In this article, we hope to provide a quick, albeit simplified, definition of phenomenological methods; show some of the ways these methods are being applied in a variety of academic fields adjacent to and overlapping with folklore; show how phenomenological methods are being employed in folklore; and offer some suggestions for further applications.

It is not easy to define "what phenomenology is." There is no single notion of phenomenology held by those who discuss it. Recent writers (e.g., Blount, 1968) have observed that the differences among the various phenomenologies exceed the common features. However, there seems to be some agreement on how phenomenological theory is applied—that is, many theorists can agree on what is proper phenomenological methodology. And it is this methodology that we are interested in.

Perhaps the easiest way to characterize the phenomenological method is to compare it with the "other" method. From the beginning, "science" (i.e., the search for knowledge and understanding) has had two contrasting tendencies: one deductive, the other inductive; one employing experimental manipulations, the other preferring simple observation; one studying elements of a phenomenon, the other attempting to describe the entire phenomenon and the relationship between its parts. This first tendency is quantitative, deductive, and experimental—the science practiced by so-called "scientific disciplines" today. The second tendency is qualitative, inductive, and descriptive—phenomenological "science."

We might add here that we are not among those apologists for humanistic studies who would make humanism an experimental science. See, for example, Weil, 1970. We are arguing that the term "science" should include both tendencies outlined above. It is regrettable that in the U.S. today the quantitative-deductive-experimental method is seen as the only way of "doing science." As we will suggest in this article, this method is intrinsically deficient for studying human phenomena. We hope to see a return of a balance between the two tendencies so that we can feel comfortable with the term "science."

In lieu of further attempts at an abstract definition, let us examine how phenomenological science works in practice in several social science disciplines.

**Psychology**

For generations psychologists have been arguing over deductive vs. inductive approaches to analyzing human behavior. At the moment, deductive, empirical, "behaviorist" approaches dominate the field. However, there is still an undercurrent of inductive, "introspective" phenomenological research going on.

Phenomenological psychology attempts to "explore the private worlds of inner personal meanings," according to Carl Rogers (1964). Phenomenological psychologists try to work from the point of view of the behaving organism itself. Rogers (1964: 119) adds that phenomenological psychology can "investigate all the issues which are meaningless for the behaviorist—purposes, goals, choice, perceptions of self, perceptions of others, the personal constructs with which we
build our world, the responsibilities we accept or reject, the whole phenomenal
world of the individual with its connective tissue of meaning.

Good reading on behaviorism vs. phenomenology: T. W. Wann (1964).

Sociology

Phenomenological studies in sociology come under many different titles:
"ethnomethodology," "reality construction," and "qualitative analysis" are some
of them. But all of the titles have in common a phenomenological mode of research--
participant observation. Participant observation is viewed as a logical alterna-
tive to traditional empiricism--as a research method that will enable a sociologist
to gather information about human behavior that would otherwise be denied him.
It is not less sociological than other methods; it is only different. The
participant observer's primary source of information about his subjects is to
be found in his observations of the way they carry out their everyday lives,
rather than in statistics abstracted from computerized questionnaires.

There is much about everyday life behavior that is interesting to the
sociologist, but in order to gather it he must adopt a research style that
will not disturb the naturalness of the situation in which he does observation.
In some types of participant observation, the observer is an unknown (in terms
of his real purpose) member of a social group. Sometimes he is not present in
the group at all but observes them from a hidden room or by video tape. However
the most effective (and ethical) types of participant observation are carried
out with the other group members fully aware of the observer's purpose. In
these instances what the observer tries to do is to become an integral part of
the routine social life of his subjects. He attempts to become as familiar to
them as any other everyday associate so that they will feel at ease in his
presence. The similarity of this approach to all types of folklore collecting
should be apparent. Alfred Schutz expressed this approach in theoretical terms:

