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PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE ANALYSIS OF MUSIC  
Report from Binghamton  
by Judy Lochhead

The study of music based on the concepts and methods of phenomenological philosophy is a relatively recent development within both music theory and musicology, and the occurrence of a special session devoted to this topic at the 1986 meeting of MTSNYS indicates its growing importance. Since phenomenology as a basis for music study is a new development, one might well expect the state of research in this field to be "pre-paradigmatic" in Kuhn's sense. The range and variety of papers delivered during the session confirmed that expectation. There was indeed an intensity and excitement in the ideas presented by the speakers that attested to the exploration of new paradigms.

While the three central papers of the program (by Brodhead, Atcherson, and Justin) presented a variety of approaches, there was a similarity among them owing to their shared philosophical base -- that of phenomenology. The primary focus of a phenomenological approach is the human experience of music. To a greater or lesser extent, many analytic approaches are nowadays concerned with the experience of music. The phenomenological approach is, however, explicitly and strongly focused on music as a heard phenomenon, as something that has existential structure and meaning. While a concern with music as heard or experienced seems at first a simple claim, its consequences are considerable. For instance, what is the status of the score with respect to a "heard phenomenon," what role do our theoretical notions about music play in our experience of it, what is the piece -- the heard music or the score, and what analytic methods may be used to study a sounding phenomenon?

Although the phenomenological approach generates new questions, it also provides answers to existing questions. For example, recent music often poses problems for the analyst or critic because it resists the received categories of musical structure or because it doesn't have a score. A phenomenological approach to analysis provides some workable solutions to these problems. And further, the approach has proven interesting and fruitful for other, more traditional bodies of music; applied to this music, a phenomenological approach offers a fresh perspective.

In order for interested readers to pursue the ideas of phenomenology and how they have been or may be applied to music, a selected bibliography is given below. I have chosen those works which are most pertinent to a music scholar learning the field. Also included are some references to "reader response" theory in literary criticism as an instance of a parallel development in another discipline.

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