The object of this article is difference as it is addressed by social scientists. In order to grasp the significance of this issue within the social sciences, and to understand the socio-cultural realities that notion is meant to account for and explain, I will concentrate on a particular univers de discours, that of music. These discourses are worth special attention not only because they deal with a phenomenon which, in our societies, has traditionally been granted the status of 'the art par excellence'; but also because the development of most 'serious' as well as 'popular' music styles and genres has involved - and still involves - multiple cultural interactions and exchanges. Moreover, as far as western capitalist societies are concerned, the history of music production (sound products, composition and reception practices, institutions, etc.) and intellectualization (music theory and aesthetics, analytical models, etc.) has been fundamentally shaped by the social and cultural impacts of difference and the debates that surrounded it.

After a short analytical presentation of socio-cultural theories on music, I shall explore the historical background and epistemological genesis of those discourses. A critical examination of the dominant western views on foreign - e.g. non-European - musics should illustrate how, via eighteenth-century exoticism and early nineteenth-century concepts of diversity, the notion of difference was finally introduced to designate otherness and, hence, became an issue for the newly founded social sciences; and how this conceptual shift was part of complex social changes that transformed western societies, their relations to 'Others', and colonial imperialist ventures. This historical portrait will lead to a critical inquiry into modern socio-cultural theories. I shall demonstrate that in the wake of the acknowledgement of the relativity of music - as of culture in general - two divergent notions of difference have been articulated, which account for the distinct definitions of music as a reflection and an expression of social and cultural differences. In the final discussion, I will outline some of the implications of today's most dominant views of music and raise some issues for future work that should be relevant to musical as well as cultural studies.

AN ANALYTICAL PORTRAIT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORIES ON MUSIC

Socio-cultural theories have come to play a significant role in the field of
musical studies. Over the last twenty-five years or so, the scope of the field has widened tremendously as researchers from various disciplines (mass communication, anthropology, sociology, film studies, ethnomusicology, etc.) have got involved. It is now a highly diversified area of research whose development has been accompanied by the emergence of rival theoretical frameworks. Yet the vast majority of these theories do share some fundamental assumptions.

Music is usually addressed as humanly organized sound; it encompasses not only sounds and sound objects, but the various practices and attitudes involved in their production, circulation, and reception that make musical phenomena ‘instances of socially circumscribed discourses’. Being the result of practices and ideas acquired by human beings as members of various societies or cultures, music is also defined as a polymorphous phenomenon. Thus, the criteria allowing its description and evaluation ought to be relative to what each society or culture considers as music at a certain stage of its socio-historical development, hence to the modes of production, circulation, and reception prevailing in varying social or cultural settings. Most theorists also agree that musical sounds and practices should be studied in relation to the respective functions they carry out in any given society or culture: music is conceived either as an essential means for the establishment of ‘social order’ and the development of cultural identity, or as an important way through which members of rival groups (demarcated by social classes, gender, ethnic and linguistic affiliation, etc.) develop their sense of belonging and express their specificity.

Those are the main theoretical premisses shared by researchers whose ideas are otherwise opposed, if not contradictory, but whose research projects are nevertheless oriented towards the same goal: the study of music in its context. This common orientation constitutes one of the major trademarks of socio-cultural studies of music, one which is in direct keeping with the spirit if not the letter of those nineteenth-century founding discourses which first seriously challenged the idea of the purely acoustical foundations of music. Its most characterizing trait is a ‘differential’ approach to music: music is addressed as one fundamental way by which groups (and individuals) actualize and manifest their respective cultural and social attributes - because these attributes provide music with its most original characteristics, they constitute the most determining components in its very definition as a social and/or cultural phenomenon.

I would therefore argue that on a descriptive level, contemporary socio-cultural theories attempt to account for the variety or diversity of musics and musical phenomena, in relation to no less varied societies and cultures. On a theoretical level, however, diversity is constructed as difference by means of conceptualizations leading to two contrasting definitions of otherness (particularity vs alterity). As I shall explain later, some discourses focus primarily on the similarities musical phenomena might share despite their observable dissimilarities and, hence, address them as so many replicas of a unique general mould which shapes them from the outside; others stress the irreducible heterogeneity of musical sounds and practices and, hence, define the specificity of singular musics in relation to the different social and cultural
realities of those involved in their production/reception, as well as to the
immanent contradictions constitute of the respective communities, cultures,
and societies in which they prevail. By and large, music is thus constructed
either as a particular reflection or representation of global determining cultural
or social patterns, or as a specific expression of mediating cultural or social
differences. The underlying assumption of this hypothesis is that from an
epistemological standpoint, socio-cultural theories of music draw (in a more or
less formal way) on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourses of diversity
difference: some have reproduced (although in slightly modified ways)
arguments developed during the Age of Enlightenment, whereas others have
(more or less completely) broken free of them.

