I
In Search Of A Discipline

usic is the last of the cultural forms to appear in the current renaissance of cultural studies. Though "popular music" (i.e. subcultures) has been central to the emergence of the cultural studies academic community in Britain, its literature has little to do with music itself; and while Hollywood film, science fiction, advertising and photography occupy a secure place in many communications/humanities/ social sciences curricula in Canada, the treatment of music has been relatively feeble. The evidence is that this is beginning to change. The questions this raises are as follows: In what disciplinary matrix should the study of "popular music" take place? What forms of pedagogy would be most appropriate to it?

We would like to begin addressing these questions by beginning with our response to a conference organized at Carleton University in Ottawa in March (1985) entitled "Popular Music in the University". Part of its rationale was that a number of international rock critics were gathered in Ottawa to discuss the agenda of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music's first North American conference, to be held in Montreal in July.[1] Carleton University's John Shepherd took advantage of the situation to hastily schedule a conference on pop music and pedagogy. This mini-conference had a located rationale without a located discourse. Beyond justifying Canadian financial contributions to the travel funds of the visitors, its function was not so much the "development and promotion" of study, but rather simply promotion *of* development. Or, in other words: the mobilization, in the Canadian context, of international authority as symbolic capital in the drive towards the legitimation of a new discipline.

Can this strategy for the creation of a discipline be successful? It would seem to depend on the terms. The accumulation of information was not dispatched on a search for methodological agreement; rather, it was organized as part of a strategy for placing popular music explicitly in the university curriculum.

The conference participants (all male, with one official and one unofficial exception, not counting the audience of course) did not expect to agree on what popular music should be taught, how, to whom, nor on the pedagogical implications of one or another orientation. The presentations, with one or two exceptions, did not explicitly address such questions. Given all the "noise" made on behalf of this conference's purpose to discuss pedagogic practices that would give popular music a view in the university, both music and pedagogy were notably absent. In the absence of a fruitful theoretical framework it remains that *a* pedagogy for the study of popular music doesn't yet exist. What do exist are a number of different modes of intellectual and cultural organization, shaped by existing institutional structures, and, within these, by the available intellectual discourses, which shape or appropriate the discussion of popular music by the terms they set.

This was made clear at the conference by Simon Frith's mapping of British literature on popular music over the last decade (a literature which has been highly influential in the rudimentary stirrings of popular music study in Canadian academia). This literature, he argues, has been heretofore mediated by three academic frameworks (none of which can account for the "musical" substance). The "youth culture" literature sees rock as the "spontaneous sound of the streets", a kind of organic rebellion, as though the suburbs did not exist and even dominate rock culture; "mass cul-

ture" literature sees rock as commercial product, and amasses melancholy economic statistics, romanticizing the "independents" while paradoxically bemoaning technological progress; and the "sociology of work" literature deconstructs the processes of producing the music itself, but doesn't explain them any better than other models of symbolic interactionism

In a spirited investigation of Reaganite rock à la Baudrillard ("Life's a bitch and then you die."), Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois - Urbana, argued that young people don't "read" the media, but enjoy it in a state of distraction, as Walter Benjamin argued in his "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", thereby being continuously reimmunized against the cultural debris of information saturation. Since Reaganite youth don't make sense of their musical attachments, Grossberg argued, neither should we. In effect, such an argument not only pre-empts the possibility of critical pedagogical practice, but it is also resigned to capitulating to this form of "reading" the history of the present.

According to John Shepherd, the future for the study of popular music in the universities rests in its successful legitimation within the academic establishment in a manner which would have the simultaneous and necessary

consequences of challenging the very epistemic premises of musicology in particular and the entire "academic enterprise" in general:

...the introduction of critical popular music studies into universities in a manner that is phenomenologically and hermeneutically satisfactory will likely challenge the problematics of host disciplines, but, relatedly, because such introduction may also bring into question certain assumptions and premises traditionally fundamental to the western academic enterprise.[2]

But Shepherd neither explains what he might mean by "phenomenologically and hermeneutically satisfactory" nor

what the criteria for such an event might be. We agree that there is a need for the critical study of popular music in universities, and that questions as to where or how it could be situated "inside" the university require thought and debate. However, his arguments with respect to these questions are not at all compelling.

