

Editorial note: new roots to interpretation

This issue of the journal originated in a feeling among the editors that popular music studies had become rather isolated from theoretical developments elsewhere in cultural studies and other related academic areas. There seemed a need to encourage people to make links between popular music and new theories of the subject, of society and of signification, whether to endorse them or to challenge them. Despite the widespread claim that the 'high/low' distinction in culture is at an end, much recent theory has remained 'high' not only in tone, but in its choice of texts for analysis. Popular music has been getting a mention, but often a rather casual one, with few references to previous work. And while some interesting writing on the implications of postmodernism for popular music and vice versa has been done, it is not generally being published in the specialist popular music journals.

We were also thinking, ten years on, about the way in which the 'Theories and Methods' issue of *Popular Music*, published in 1982, had helped to define and foster debate. As an area, 'popular music' lies not only between academic disciplines and methods, but also between widely differing definitions of what is 'popular'. There is a strong centrifugal tendency, perhaps following the international and generic proliferation of popular music itself, which can mean that as individuals, we beaver away in a particular compartment of 'popular music', with only the biennial IASPM conferences to remind us of what the rest of the world is doing. Without necessarily wanting to adopt the kind of split between 'theoretical' and 'empirical' work that a 'theory issue' implies, we wanted to produce a number of the journal that would make connections between work on popular music and wider cultural debates. In this way, we hoped that some new 'central' issues would emerge in popular music studies, countering the centrifugal force, and allowing people to engage more with each other's work.

Of course, what we had envisaged did not materialise in the form we had thought it would, and the positive side to this is that we became aware of new work which was using unexpected areas of contemporary theory to look at popular music: Ellie Hisama's use of the critique of 'orientalism', for instance, to look at rock's construction of 'eastern' women; or Katrina Irving's use of the political theory of Laclau and Mouffe to analyse the issues around gender and ethnicity in rap music. The other articles in this issue relate to developments in the areas of ethnography, social history, music analysis, and feminism, respectively. We are very aware that this leaves out a wide variety of academic areas and theoretical developments, which we would have liked to include in the issue if we had been able to find the material. Among these are areas like music history, the psychology of listening, ethnomusicology, theories of 'world music', semiotics, discourse analysis, postmodern cultural theory, and the study of political and social move-

ments. We warmly invite contributions on popular music from these or any other perspectives for future issues of the journal. We also hope that the articles in this issue will generate debate, and would welcome replies in the form of short notes for the 'middle eight' section, as well as full-length articles.

In short, our title, facilitated by several pints of rootsy English beer, expresses the hope that this issue will provide both some new roots, in the sense of new theoretical narratives for popular music, and some new routes along which analysis of popular music can develop.