

# Soliloquy Methodology: A Cradle for Credible, Practice-Based Research

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**Abstract:** Practice-based research is becoming increasingly popular with scholars of creative arts, writing and even business studies. The author is currently using practice-based research in conjunction with her original, Soliloquy Methodology, to address the research question: *How does my application of Soliloquy Methodology produce insight into the phenomenon of judgement?* The practice component, which aligns with a method in the framework of Soliloquy, involves writing, directing and staging a full play about human judgement. Through the practice, new insights into the research question have been gleaned. Debate is now emerging about the validity of practice-based approaches – is it academic inquiry or is it just art? This paper will argue that whereas artists do not need to be able to explain their work (as the work speaks for itself), academic researchers using arts-based methods do. The very nature of academic inquiry requires a solidly aligned methodology to service the research question, along with clearly articulated research outcomes. This paper will look at the academy's recent attempts to find suitable frameworks for practice-based research and then contrast these with the author's alternative and original methodology, Soliloquy Methodology. It will argue the latter both compliments the creative nature of the practice and validates the need for academic structure and explanation. Soliloquy Methodology has been developed over two decades as an adaptation of Husserl's philosophical, pure phenomenology. The author will describe her current, practice-based research that uses creativity - specifically play writing and performance - as a research method. It will demonstrate how this method cradles comfortably in the theoretical framework of Soliloquy Methodology. There is potential for different and new knowledge to be accessed through arts practice. Answers come initially in abstract forms, which must then be interpreted and articulated by the researcher. This paper will emphasise the need for investigators to be vigilant about rigor in their research. It will demonstrate how this is being achieved with reference to the author's current, theatre-inspired inquiry into judgement. Furthermore, it will detail the research framework of Soliloquy Methodology for possible use in future arts-practice-based projects.

**Keywords:** Practice-based research, Soliloquy Methodology, Arts-based methods, Phenomenology

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## 1. Introduction

I have embarked on a second PhD. I don't need this for my career, but it greatly supports the development of my work in research methodology. The new PhD builds upon the methodology I established over the past two decades, in that it adds an explicit, practice-based research component to the framework. I am writing and producing a play, which will serve as an essential method to contribute to the overarching methodology of Soliloquy. Having been accepted now as a PhD student in the discipline of Creative Arts (my previous PhD is in Education), I have access to expert guidance by performing arts supervisors who will help me to execute the play I write. Additionally, I have full access to professional theatre facilities at the Conservatorium in Mackay, Australia, and I can work with the trained musical theatre students at the university. Had I not associated myself with CQUniversity, I would not be able to facilitate this kind of research.

I am increasingly mindful that a PhD using practice-based research should be scrutinised on several levels. Some artists may just want to do art and hope to also pick up a degree along the way. I argue that this is inappropriate, as the purposes of art and research differ. However, I contend that art may serve as a method within the research design. Manghani (2021) agrees:

*.... One of the common mistakes of the PhD application is the outlining of a pre-formed 'project'. Sometimes, projects simply are projects, which can be pursued equally well (and often more satisfactorily) outside of a PhD. Sometimes projects are useful vehicles or containers within which to pursue the practice of your PhD, but in this case they need to be starting points, not endpoints. In short, the difference is between a 'project' (which practically speaking can be executed) and a 'research project' (which will have specific parameters, but its final shape is not known) (Manghani, 2021).*

When I embarked on my research question about the nature of judgement, I did not know what I would find. I knew I wanted to write a play, but it was not pre-planned to any extent. I followed my tacit (Csikszentmihali, 1997) inclination to read into mythology – Greek, Mesopotamian, Viking and Egyptian. The information gave me ideas for setting the play. Mostly, the breakthroughs in thought came through the voices of the characters as they dictated to me their lines. I know that may sound strange, but it is not uncommon for writers to feel as though characters are speaking through them (Flood, 2020). I suspect that when this happens, I am accessing

my creative unconscious. This phenomenon aligns with the methodology of Soliloquy. One of the steps is to embark on a period of quiet waiting for information to be given – the Epoche. This is followed by a breakthrough to conscious awareness of what it all means – the Epiphany. The play writing ushered me through these essential methods.

I contend that the theatre art in my practice-based PhD served as vehicle to take me to the research outcomes about judgement. The writing has a clear place in the research framework. It completes the ‘Epoche’ method in the overall design of Soliloquy Methodology, which is detailed below. In the past I have used this established the methodology (Vallack, 2021) to reach outcomes, but this new research is an attempt to analyse *how* it works rather than (as was previously done) only *what* outcomes are produced. As I draw near to the completion of this PhD, I see that my research question – *How does Soliloquy Methodology produce insight into the phenomenon of judgement?* – has been clarified through the practice of play writing. I argue that creative writing and playmaking engages the unconscious mind, which according to Milton Erickson, is much smarter than even our intelligent, conscious minds. He said, “Trust your unconscious; it knows more than you do.”(Erikson, 1979).