Shepherd identifies the primary obstacle and problematic for a "critical musicology" of popular music with the differences which exist between competing object domains of the traditional disciplines of sociology and musicology. Sociology, he maintains, brackets the musical language of popular music from its analysis of its social constituents, and musicology, which has the competence to come to terms with the musical language, distorts and delegitimizes popular music because its methods of analysis are biased in favour of "serious" music. This problem was pinpointed by Adorno more accurately:

Sociological findings about music are the more assured the farther they are from, and the more extraneous they are to, music itself. Yet as they immerse themselves more deeply in specifically musical contexts they threaten to keep growing poorer and more abstract as sociological ones.[3]

As it is, whether or not one technical musical language is more appropriate

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By
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than another (yet to be created?), the significance of Adorno's insight should not be lost. Musical and sociological analysis will always retain a certain amount of tension and divergence. Rather than recognizing the challenge of this tension, Shepherd wishes to create a more efficient discipline. To this end, he too often resorts to oppositions between the "popular"

and the "serious" which are mutually, and often unrecognizably, homogenized into uniformly polarized identities. He believes he is basing this opposition on real musical differences: in the name of these differences, he abolishes their differences to institute a domain of exclusive sameness. The result is such that when Shepherd does commit his "technical" knowledge of music to paper he justifies a certain dubiousness towards it.[4]

Yet in spite of his belief that music departments are inherently hostile to treating popular music in the manner he envisions, Shepherd argues that:

...the inevitable site of intervention for the advancement of popular music studies is the discipline of historical musicology. It is clearly impossible for critical theory to engage in a dialogue with a view to developing categories of analysis appropriate to "musical process" if historical musicology keeps the door firmly shut.[5]

One wonders why, given his contention that musicology is both inappropriate and incapable of coming to terms with what he considers to be significantly different characteristics and criteria in popular music, he insists on situating its study in such an unhappy environment![6]

And what are *students* to gain from these developments? In other words, how is this "pedagogy" to respond to

II
"Serious" Vs. "Popular"
Or
The "Social Soundtrack"[7]

We reject setting the debate in terms of a methodological or epistemological tension between musical and social truth claims. We don't want to resolve this tension, but seek to turn it into a pedagogical and methodological insight. Acknowledging the *productive values* of this tension brings into view differences which may lead to less entangled theoretical and empirical work on music.

The oppositions between "serious" and "popular" lead to the same bottlenecks as the adjudication of the various truth claims between sociology and musicology by a "third" discipline created in the legitimation of popular music studies in the university. Indeed this legitimation of a new discipline depends on this opposition and, in fact, continues to reproduce it as knowledge. The result is that a particular framework of analysis, based on this opposition, is already in place (even in a state of "epistemological" crisis) before it is brought to the exploration of the social relations of musics and musical practices.

Insofar as this opposition must identify itself with an already given

The classical business is even more a business of stars than the pop record business, and the classical buyers even more star-oriented and less adventuresome than the typical young buyer of pop records. The international classical record market is one dominated by a few international superstars mostly performing familiar repertoire for conservative buyers.[8]

If our experience of popular music is shaped by radio, by records, a star system and a highly ritualized performance spectacle in which musicians reproduce their already-recorded sounds in perfect simulation, so is classical music (though its listeners may be older and richer) and, for that matter, the avant-garde. By pointing out similarities in marketing strategies, we don't mean to conflate the real differences in the social meanings of musics for their listeners. But the social/musical differences so evident in the present multiplicity of musics (especially as these are regulated by radio stations, academies, arts councils, etc.) are far more categorical than their actual lived manifestation. Most people listen to several kinds of music whose specific heterogeneity defines their musical landscape. And most are ambivalent about the industrialization of this landscape.

We should note that while mass production has collectivized the *reproduction* of music, it hasn't, for the

innovators of new musical technologies in the area of computer-aided digital synthesis results in a convergence of shared instrumentations, technical approaches and sound/noise definitions between popular and art musics. Today everyone wants — and can have — a Yamaha DX7.[9] The sonic possibilities and definitions of musical use are created by musicians and engineers who themselves are not confined by strict divisions between art and popular music. As a result, formerly strong divisions between musics based on the instruments for which the music is conceived (e.g. cellos and flutes vs. guitars and drums) are now increasingly weakened by the challenges of shared musical technologies. This emergent "common-practice"[10] provides a focus for both social and musical analysis.

