- Subjectivism, which assumes that there is no meaning outside of what I know from personal experience. Some kinds of reflective research and narrative inquiry work within the boundaries of subjectivism.

Although Alchemy Methodology starts with subjective methods, the overall epistemology informing the methodology is Objectivism, because ultimately the researcher is seeking archetypal objects. These objects will sum up the research in a way that is understood universally. Alchemy, through first-person research into subjective experience, searches for what Husserl calls *a priori* objects. He says:

> All of phenomenology, or the methodological pursuit of a philosopher's self-examination, discloses the endless multiformity of this inborn a priori. This is the genuine sense of "innate"....Phenomenology explores this a priori, which is nothing other than the essence...and which is disclosed, and can only be disclosed, by means of my self-examination (Husserl, 1964/1929, p.29).

Like Plato's Greek Gods and Jung's archetypes, these a priori objects do not actually exist in the lifeworld, but they exist *transcendentally* in a way that symbolizes lifeworld phenomena. For example, no one has ever seen Aphrodite herself, but we see her essence in everyday beauty. So when the researcher uses Alchemy Methodology, s/he hopes to reach some kind of *ideal* (in a Cartesian sense) object (like Aphrodite – or Cupid,

or Dionysius) that will encapsulate an intersubjective answer to the research question about personal experiences.

Neville (2005) points out that archetypal psychology originated mainly from the work of Carl Jung, who used Plato's ideas of patterns and forms. He puts it this way:

> Following Plato, he was inclined to understand archetypes as pre-existent forms which are replicated again and again in nature and in our experience. He wrote of archetypes as "instinctual patterns of behaviour", which are genetically inherited, as "structures of the collective unconscious" and as "modes of apprehension" which shape our encounter with reality....We can learn something of the nature of these patterns in the "old stories" or myths of ancient cultures" (Neville, 2005, p.22).

In Alchemy Methodology, when an image or metaphor from the "old stories" presents itself, it may well come as a gift from the unconscious in the form of the research outcome. According to Neville (2005), archetypal psychologists suggest that "all behaviour is archetypally constellated" and "Our thinking and behaving is done within one archetypal fantasy or another." (Neville, 2005, P.24). Alchemy Phenomenology, too, is based in this belief-context. It seems fitting then that researching human behaviour should be done through an archetypal lens.

The Theoretical Perspective of any research design is the philosophy that works within the context of the given epistemology. The Alchemy system is informed by the theoretical perspective of Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology. Husserl perfected this authentic phenomenology in his later life, but he was ahead of his time. Twentieth century positivists were not ready to comprehend his notion of intersubjectivity. Husserl's idea that through one's most personal and subjective experience we can come to know the most universal and intersubjective phenomena, was somewhat metaphysical and beyond the boundaries of the physical sciences. Husserl explained that intersubjective knowledge can be conceptual - for example, through my fear of spiders, I can come to know your fear of snakes. Although our subjective experiences differ, the intersubjective phenomenon of fear transcends those differences. Husserl writes:

> 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, (1964/1929, p.34).

To summarise, Alchemy Methodology is informed, philosophically, by the epistemology of Objectivism and the theoretical perspective of Transcendental Phenomenology (Husserl, 1964/1929). The research methods, that is, what the researcher *does* in pursuit of knowledge, align philosophically with the objectivism of the epistemology and Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology, which informs the theoretical perspective. This is how the process has unfolded in my experience of trialling the approach. Each method is highlighted to emphasise the sequential nature of the methodology:

Firstly, in keeping with Husserl's doctrine, I seek first-hand **Experience** of the phenomenon. At this stage I try to suspend any critical analysis. I allow time for the unconscious to do its work – making patterns of the complex subjective information derived from the experience. I avoid thinking too much at this stage. I allow for a time of incubation – the **Epoche**.

Later, and in a timely way, an a priori object will present itself. This object may materialise through my related creative pursuits – writing or painting, or perhaps through a dream or meditation. This is the **Epiphany.** At first I may not recognise my unexpected research object. In my experience, I have found that it will reappear if necessary. At this stage of the research I may write plays or narrative as a form of free-association, and the object will sometimes surface through the dialogue of a character. Other characters in the play or story will discuss and debate the image, and slowly introduce the research object into consciousness. This process is the **Elucidation**, or the time of clarification. Finally, as this is research and not art, I must explain my research findings. This is the time for scholarly analysis and **Explanation.** Only now, at the end of the process, should cognition have a voice. At first it must be silent, in order to heed the whisper of the unconscious.