I will firstly show the framework of Soliloquy Methodology so that the place for practice-based research is evident. It cradles in the Epoche method. I will then explain the ways in which the focus for this specific research, the phenomenon of judgement, was clarified through Soliloquy, and through this application of practice-based research.

## 2. Soliloquy Methodology as a Framework for Arts-Practice-Based Research

Soliloquy Methodology is a research approach developed from the pure, transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. It takes the philosophical foundations of phenomenology, which Husserl developed one hundred years ago, and sets out methods or steps through which it can be applied to research. I have argued previously (Vallack, 2014; Vallack, 2016) that phenomenology has been misunderstood and maligned by followers of Heidegger and the existential school of thought throughout the twentieth century. It is evident that the propaganda espoused by this movement has misrepresented phenomenology. The ‘new’(Crotty, 1996) approach appealed so well to 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars, who in their pursuit of qualitative forms of inquiry seemed to have avoided reading the primary sources. The secondary sources compounded the misunderstandings until Husserl’s phenomenology became distorted and unrecognisable. The confusion caused by the misreading of Husserl has seen students avoid using phenomenology, believing it to be too difficult. It is more than difficult – it is non-sensical, and nothing like the original phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Over the past twenty years of inquiry, I have found the many ‘new’ versions of phenomenology were inconsistent and confusing. The problem is that the entire theoretical framework is different to that which holds Husserl’s phenomenology. I have attempted to clarify the epistemological differences in the following table.

**Table 1: The epistemological differences between Soliloquy Methodology and Existential Phenomenology**

### Husserl’s phenomenology as applied through Soliloquy Methodology

Theoretical Framework	Soliloquy Methodology based on Husserl’s original phenomenology	‘New’ (Crotty’s term) Phenomenology as manipulated by existential interpreters
<b>Epistemology</b>	Objectivism	Constructionism
<b>Theoretical Perspective</b>	Transcendental Phenomenology	Interpretive research
<b>Methodology</b>	Soliloquy Methodology	Interview-based data collection and theme analysis
<b>Methods</b>	<p>EXPERIENCE – The researcher works only from hir own experience.</p> <p>EPOCHE – A period of altered consciousness, wherein the unconscious mind controls the direction of the inquiry. This may be though dream, meditation or creative, practice-based research for example.</p> <p>EPIPHANY – The unconscious presents an insight as (perhaps cryptic) an image, myth or metaphor, for example. This will need to be interpreted by the conscious mind in the next step.</p> <p>EXPLICATION – The conscious mind makes sense of the information so far and applies it to the research question.</p>	<p>Methods vary, but generally include interviewing a number of coresearchers with an interest in the topic and drawing themes from the responses.</p> <p>(Note: Husserl insisted that phenomenology was a process done only by the researcher on hir personal experience. Only then, he argues, can the outcome elevate from being the most subjective to having an application for the most intersubjective or universal.</p>

Theoretical Framework	Soliloquy Methodology based on Husserl's original phenomenology	'New' (Crotty's term) Phenomenology as manipulated by existential interpreters
	EXPLANATION – The researcher explains the outcomes presented through the Soliloquy process.	It is this point that 20 <sup>th</sup> century positivists could not accommodate.)

Pursuing phenomenology as a postgraduate student last century, I became confounded by the contradictions throughout the literature. Finally, I came across a small group of philosophers who saw through the issues and helped me to clarify an understanding of phenomenology. In 1999, when the misconstrued views were becoming commonplace in Australia, Professor Michael Crotty presented a Keynote address on 'Phenomenology' at the Conference for Qualitative Research. He distinguished between Husserl's original 'transcendental' concept and what he called 'new' phenomenology (Crotty 1996/1998). When I asked him about it later, he did me a great service by signposting the direction for my future research. He identified that I was doing 'transcendental phenomenology' and mused that not many had followed Husserl down that path. With a clear direction, I could then go forth into the philosophy of Husserl. At first, I found the philosophy difficult to read, but gradually, with the help of my philosophical dictionaries, I began to get an inkling for it. It resonated with my postpositivist and intuitive inclinations and helped me to articulate what later became Soliloquy Methodology.