New forms of radio also achieve an innovative musical discourse by avoiding the existing categories of musical genre in their musical assemblages. Their iconoclastic approach to temporal, geographical and generic divisions in music are equally oblivious to the expectations of academic and commerical institutions that these divisions should be maintained. The result is that they also create a location for the dissemination of the music made by all those DX7 owners, whether they originate in the academy or the clubs.

the ubiquitous processes of popular music, without reproducing, in both "content" and form, the boundaries between production and consumption whose maintenance already can't make sense of musical culture itself? Isn't the whole point of introducing popular music to the classroom to reveal the mystification and limitations (social or epistemological) of such divisions in the context of contemporary musical culture? So why reproduce them in the classroom?

formulation of the "popular" it is incapable of generating fruitful questions about the "popular" outside of this given formulation. Popular music, for instance, is defined as that which is mass-produced, technologically mediated, organized by a hit parade and a star system and characterized by a symbiotic relationship between performance, recording and broadcasting, and by its articulation with various social groups. But then so is classical music. Despite the current image of aristocratic aloofness, of privileged autonomy, which surrounds its usual social critique,

most part, altered the *production* of music, which is still predominantly artisanal, i.e. individual, in the ways that musicians conceive, create and contract our their work. Individualistic forms of artistic creation and evaluative concepts of authenticity work to reproduce one another, and encourage a particular "star system" discourse (cf. Live'Aid) about motives and quality. This suggests a larger project for musical sociology, which could trace the social construction of originality, authenticity and individualism across a number of different musical spheres, and consider interactions and antagonisms between 'hem in appropriate terms.

The increasing collaboration between musicians/composers and the

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III
Post-Notes

1 There is already a "study of popular music in the universities" which has been in place in Canada for a decade, though it is not recognized as "study" by legislators or hired practitioners. This is the campus/community radio station, whose producers know more about current developments in popular music than most heretofore granted a degree in the field. Their work encompasses the study and dissemination of local, international industrial, "stylistic", graphic, oppositional and technological themes in contemporary music production. Their broadcasting strategies do not observe boundaries between popular and other musics as absolute; they move beyond several of the "categories" to which we previously objected, not only those dividing "serious" and popular music, but also those dividing the producer from the consumer.

Granted, such "expertise" does not in itself constitute study. That is because it is not adjudicated. At the same time campus radio is the site of the most located discussion about musical trends, the most fervent pursuits of the varying logics of musicians and producers, the most elaborated explorations of the intertextualities of various musics across space, time and genre, and the most appropriately mediated production of musical and "extramusical" knowledge concerning the development of contemporary musical discourse. The "sound" of the radio is that of popular knowledge permitted to speak.[11]

2 A formally worked-out pedagogy for the study of the "popular" in music must begin by addressing the particular *resistance* of the sonic/musical domain. In this context resistance is meant to refer to both the physical or material properties of an object (e.g. the physical properties of stone, metal and wood each exhibit a different resistance which is tangible), and their historicality. This point may be clarified by comparison with the far greater critical and pedagogical articulation achieved in the analysis of image-forms (photography, video, film).

It is not at all uncommon for people who have little or no formal (i.e. professional) training in visual language to possess quite sophisticated critical and expressive capacities for identifying the "ideological" or socio-political relations of image-forms. Here, the impact of cultural studies programmes which offer a curriculum in which such analytical practices are brought to

bear on social imagery should not be underestimated. As well, for those both within educational institutions and outside of them, there has been a productive impact brought about by the insights and analysis of Barthes, Berger, et al.

Unfortunately, there has not been a parallel progress of critical and expressive capacities for the understanding of sonic/music forms outside the pedagogic traditions and institutions of art music. One may notice sonic/music forms have not had their Barthes' and Berger's. Although Adorno's work remains compelling and important, it has been accused of being too elitist and daunting. (Or too elitist, because it is daunting?)