5.   An example of Alchemy Methodology in practice.

Let me describe an example of how I have used Alchemy Methodology in research. In 2008 I was working as a research fellow on a project about personal (online) learning environments in Education. I was employed alongside technically gifted workers, but I was not naturally talented in that regard. We used to joke that I was the 'reality check', but actually that was probably the case. I was employed to research into the reluctance that some academics have towards using Web 2.0 technology. The research involved acquainting myself with Web 2.0 technology, such as Second Life, Twitter, Facebook, Delicious and other online environments, and mapping my learning process. This was still fairly new in 2007. I kept a blog to record my reflections, frustrations and triumphs (Vallack, 2009). Apart from that there were no restrictions. It was unstructured, and I wrote freely as the thoughts came to mind. In Freud's terms, I was 'free-associating'. Without the confines of guidelines, I enjoyed an exciting air of uncertainty and chaos. Those of us who creatively thrive in that environment are well suited to using phenomenology for inquiry. Others, however, will prefer attention to detail and predictable outcomes. They will find the whole-brained approach of Alchemy Phenomenology disconcerting. Many scholars, particularly more positivist researchers, are not be comfortable with the lack of structure, and they should use other research methodologies. This is a methodology for the intuitive researcher. Jung (Jung, 1933) explains intuition as a function of the unconscious and emphasises its importance to one's accumulation of knowledge.

The Web 2.0 learning process began with my own, subjective experience of the Web 2.0 phenomenon, all the while allowing space for what Husserl calls the "epoche". This is the magical (Gebser, 1986) period, where the unconscious works below the surface of consciousness. It has been recognised and named by other scholars such as Moustakas, who refers to this time as an 'incubation' (Moustakas, 1990) period. During the Epoche the researcher avoids, as much as possible, any inclination to hypothesise, or analyse the experience. When researching the Web 2.0 technology platforms in 2007, at first I just blogged about it as a kind of free-association. This provided a fertile environment through which the unconscious could speak through metaphor and image. Eventually (and this is the unnerving part, as there is no conscious control over when it will happen) I referred unwittingly, through my writing, to the myth of Echo and Narcissus. This was my Epiphany, but at first I did not recognise it. Then, as the Elucidation phase surfaced, and my blog again mentioned the myth of Echo and Narcissus, my conscious mind finally realised it was important. The whole process can seem like a leap of faith, as the researcher waits helplessly and patiently for the unconscious to present its fruits to cognition. For this reason, Alchemy Methodology only suits highly intuitive individuals with the confidence to let the process unfold in its own time. And it does unfold to produce results. And this is always surprising to me.

Once the Elucidation stage is reached, the researcher should engage cognitively with the insights presented. When the legend of Echo and Narcissus emerged, I was ready to allow my cognition to actively contribute to the process, and to explain any archetypal insights. The process began with an analysis of the legend, to understand why it was important. A reader will not understand the example without familiarity with the story. Here is a retelling of the story of Echo and Narcissus (Facinabao):

Echo was a beautiful nymph, fond of the woods and hills, where she devoted herself to woodland sports. She was a favorite of Diana, and attended her in the chase. But Echo had one failing; she was fond of talking, and whether in chat or argument, would have the last word.

One day Juno was seeking her husband, who, she had reason to fear, was amusing himself among the nymphs. Echo by her talk contrived to detain the goddess till the nymphs made their escape. When Juno discovered it, she passed sentence upon Echo in these words: "You shall forfeit the use of that tongue with which you have cheated me, except for that one purpose you are so fond of—reply. You shall still have the last word, but no power to speak first."

This nymph saw Narcissus, a beautiful youth, as he pursued the chase upon the mountains. She loved him and followed his footsteps. O how she longed to address him in the softest accents, and win him to converse! but (sic) it was not in her power.

She waited with impatience for him to speak first, and had her answer ready. One day the youth, being separated from his companions, shouted aloud, "Who's here?" Echo replied, "Here." Narcissus

looked around, but seeing no one, called out, "Come." Echo answered, "Come." As no one came, Narcissus called again, "Why do you shun me?" Echo asked the same question. "Let us join one another," said the youth.

The maid answered with all her heart in the same words, and hastened to the spot, ready to throw her arms about his neck. He started back, exclaiming, "Hands off! I would rather die than you should have me!" "Have me," said she; but it was all in vain. He left her, and she went to hide her blushes in the recesses of the woods.
From that time forth she lived in caves and among mountain cliffs. Her form faded with grief, till at last all her flesh shrank away. Her bones were changed into rocks and there was nothing left of her but her voice. With that she is still ready to reply to anyone who calls her, and keeps up her old habit of having the last word.