Reading the works of philosophers who understood the transcendental concepts better than I, helped to confirm my grasp of phenomenology. I learned from Hopkins (Hopkins, 1999) that Heidegger, a former student of Husserl's, had taken the terminology of the master and distorted the meanings to create an approach which amounted to little more than basic interview-based inquiry. He did this as he chose to limit his vision to existential, science-based thinking of the twentieth century. Ironically, his distorted interpretation appealed to most scholars in the twentieth century, who also could not think beyond empirical inquiry (Sheldrake, 2013).

Some years later, Soliloquy Methodology emerged as an application for Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Husserl never set out an explicit approach for doing phenomenology, but he did set down guidelines. These included the need for researchers doing phenomenology to only start from personal experience of the given phenomenon. One must start with subjective experience, which when reduced, will reveal essences that relate to humanity generally. He quoted St Augustine who said, "Do not wish to go out; go back into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man"(Husserl, 1977). Focus on the personal experience will eventually present the researcher with profound, 'intersubjective' outcomes to the phenomenological research. Through the steps that emerged to form Soliloquy Methodology, I have found the research question is answered in the form of archetypes and metaphor, which the researcher must then interpret. So, what is an archetype? Neville points out there have been slightly different understandings, yet the gist of archetype is held in his definition:

*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 'principal 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)*

Transcendental Phenomenology uses archetypes to present a priori forms relating to the research inquiry. This was the final word in the philosopher's lifetime refinement of the phenomenology. Those who followed Heidegger away from Husserl's insights did not understand phenomenology (Hopkins, 2011). They missed the point of Husserl's focus on a priori objects and consequently distorted his terminology to make it mundane and therefore familiar. Much of the phenomenology we see used today in social research uses this unremarkable approach. But Husserl's phenomenology was ultimately one that transcended the mundane. The objects it summoned up were archetypal and therefore held universal significance. Starting with the researcher's own, personal experience of the phenomenon, awareness is given through the stillness of the Epoche. It is given up to consciousness from the depths of the unconscious – and from the collective unconscious (Jung, 1953) – to present truths that apply to every person. This is the Epiphany. In the following prototype example, I will describe how the epiphany manifested in this PhD research about judgement.

### 3. The Prototype: How Practice-Based Research Contributed Answers to the Question of Judgement

One of my supervisors identified that Soliloquy was a kind of back-the-front approach to research. Whereas most PhDs start with a review of existing literature on the topic, Soliloquy requires the researcher to avoid this to a degree. Rather than consider what others have written on the topic, the research fills the curious void with the individual's information and original imaginings about the topic itself. In this example, I was drawn to understanding the notion of judgement. There were personal motivating factors in this choice, which are essential for the phenomenologist.

Here is a summary of my personal journey.

Many years ago I shared accommodation with a young psychologist who was training in psychoanalysis. At that time, I was an actor doing further work on method acting. There are strong parallels between these two endeavours, as the method actor analyses his personal life to find the truth in his performance. We would say then that we were not acting but rather, we were being. My friend would bring home various psychology tests and we would amuse ourselves with them. The Myers-Briggs test (Briggs and Myers, 1977/2011), which is still in popular use, is based on Jung's personality types:

- Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I)
- Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)
- Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)
- Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)

Individuals score various amounts on each indicator, resulting in an overall profile. I was surprised that as an ENFP, I had no score for Judging (J). None.

My apparent lack of judgement became problematic when teaching Creative Arts Education. The university required allocated grades for student art works. This was perplexing, as I could see merits in each work, and although I wrote the required marking criteria as broadly (and vaguely) as possible, I still had difficulty judging art in that somewhat punitive way. Fortunately, I was able to assign marking to a qualified art teacher, who just knew how to grade the works. She would have been blessed with a more useful personality type I suppose.

I investigated judgement as a topic for this PhD. I had met the first requirement for the phenomenology – personal experience with the lack of it. Next was the Epoche. This time is the most blissful for ENFPs like me. It is a time of flow – with feelings rather than rational thought; with dreams and intuition and for embracing the perceptions as they appear. I found myself drawn to ancient mythologies. So that is where I began. While my fellow researchers were cleverly discerning data, I was reading about the Gods of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, the Vikings and the Christian bible. The last one may seem odd, but the final Book of Revelation contains stories of dragons and headless horsemen, so it seemed to fit. I started to see parallels in the texts. There were intercultural versions of great floods and of folk turning into pillars of salt or rock. It was if the great myths were not cultural but rather archetypal. They belonged to humankind. That resonated with my readings of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, wherein the personal truth is a microcosm for a universal truth. However, at this stage I did not know what this had to do with my research question. Was it all irrelevant? I feared that six months into my PhD I was only enjoying stories that may have nothing to do with the research. This can be a time of anxiety for the phenomenologist. Fortunately, my previous attempts at trialling Soliloquy had convinced me that in time the unconscious would reveal to the conscious mind the connections. And when it did this for the current research, as always, it took me by surprise.