It is hard to avoid reflecting on the meaning of images; they are always *before* us — staring at us and we at them. But sound/music operates in our society in ways which, more often than not, may be characterized as being "behind our backs". (One need not "face the music" to hear it.) This property of the sonic/musical object permits it to be experienced in far more unconscious ways than images. Sonic/music forms are often (in) the *background* to various social activities as well as serving as the "soundtrack" to visual forms.

Since an explicit emphasis in the work of Berlioz and Wagner music has become a misleadingly subtle form of accompaniment to social action. Indeed, muzak and the Hollywood soundtrack may be traced back (as Adorno has suggested) to Berlioz' "idée fixe" and Wagner's "lietmotif" which programmatically identify a social actor/action with a recurring, recognizable musical theme or motif.
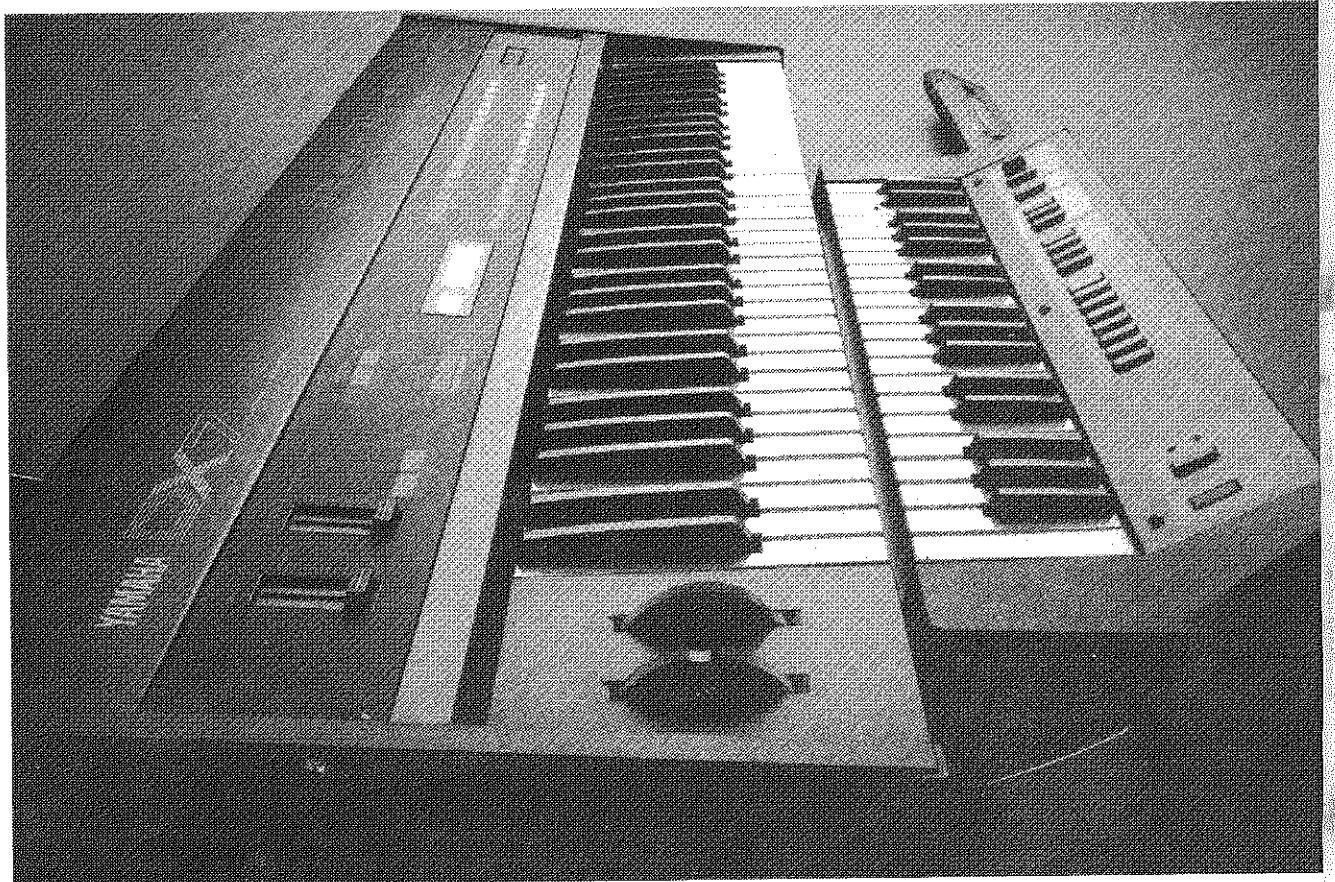
3 Music as pedagogy, pedagogy as music? We denote a mediation whose name is media. Music as production, music as consumption? We denote a mediation... Music as sound, music as social organization? All of these are problematic divisions which can be broken down only in the course of a pedagogical and technologically

