

E. Christopher Mare  
KA\*753C – Integrating Research and Practice  
Self-Evaluation  
5 August 2012

The purpose of this study was to investigate first-person methodologies to the study of consciousness so as to gain familiarity with integrating them into research scenarios. Three distinct first-person methodologies were practiced during the duration of this study, as outlined by Varela and Shear (1999, p. 7):

|   | <i>Method</i>                                 | <i>Procedure</i>  | <i>Validation</i>                            |
|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | Introspection                                 | Attention during a defined task   | Verbal accounts, mediated                    |
| 2 | Phenomenology                                 | Reduction-suspension  | Descriptive invariants                       |
| 3 | Meditation:<br>Samatha; Mahamudra;<br>Zen; TM | Sustained attention;<br>uncontrived awareness;<br>suspension of mental activity | Traditional accounts,<br>scientific accounts |

I will now briefly evaluate the results from the practice of each:

Introspection: I found this to be a very difficult practice to document. While I could say that, within the context of this study, I found myself introspecting at various times throughout the day, I never acquired the discipline to write down and record the contents of the introspecting. I intended to keep a journal that would be revisited at regular intervals but I discovered resistance to this practice. This may have been because I have journaled at other times in my life yet rarely have gone back to see what was written – so what’s the use? On another level, during those few times during this study when I actually picked up the journal to write, it seemed as if I would be just ‘thinking about thinking’ – and that felt very tedious. In the end, not enough data was collected to document in this self-evaluation. It may be that Introspection, as a first-person methodology, is useful at time-scales larger than the one allocated for this particular study.

Interestingly, I *was* able to find enthusiasm for regularly recording a *dream* journal. While I have not read anywhere that this is a generally accepted practice of Introspection, I would argue here that recording the contents of dreams may be considered a viable first-person methodology for the study of consciousness. Accessing the dream world is an exploration of the *subconscious*, a *pre-thinking*, *pre-verbalizing* realm that may actually *prefigure* introspecting thoughts throughout the day. Indeed, I found myself regularly contemplating the dreams I recorded to gain perspective for the unfolding of events in waking conscious life. I discovered one source (Roberts, 1974) which recommended the practice of shortening the habitual period of sleep to just five or six hours, and then adding a short nap in

the middle of the day, so as to accentuate the experience of alternating between dream and waking reality, that is, between subconscious and conscious life, thus affording a sense of continuity between the two. I will enclose a few pages from my dream journal as an Appendix to this self-evaluation.

Phenomenology: For this aspect of my KA\*753C study, I participated in an online seminar offered through Fielding by Prof. Valerie M. Bentz, Ph.D., called “Phenomenological Writing.” Over the course of a quarter, participants practiced writing phenomenological protocols and other informative pieces related to the following themes: 1) Lived Experience, 2) Etymology, 3) Existentials, 4) Earliest Most, 5) Not Present Opposite, 6) Essential Structure, 7) Techniques, and 8) Lifeworld. I found this to be a very useful seminar for practicing and refining my phenomenological writing skills. It also was very enjoyable to be able to practice *spontaneous* writing, in the phenomenological tradition, as opposed to the deliberate – and often dry and pedantic – scholarly writing required for the rest of the doctoral degree process.

The appearance of this seminar was timed fortuitously as I now enter my dissertation process, for I have proposed using phenomenology as my primary research methodology. My dissertation research will focus upon the phenomenological experience of ‘moving through’ the contrasting settlement morphologies of ‘grid’ and ‘organic.’ Recording this experience using the technique of ‘bracketing’ in preparation for the ‘epoche’ will have been greatly assisted by the practice obtained during this seminar.

As a result of this seminar, I have gained increased appreciation for phenomenology as a first-person research methodology. The study of consciousness is inherently *subjective*; third-person methodologies can only ever *approximate* the experience. Since consciousness, I believe, is the ubiquitous substratum, the innate progenitor, to every other dimension of life, I would hope that this first-person research methodology will continue to gain prominence within the research community. The eight essays I wrote for this aspect of my KA\*753C study are enclosed in an Appendix to this self-evaluation.