Sharing a community of space implies that a certain sector of the
outer world is equally within the reach of each partner, and con-
tains objects of common interest and relevance. For each partner
the other's body, his gestures, his gait and facial expressions
are immediately observable, not merely as things or events of the
outer world but in their physiognomical significance, that is, as
symptoms of the other's thoughts. Sharing a community of time--
and this means not only of outer (chronological) time, but of
inner time--implies that each partner participates in the on-rolling
life of the other, can grasp in a vivid present the other's
thoughts as they are built up step by step. They may thus share
one another's anticipations of the future as plans, or hopes, or
anxieties. In brief, consociates are mutually involved in one
another's biography; they are growing older together; they live,
as we may call it, in a pure We-relationship. (1962: 17)

In a very real sense, the observer becomes a participant in the community of
space of his subjects, meeting their honesty with his own and allowing their
routines to occur naturally. In so doing, the observer integrates himself into
the processes of everyday life, allowing social interactions to occur naturally
--just as they would if he were not there.
In order to gather information about the ways in which people view themselves and their social world, the observer must obtain an understanding of their "interpretive processes." If he is to gain a genuine, unaffected conception of how they actually live and act, the observer must refrain from allowing his sense of reality to influence the behavior of his subjects:

The observer must approach his subject with no structured expectations of how an object should be described....While we might argue that this is an impossible requirement, the phenomenologist feels that at least the observer seeks to reduce his preconceptions to a minimum so that he can receive an object as it is given to his consciousness. He must not have hypotheses to direct him as to what he should find in his investigation. The investigator goes into the situation to be studied with a totally open mind--open, in fact, in depth to all the stimuli that impinge on his consciousness. He admits only that which is immediately experienced as he concentrates on the object of his inquiry. (Bruyn, 1966: 272)

Much can be said about doing social research without any hypotheses, but, in basic terms, what Bruyn suggests above is that the participant observer simply follow the rule of everyday-life in carrying out his study. What the observer is after, of course, is information regarding the everyday-life activities of his subjects. Whether they are cab-drivers or surgeons, his subjects have certain traditional and routine ways of interacting that are directly related to their culture and identity. If the observer attempts to manipulate the social group he studies, he runs the risk of disrupting the essential "routineness" of their activities which make them interesting. In other words, the observer should refrain from imposing his own value orientations and rules of conduct upon his subjects. To do so is to disrupt the very activities which he wishes to study:

There is clearly a similarity in the emphasis in the work of the participant observer and the phenomenologist on this point; they contrast with the traditional empiricist. The traditional empiricist sets up preconceived realities which he seeks to verify; the observer and the phenomenologist show tendencies to reduce preconceptions of their subjects to a minimum. While many participant observers have shown an interest in outlining a general design of their study beforehand, their research interests thereafter are clearly guided by their subject as it is given. As they become personally involved in the activities of the people they study, participant observers report the importance of following the activities as they exist, rather than following preconceptions. (Bruyn, 1966: 273-274)


Literary Criticism

Phenomenological literary criticism has been articulated primarily by a group of French critics working in Existential and Absurdist traditions. A phenomenological critic attempts to "pierce" the barrier of language in order to merge his consciousness with that of the author--in order to comprehend the "essence" of the writer's work. Phenomenological criticism attempts to describe, not explain or analyze. In practice, this method can lead to what are thought to be whimsical essays (e.g., Gaston Bachelard's discussion of nests, corners,
cupboards, etc. in The Poetics of Space), but the criticism is, in fact, serious and searching.


**Anthropology**

Studies in the tradition of the "new ethnography" are trying to examine cultures from the point of view of the behaving organism. According to one description, the aim of the "new ethnography" is:

> to discover the ways in which members of a community themselves categorize their own behavior and thus to overcome the tendency to superimpose one's own analytical categories, while aiming at a description that goes beyond mere observation and recording.

(Gumperz and Hymes, 1972: 106-107)

And so, anthropologists attempting this type of ethnography are doing much the same kind of work outlined by Carl Rogers for phenomenological psychology.

Additionally, sociolinguists have adopted phenomenological methodology in their development of the "ethnography of speaking." Linguists working within this framework study language as it is actually used in everyday life, and as it is used within the context of a community as a whole. Many linguists then use this information they have gathered to try to discover "cognitive structures"—or to uncover some such larger cultural structure as it would be seen from the point of view of the people studied.