Narcissus's cruelty in this case was not the only instance. He shunned all the rest of the nymphs, as he had done poor Echo. One day a maiden who had in vain endeavoured to attract him uttered a prayer that he might some time or other feel what it was to love and meet no return of affection. The avenging goddess heard and granted the prayer.

There was a clear fountain, with water like silver, to which the shepherds never drove their flocks, nor the mountain goats resorted, nor any of the beasts of the forests; neither was it defaced with fallen leaves or branches, but the grass grew fresh around it, and the rocks sheltered it from the sun. Hither came one day the youth, fatigued with hunting, heated and thirsty.

He stooped down to drink, and saw his own image in the water; he thought it was some beautiful water-spirit living in the fountain. He stood gazing with admiration at those bright eyes, those locks curled like the locks of Bacchus or Apollo, the rounded cheeks, the ivory neck, the parted lips, and the glow of health and exercise over all. He fell in love with himself. He brought his lips near to take a kiss; he plunged his arms in to embrace the beloved object. It fled at the touch, but returned again after a moment and renewed the fascination.

He could not tear himself away; he lost all thought of food or rest, while he hovered over the brink of the fountain gazing upon his own image. He talked with the supposed spirit: "Why, beautiful being, do you shun me? Surely my face is not one to repel you. The nymphs love me, and you yourself look not indifferent upon me. When I stretch forth my arms you do the same; and you smile upon me and answer my beckonings with the like."

His tears fell into the water and disturbed the image. As he saw it depart, he exclaimed, "Stay, I entreat you! Let me at least gaze upon you, if I may not touch you." With this, and much more of the same kind, he cherished the flame that consumed him, so that by degrees he lost his colour, his vigour, and the beauty which formerly had so charmed the nymph Echo.

She kept near him, however, and when he exclaimed, "Alas! alas!" she answered him with the same words. He pined away and died; and when his shade passed the Stygian river, it leaned over the boat to catch a look of itself in the waters. The nymphs mourned for him, especially the water-nymphs; and when they smote their breasts Echo smote hers also. They prepared a funeral pile and would have burned the body, but it was nowhere to be found; but in its place a flower, purple within, and surrounded with white leaves, which bears the name and preserves the memory of Narcissus (Facinabao, retrieved 2017).

So what did my analysis tell me about academics and technology? Certainly my story is neither as glamorous or romantic as the delightful myth, however there are parallel insights to be gleaned through the plot. My blog showed that like Echo, I felt inarticulate when I tried to talk about online environments. I did not know the meaning of the acronyms, and I was unfamiliar with the many websites that seemed to be known to my colleagues. I was not computer-literate, and could not shortcut my way around the keyboard - like Echo, I was relatively mute and only able to follow the lead of others. Most poignantly, however, the technology that I wished to engage with was cold and unfeeling. Like Narcissus, it would not empathise or sympathise. It was self-contained and sufficient unto itself. I did not matter to it at all, even though it mattered to me! In the final

step of the methodology, the explanation, I suggested that some academics, like me, may need to be able to engage socially and emotionally in order to engage with the learning. Was the myth of Echo and Narcissus the key to understanding why some academics struggle with using technology? And if so, perhaps we need to look at the way we are teaching technical literacy in an academic environment?

6. Conclusions

This paper sets out the original research methodology, called Alchemy Methodology. It is an application of pure phenomenology, which mandates that one must experience the phenomenon first-hand. This idea opposes the popular misunderstanding that phenomenology is interview-based research, which is informed by narratives of another's 'lived experience' (Giorgi, 1985).

Our traditional, quantitative and qualitative approaches to research work well when we are able to rationally isolate one question or hypothesis, and deal with it in an isolated way. Cognitively, we deal well with such simple tasks. We even have software to help us do it. However, in an uncontrolled, chaotic research and learning environment, the information overload can be overwhelming for our limited cognition, and the software is limited. I put forward a methodology that champions the unconscious to deal with complexity through arts-based methods. This part of the mind, which is adept at sorting through chaos, can be engaged through Alchemy Methodology. The unconscious recalls experiences and reveals solutions to complicated problems, through dream, art and authorship – if only we attune to the meanings therein. Phenomenology, akin to psychoanalysis, draws on the art of interpreting the language of the unconscious. Arts-inspired researchers may find Alchemy Methodology a useful, step-by-step approach for researching their own, first-person experiences.

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