Meditation: For this aspect of my KA\*753C study, I designed and undertook what I have called a “Transformation Intensive.” This was an ambitious schedule of spiritual exercises which have the reputation for contributing to “transformation of consciousness.” I entered this study as a researcher: by paying careful attention to the effects produced by this concentrated period of spiritual practice, I wanted to discover if I could indeed notice some sort of transformation, while it was actually happening. This was intimately subjective, first-person research.

Varela and Shear list “meditation” as one of the recognized first-person methodologies to the study of consciousness. In my schedule, I allocated two times during the day for disciplined sitting meditation practice: one early in the morning and another right before bed. I also included in the schedule two times during the day for yoga practice: one in the morning

and another in the afternoon. Additionally, I added a pranayama practice and a chanting practice during the morning exercises – thus there were six scheduled spiritual practices each day. I kept an ongoing record of the consistency of the Intensive in the form of a calendrical wall chart. There were six boxes for each day, one box for each of the exercises, and five weeks total per chart. Once the five-week period of practice had been recorded, I could then tally the total numbers for the practice of each exercise.

I anticipated the value of such an exercise – the recording of a Transformation Intensive as first-person methodology to the study of consciousness – well in advance of the Phenomenological Writing seminar. The first day of recording data was 4 July 2011, about 13 months ago. I now have eleven full rounds (of five weeks each) of collected data. Some patterns have become apparent: for example, the practice of morning yoga started ambitiously but then dropped out almost completely, while the practice of afternoon yoga increasingly gained in consistency until the most recent round, where eighteen days (out of thirty-five) of practice were recorded (51.4%) – a new record! Also a new record in this most recent round were twenty-two days of morning meditation practice (62.8%). The appearance of two new records in the most recent round of recording suggests an habituation to disciplined spiritual practice. As a result of this Transformation Intensive – a form of first-person research methodology – spiritual practice has become routinized into my daily rhythm. I did practice before the Intensive; yet it was quite random, and there could be long spells with no practice at all. Now, I think, the practice has become more integrated into my self-identity, such that if I miss a couple days in a row of, say, morning meditation, I start to feel something missing. I don't think I could ever go back to no practice at all. This could be an indication that transformation has occurred.

There is another facet to the data that also strongly suggests transformation, and that is the results from recording alcohol use on the wall chart. I can confess here, in the context of this study, that I had a problem with alcohol in my 20s. I came from a family with a history of alcohol indulgence and then went into the Navy when I was 19 and jumped right into it! I must admit, I did have lots of fun but it was not a sustainable sort of fun. I've discovered that as I mature, I have less and less interest in intoxication and its associated lifestyle – and this, of course, mirrors almost exactly an *increase* in interest in obtaining the benefits that spiritual practice may bring. Therefore, one of the goals of the Transformation Intensive was to see if I could replace alcohol use with spiritual practice – and the results definitely show a trend toward decreasing usage as the Intensive progressed. For example, Round 1 shows 16 days of alcohol usage, while Round 10 was down to just 5 days of alcohol usage out of 35. My goal is to get down to merely drinking a bottle of wine on Friday night, and that's it. I'm excited now to see just one mark a week noted on the wall chart; and that is real positive motivation, to see the rest of the days unmarked, clean, free of intoxication.

While these two benefits of the Intensive do suggest “transformation,” somehow I was hoping for something more, something ‘magical.’ I do seem to have a modified outlook on the

world – an increased sense of acceptance or perhaps the indifference of a detached observer, almost as if I was in a play and performing my assigned role – yet this sense might have transpired on its own, without any Intensive. I am still holding out for one more specific indication that a transformation has taken place: I announced to the universe the wish that I want to be funded to complete my Dissertation, so that I don't have to take out any more student loans. If that wish comes true, if some sort of funding is arranged, then I can say for sure that the Transformation Intensive was a resounding success: I am operating on an augmented energy level! I will enclose as Appendices copies of my wall chart.

## References

---

- Roberts, J. (1974). *The nature of personal reality*. Toronto: Bantam Books
- Varela, F. & J. Shear, eds. (1999). *The view from within: First-person approaches to the study of consciousness*. Bowling Green, OH: Imprint Academic