Erving Goffman is an interesting example of the bridge here between anthropology and sociology. If you consider Americans as the "folk" that Goffman studies, then his work can be seen as a "new ethnography" of American culture. And it is through the work of Goffman and the kinesics studies done by Kay Birdwhistell (1970) and others that we come to semiotics. Semiotics is a study of all of the communicative media used by a culture—from national flags to tombstones to patternings of behavior. Folklore, then, becomes a part of semiotics, since folklore is a medium by which people communicate information about their culture. The general principles of semiotic studies, then, can be profitably applied to folklore.

Good reading: Ben Blount (1968), Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer (in Press), and Dell Hymes (1964).

**Object (Text)-Centered Folklore**

Until recently, folklore scholarship has not employed the phenomenological methodology we have been describing. Historic-geographic studies have been complemented by functionalist approaches, and the general methodology is now considered to be "collection, annotation, and analysis." The problem arises with the type of analysis. All too often, functionalist interpretations are based on a preconceived notion of the structure of a culture. It is not enough for folklorists to speculate on cultural patterns on the basis of their collections—they must work with the patterns the "folk" themselves perceive. Too many distorted anthropological studies have taught us the hard lesson of the results of not looking at items through the eyes of "the people."
Seeking explanations for cultural structures through folklore items is phenomenological to the extent that items are used to investigate the "community of time" (or space) shared by persons within a culture. Psychoanalytic and Levi-Straussian interpretations appear to be approaching this end—but they are especially susceptible to the charge of the application of pre-conceived categories. "World view" and "values evaluation" studies are explicitly trying to use cultural items as a means of exploring "the private worlds of inner personal meanings," and it is to these approaches that we look with considerable enthusiasm.

Good reading: We don't know of a few works that bring all this together. An interesting discussion of part of this is Dundes' (1965: 414-416) introduction to Stith Thompson's "The Star Husband Tale." As an example of "world view" literature we suggest "on Ireland (1973).

Process (Context)-Centered Folklore

A number of folklorists have drawn on the "new ethnography" of anthropology and the "ethnography of speaking" of sociolinguistics and redefined folklore as the study of the behavior of folklore performers considered in context. This approach is plainly in the mainstream of methodologies drawing on phenomenology. From this perspective, folklore then becomes defined as performance and not item:

In its cultural context, folklore is not an aggregate of things, but a process—a communicative process, to be exact.... And in this framework, which is the real habitat of all folklore forms, there is no dichotomy between processes and products. The telling is the tale; therefore the narrator, his story, and his audience are all related to each other as components of a single continuum, which is the communicative event. Folklore is the action that happens at that time. (Ben-Amos, 1972: 9-10)


Suggestions and Further Applications

Some of the statements in this paper may distort the truth. Some may be just plain wrong. If that is so, it is because we have had to piece a lot of this information together from bits and pieces of our experience. Our principal recommendation is that folklore studies formally develop phenomenological methodology as a means of doing its work.

Our understanding of folklore is that it is a humanistic study. It is our firm belief that people—and human phenomena—cannot adequately be studied by the quantitative-deductive-experimental approach. Folklore is in a unique position—as a point of confluence of all of the streams of research outlined in the early part of this paper. We should capitalize on this opportunity and explore the weaknesses and strengths of all of the disciplines to which we have access. At best, we can discover good ways of pursuing our own studies (such as phenomenological methods). At worst, we can avoid the pitfalls into which other disciplines have fallen.

Our second recommendation is implicit in the fact that we have written this paper: we think that object-centered and process-centered folklorists ought to get together. Process-centered folklorists need to know about folklore items (and their structure and dissemination and function) just as much as object-
centered folklorists—need to understand the context and manner in which the items are "performed." The use of one approach without the other runs a grave risk of falling into error or (at best) distortion. We see phenomenological methods as a way in which we can all pursue our interests in a balanced, responsible manner.

Bibliography


McCall, George and J. L. Simmons, _Issues in Participant Observation_. (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1969).