mediated practice. In that sense campus radio provides both a model and a context for a different kind of productive/analytic work. It makes more sense to ask students to organize an analytic discourse on music (and their experience to it) through the more democratic technology of tape, than to invite them-over with their guitars for a jam session. The former produces (and potentially, disseminates) knowledge; the latter, therapy.

As an organization of narrative and sonic materials, tape-form represents a challenging and practical alternative to those uninterested or unfamiliar with the language and techniques of traditional musics ("popular" and "serious").[12] The horizon for historiographic and analytical applications

is quite broad; one can gather sonic/musical "documents" and re-present them, deconstructed and decontextualized, taking full advantage of their sonic and historical properties (cf. *resistance* above) in a manner not inconsistent with an explanatory narrative such as the essay form. The task of the "instructor"in this situation is to both demystify the technological tool and to help "students" master the formal elements of its "speech".

In this way one would not replicate uncritically the existing musical forms and "their" pedagogic practices. If, following Cage, music is defined as organized sound, the field of research and practice can open up to include those forms of organized sound which are heard and deployed inside and outside concert halls, clubs, radio, video, etc. in the "normalization" of social spaces.

4 Given that the pedagogical project here is to encourage students to simultaneously speak and produce their own knowledge and experience, there appears to be a problem in encouraging such "speech" through a possibly unfamiliar mode, e.g. the tape recorder. The introduction of technological literacy is a dual process, in that it encourages greater understanding of existing media discourse and also re-articulates pro-

blems in the social rhetoric of university discourse, i.e. the organization of knowledge. Empirically, the fact that this process welcomes, simultaneously, strategies of quotation (enthusiasm) and of open-ended questioning (uncertainty), it tends to outweigh the potentially intimidating qualities of media technology. I say (jb) "empirically" because I have found women to be as open as men to working with cameras, tape recorders, video and other tools of quotation/questioning with sound and/or (more often) image reconstruction. So these

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processes must invite a process of producing and expressing experience/thought whose hospitality to the analytic articulation of otherwise unspoken experience outweighs (perhaps in contradistinction to standardized academic discourse, in the social sciences especially) the technological intimidation ordinarily ascribed to women. The pedagogical "task", then, is to rediscover what can be spoken and what should be asked.

5 As soon as you challenge the boundaries between "analysis" (the institutional rhetoric of the written page) and "practice" ("making music"), you introduce the problem of adjudication. Adjudication arises from the communicated legitimacy of the assigned task, which appears "natural" as long as it reproduces all the divisions to which we have referred. Therefore it is a political problem only secondarily, and a formal problem first: it raises the question of what we, as teachers, are trying to "produce". The clarification of this can only be accomplished through a systematic pedagogy of sound discourses and their tangible social contexts, which themselves have to be appropriated (like any "raw materials") as a formal, i.e. intellectual, argument.

Contemporary musics are full of quotations, borrowings, historicisms,

6 It shall come as no surprise, given our arguments in favour of rejecting the "disciplinary" debate that we should argue in favour of situating the study of popular music in an interdisciplinary programme whose project is the history and analysis of the constitution and regulation of the "popular". What is sorely lacking from the study of popular music is a connection with the historical formation and development, the political and symbolic determinations of the "popular", the "public", etc. It would be crucial to such an interdisciplinary project to gain from the work of Carlo Ginzburg, Natalie Davis, Le Roy Ladurie, Mikhail Bakhtin and E.P. Thompson, on the history of early modern popular culture. Too often popular music studies are saddled with an ahistorical conception which seemingly takes for granted an identification of popular music and culture with rock culture, or generally, 20th century mass culture. By activating historical dimensions, inquiries into popular culture can bring into view both the continuities and the mutations of popular culture. There is already a vast literature addressing the economics of popular music, which enters inevitably and importantly into its study. This too can be used and interpreted as part of an historical reading, and of the project of learning to

