

## Chapter 14

# Myth, Magic & Method: Using Subphenomenology to Analyse Weblog Data

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Researchers from all disciplines are increasingly inclined to acknowledge intuition and reflective practice as a valid ways of knowing. But in technology and areas other than the arts, this thinking is still new, and few strategic frameworks are available to assist researchers to approach intuitive research with rigor. In this chapter, Subphenomenology is laid out as a methodology for analysing weblog writing, as data for research. As a template for other first-person research, the framework showcases the author's own experiences as a novice Web 2.0 user. Starting with the research question, "Why do I resist learning with technology?" I show how candid blogs are analysed to reveal an archetypal image of Echo and Narcissus in response to the research question. This chapter formulates how Subphenomenology uses intuition to access unconscious knowing, and reveal an archetypal image of the research in question. The case studied, like all case studies, may not be applicable to every learner who, in the described sample, shies away from technology. But it may provide profound insight to those who self-identify with the given universal myth. Subphenomenology is a formula, which can be applied to any weblog data, or indeed any creative work, to enable researchers to understand more about the universal implications of their most subjective reflections.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61692-791-2.ch014

## INTRODUCTION

A famous psychologist once said:

*And it is very important for a person to know their unconscious is smarter than they are.... So you build your technique around instructions that allow the conscious mind to withdraw from the task and leave it all up to the unconscious (Erickson in Neville, 1989, p.68).*

Such a technique is Subphenomenology. The method of free-association data collection lifts the lid of the unconscious so that images and forms may appear to the conscious mind through dream and meditation.

C. Q. University, in Australia, has a current research project that is seeking to better understand the nature of web-based Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) and the consequential implications of these PLEs for teaching and learning. The proverbial elephant in the lounge room however, is that many otherwise capable academics, still resist technology. As a Research Fellow with this project, and oddly, a self-confessed (but now evangelised) technophobe, I used my blog data to map and analyse the learning curve resulting from my new and frequent encounters with Web 2.0 technology. Using an arts-based, qualitative methodology that I had developed and published earlier, I analysed the blog entries to gain insights into this phenomenon of academic ‘end-user’ resistance to technology. The methodology is called Subtextual Phenomenology (Vallack, 2005a), indicating subliminal meaning behind the language used to describe the phenomena. For the sake of eloquence, and possibly because I have now served time in the technologists’ den of acronyms, where everything can seem abbreviated to the point of obscurity, I will hence-forth refer to the methodology as Subphenomenology. This chapter is about the structure of Subphenomenology, and it demonstrates an approach to using blog data for research. Firstly I will set out a brief description

of the current research context in which I am using Subphenomenology, along with the research results. Then I will present the structure of this methodology and argue for its philosophical rigor. Finally I will illustrate the methodology with the outcome of our current research and demonstrate the potential of Subphenomenology as a template for further blog analysis.

So what is the outcome of the PLE inquiry into academic technophobia? Using Subphenomenology, it became evident that the relationship between a recalcitrant technologist and the technology itself may be akin to that of Echo and Narcissus. Here is the story of Echo and Narcissus:

*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. Oh, how she longed to address him in the softest accents, and win him to converse, but 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*

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