During this Epoche, I began writing a play. I knew it would be about judgement, but I knew not how it would unfold. My personal experience as a hobby cat breeder and cat show judge became the starting point. (Of course, I struggle with judging cats as well as art works, but this research is helping.) The play starts in the theatre foyer as a 'real' cat show with real cats. It then progresses to the auditorium and the Egyptian Hall of Truth, where mortals are judged by cat goddesses to determine their fates in the Afterlife. The readings had informed me that according to Egyptian mythology, there are two phases to qualifying for eternal bliss in the Afterlife. The first is a criteria-based checklist whereby one must be able to testify that one has not sinned. This is a convoluted process, involving protocols about remembering every name of the forty-two inquisitors and being able to deny participation in all of the listed sins – eavesdropping, kissing, being cruel to animals, for example. Then, as if to usurp phase one altogether, the second step in determining the fate of the deceased is to weigh the victim's dismembered heart against a feather. Here, the process goes from rational, criteria-based

assessment to a metaphysical and absurd one. According to the mythology, the heart is removed from the individual by Anubis, the God of death. It is then weighed by the great goddess, Ma'at. She has a special feather, which she places on one end of the scale. On the other is placed the heart. If the heart is heavy with sin, it is tossed to the greedy Goddess Ammit – part crocodile, part lion and part hippopotamus - who will devour the heart. When this happens, the victim will just cease to exist. They are no more. If however, the heart is pure and light, the deceased will go forth to the place where there is joy and peace and where everyone known and loved by the candidate will be there to eternally celebrate reunion. (Unless, I suppose, they have ceased to exist?)

During the Epoche, I drafted the play script. Like many writers, I hear voices of characters in my head, and follow their dictated dialogue, editing occasionally. I believe this process is a way of accessing the voice of my unconscious mind. In the past, when trialling Soliloquy Methodology, I recalled dreams, which would inform me and provide archetypal insights for conscious recognition and analysis. This current research, using practice-based scriptwriting, is another way to reach the phenomenon; a means to an end.

The Epiphany is the point where the unconscious offers up to consciousness the answer to the research question. I recall the day I sat at my desk and considered that all of what I had been doing. Although engaging, it did not seem to be informing my research. Then, as if the little egg of truth had incubated, I began widening my focus from the characters to the play as a whole. The script was showing me that the nature of judgement was two-fold. Basically, judgement is something we do intuitively, on an instinctive level. We intuit our judgements – in an absurd way – like the heart and the feather. However, we have also learned to be rational beings and pride ourselves on logic. We do not take seriously that which is not 'evidence-based'. So, to justify what we already know on a primal level, we invent logical checklists by which to rationalise our decisions. The Egyptians use the forty-two negative confessions. My university uses criteria-based rubrics to measure student success. My cat club uses a 'Judges' Standard', as a guide for assessing the quality of each animal. But as a wise cat judge advised me when I was trainee, 'a good cat just jumps out at you (not in a literal sense, of course) . You just know it when you see it.' She said that we can then use the Judges' Standard to qualify what we already know. Similarly, when I need to modify the artworks marked by my tutor, I can explain my gut decision using the criteria. It supports my preference for works that are light-hearted and fine. It supports my inclinations that come from a place that is deeper than consciousness.

Writing the play allowed my unconscious to take me to a position on judgement that I could not have worked out by just thinking about it. It is not an approach for everyone, as many would not tolerate the surrendering of so much control. If the researcher can withstand the period of anxiety caused by not knowing what is occurring under the surface of consciousness, it is possible that more original outcomes to the research question will be facilitated. In the Book of Revelation, it prescribes that for one to be judged favourably, one must simply believe. Similarly, to apply Soliloquy Methodology, one must have faith that the unconscious will produce an answer worthy of scholarship. I am a believer in this regard, although I confess that it still surprises me a little when it happens.