Notes

1. The International Association for the Study of Popular Music is a non-profit organization founded in 1981 to work towards "the development and the promotion of studies on popular music". It's first North American conference was held in July 1985, gathering academics, critics, musicians, journalists and researchers from nearly 20 countries. On the agenda were issues in contemporary popular music, ranging from rock video to peoples and nations, from Live Aid to new Cuban song. IASPM provides a promising resource for future gatherings of musicians, producers, and others, in Canada, to talk about local issues and problems in contemporary music; a local mini-conference was held in Toronto this November.

2. John Shepherd, "Prolegomena...", p.17-18.

3. Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, p.195.

4. Among a number of Shepherd's dubious claims is the following example: In contrasting African and western harmonic practices, for instance, Shepherd writes: "Much African music displays harmonic inflection, that is the bending of otherwise stable chords, as well as a more continuous sliding of chords." ("A Theoretical Model for the Sociomusicological Analysis of Popular Music", *Popular Music*, 1982, p.152.) This confuses western polyphonic practices with the heterophony which characterizes much non-western polyphony. Heterophony is a form of polyphony which employs two or more similar-sounding melodic lines demonstrating some individual improvisational and ornamental characteristics. To say that in such music there are chords which are being "bent" is quite mistaken. In traditional African musics that have not adopted western tonal practices, chords, as objectively heard or manipulated sonic entities, do not exist. The parameters of such musics are horizontal, not vertical. This isn't just a matter of "technical rigour"; in this characterization of African music, Shepherd seeks to find musical values with which to oppose western art music in the manner that western popular music ostensibly does in his scheme. Unfortunately, whatever

6. In the GDR, for instance, popular music research has been stimulated by the formation of an "Interdisciplinary Study Group on Mass Culture and the Arts", part of a larger project at Humbolt University entitled "Theory and History of the Arts in the 20th Century". In Italy, on the other hand, such research is based on a working coalition of local schools, local and regional governments, and performers' associations, supported by the press, music publishers, local governments and other musical institutions. Their research projects (home taping, musical consumption, youth, etc.) barely brush up against the high walls of university departments.

7. cf. N. Kompridis "Rzewski's Misuk-Theatre", *border/lines* no.2, Spring 1985.

8. Earl Rosen, "The Canadian Recording Industry", *Musicanada*.

9. This is a digital synthesizer which has been very popular throughout the industry.

10. "Common-practice" refers to the shared musical language and practices that characterized western art music from the 17th to the 19th century.

11. cf. J. Berland, "Contradicting Media", *border/lines* no.1, Fall 1984. Neither the institutions nor the methods of campus radio were mentioned at the Carleton conference, nor were any of its practitioners informed or invited (though at the subsequent conference, participants did not hesitate to visit CBC's "Brave New Waves" to chew the fat of contemporary music politics and to espouse the virtues of IASPM). This is because the real subject of IASPM discourse, in the Canadian context, is not yet pedagogy, but ideology.

12. Nikolas Kompridis has been working on formally developing the potentials tape-form holds as an articulate, expressive and critical pedagogical medium.

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global appropriations, technological cross-fertilizations and so on, which render it difficult to talk clearly about origin or originality. Similarly, music's omnipresence in "non-musical" contexts such as advertising, film, telephones and transport encourage a comparable structure of intertextual thought. Eisenstein's "dialectics" of film form address comparable problems in descriptive deciphering, and could be useful in approaching sound materials. Eisenstein's concept of montage, presented visually and verbally, offers an analogue to the challenge here, how to construct an argument through the assemblage of tangible sound materials. The suggested correspondence between film form and other media discourse reinforces the historic logic of an interdisciplinary approach to popular culture.

hear the music in more speculative ways. This would by no means require de-emphasizing the peculiarly musical materials of recent popular musics; it may even provide new insights with which to interpret them.

heuristic value such a scheme may have, it is seriously undercut when it is based on — an contributes to — a misconstrual of musical practices. (NK)

5. John Shepherd, "Prolegomena...", p.29