The Explication stage of Soliloquy Methodology is where the conscious mind makes sense of it all. I found myself drawn to literature that resonated with my findings. This was a natural means to containment and for scoping my research. In this case, it drew me to the writing of Immanuel Kant's Critique of judgement. I continue to persevere with Kant's translations, for I somehow sense that it will eventually breakthrough my consciousness to reach understanding. For now, I struggle, yet some parts seem to describe an appreciation of judgement similar to my own experience. In the editorial it is written,

*...the Critique of Judgement has two main divisions; it treats first (the Aesthetic) of the philosophy of Taste, the Beautiful and the Sublime in Nature; and secondly, of the Teleology of nature's working. It is a curious literary parallel that St. Augustine hints (Confessions iv. 15) that he had written a book, De Pulchro et Úpto, in which these apparently distinct topics were combined....A beautiful object has no purpose external to itself and the observer; but a useful object serves further ends. Both, however, may be brought under the higher category of things that are reckoned purposive by the Judgement. (Kant, 1882)*

As I understand it, Kant identifies Aesthetic judgement as the felt appreciation of things, whereas teleological judgement as the measured and applicable kind. Nevertheless, the two kinds of judgement set out by Kant are reminiscent of the two kinds presented through this research using Soliloquy. The play script reveals that one approach to judgement is light of heart yet powerful (aesthetic?); the other is laboured with rhetoric yet applicable to mundane needs (teleological?). My research revealed two types of judgement. One is the tacit knowledge of desire; the other is beholden to the calculated list designed to justify a score.

This PhD involves the third and most comprehensive trial of Soliloquy Methodology. The topic is new, but the methodology has again presented the phenomenon of the research in the form of an archetypal myth – that of the Egyptian Hall of Truth. In all trials of Soliloquy Methodology, the question comes from the passion of the researcher. Then, through the Epoche and the Epiphany comes an unconscious synthesis of knowledge, which is channelled through creative writing, dream and daydreaming. Here are the research outcomes of the three trials of Soliloquy Methodology so far:

The current research shows – Judgement is essentially two-fold. Like in the Egyptian Hall of Truth, it is administered superficially according to a set of criteria and then decisively through unfathomable magic that is preference.

Last time it was – Working with technology for some academics is like the myth of Echo and Narcissus. Like Echo, I felt inarticulate because I don't know the language and acronyms of technology, and the technology itself is like Narcissus, who cares not for my frustration and has complete lack of empathy (Vallack, 2011).

The first time it was – Directing a play is like the archetypal narrative of the Wizard of Oz. Like the Wizard in the story, the director's vision and power is somewhat mythical. The actors, like Dorothy and friends, already hold the power they seek. However, it is the Wizard, and the director, who can enable them with that knowledge (Vallack, 2014).

In this final, Explanation phase of Soliloquy Methodology, I am now writing about how it has shown judgement to be two-fold.

#### **4. Soliloquy Methodology as a Cradle for Other Research Projects**

I have assessed theses using Autoethnography and practice-based approaches, and to be candid, I wondered about the degree to which these inquiries had implications beyond each case. I will choose not to assess such work in future unless they are well supported with an aligned methodology that makes possible further scholarly knowledge. I believe it is important that PhD research presents (or attempts to show and can explain where it has failed) new insights. I agree with Manghani, who puts it this way:

*Even cross-cutting research needs to pertain to methodological frameworks, and for the researcher to be sufficiently competent in the relevant methods (or at least to be able to acquire sufficient competency through the process of developing the research). What is vital is an appropriate balance, and this can be understood through the requirement to create (or interpret) new knowledge and to demonstrate a systematic understanding of a body of knowledge or field of enquiry ....*

*The idea of merely producing an artwork (or collection of artworks), i.e. to simply submit your 'practice' alone seems spurious. No other subject area can be thought to do anything equivalent. (Manghani, 2021)*

I present Soliloquy Methodology as a framework for practice-based research, as it allows artists to start with their passion and what they need to say yet, it goes beyond this. They must form the desire for knowledge into a research question and then leave it planted in their unconscious mind. This is easier than it may sound. Have you ever told yourself you need to wake up at a certain time and found it happens? It is possible to leave instructions for your unconscious.

The proposed question will grow and return to the practitioner in symbolic form, at a later stage in their art-making process. The artist will know when it happens. If not, the unconscious will continue to knock at the door of consciousness with the delivery. Once the metaphor or the myth or the visual icon is presented, the artist will recognise the archetypal significance of the outcome and can then explain it.

#### **5. Conclusion**

My current PhD research will offer insights into the elusive concept of judgement. It has also provided an opportunity to refine Soliloquy Methodology and introduce to it arts practice as method. Further to a useful suggestion by the reviewer of this paper, my future work should also explore the possibility that Soliloquy may support a natural perceiver when placed in a position where they are expected to be judgemental.

I see now how practice-based research – the direct line to the unconscious – can facilitate Soliloquy Methodology's creative methods of the Epoche and Epiphany. It is the vehicle for research, not the outcome. I see that the artist who uses Soliloquy Methodology to move through subjective practice to an intersubjective (Husserl, 1964) scholarly knowledge, can contribute to the academy.

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