COMING TO TERMS WITH 'DIVERSITY'

The shady sides of exoticism

One of the most striking features of eighteenth-century intellectual life is the
general interest thinkers took in foreign cultures and societies. In the wake of
the so-called 'discovery' and conquest of the New World, as well as the
opening of trade - with Asia especially - reflections on foreign practices,
attitudes, and ways of living had become commonplace. But never before the
Age of Enlightenment had this interest been so obvious and so widely spread.
In literature, Chinese, Persians, and American Indians became the new figures
of Diderot's, Montesquieu's, Sade's and Voltaire's Utopias; in music, more
and more attention was paid by analysts to the newly discovered diversity of
world sounds and musics. But one cannot consider eighteenth-century Europe
without also acknowledging the increasing supremacy of Reason and the
influence of a scientific world-view on patterns of social organization and
modes of knowledge. Indeed, the concern with world and 'exotic musics'
observable in eighteenth-century western music literature, emerged at a time
when 'scientific' music theories such as Rameau's were gaining prestige and
influence. The theoretical findings this 'world' concern inspired challenged
these scientific views: undermining the assumption that music was strictly a
matter of self-contained order, sound structures, mathematical correspon­
dences, and acoustical properties, they asserted it was also, if not mainly, a
matter of norms and values, societies and cultures.

To a large extent, eighteenth-century discourses on exotic musics were
typical of the prevailing ways of perceiving foreign phenomena. These can be
summarily described as the combination of three attributes. The first is a
forced integration into dominant European norms and values. World and
exotic musics could not but cause all sorts of reactions; but if opinions differed
greatly with regard to their value and quality, all judgements relied - in a
formal or tacit way - on the so-called classical European musical idiom, on the
norms for composition and performance it established and the aesthetic values
it expressed. For instance, according to the baroque doctrine of affections -
Affektenlehre - which was still extremely influential, the ends of music v. e re to
please the senses, move affections, and excite passions; consequently, certain
musical forms were to be used in order to express certain emotions, with which they were thereafter associated. Consistently with those principles, Chastellux criticized the lack of coherence of 'Nigger' musics in which all emotions were expressed in the same way\(^\text{10}\) and disregarded all non-imitative musics\(^\text{11}\); for similar reasons, Chabanon expressed his true appreciation of Persian, Chinese, and African 'Nigger' musics which displayed clear melodic contour.\(^\text{12}\)

Perceptions of music as a phenomenon of 'the foreign' also involved a reliance on a universal totality. One of the most debated questions exoticism brought up, was that of the origins of music.\(^\text{13}\) While Rousseau argued that vocal music was the most original form, Chabanon claimed this status for instrumental music; Chastellux saw in Ancient Greek music the founding source, whereas Roussier believed Chinese and Greek musics were but corrupted by-products of the first music, which came out of Egypt; as for Diderot, he claimed the well-known Ancient musical systems were but many scattered pieces of a more ancient, more complete system invented by another unknown people.\(^\text{14}\) But despite obvious disagreements as to the exact geographical and historical locations of music's most original form, analysts were involved in the same basic quest: the search for the one and only origin of all musics.\(^\text{15}\) It was generally assumed that there existed some kind of 'musical Word', a unique and universal comprehensive totality of which all musics were part, at least originally.\(^\text{16}\)

Finally, eighteenth-century discourses referred to contextual elements as scenery. It is worth noticing that most commentators had never heard the musics they discussed, neither had they visited the foreign countries in which those musics prevailed. For analytical purposes, they relied mostly on accounts made by travellers, explorers, merchants, and missionaries. Music commentators were thus provided with information enabling them to locate the musical sounds and practices they discussed in their overall social and cultural context, but they usually kept cultural and social elements separate from strictly musical ones.\(^\text{17}\) In other words, if musical phenomena were addressed in relation to culture and society, the music per se appeared as being largely impervious to its context. The role of contextual parameters was thus reduced to that of mere background, the passive scenery against which musical life occurred;\(^\text{18}\) further evidence of the strangeness and exoticism of the music under study and the culture it came from.

The perception of exoticism can be said, then, to have taken the form of a perception of particulars, a recognition of the multiplicity of variants of what was conceived as a universal musical identity. Eighteenth-century thinkers did not assume that musical dissimilarities were fundamental or intrinsically determined attributes: they regarded them as so many reflections of the global totality to which all musical - or cultural - phenomena belonged. Consequently, musical particularities were not perceived as fixed, unchangeable properties, but as attributes that could be modified and changed. In the European context, this usually meant that through a proper education 'dissimilarities' could be lessened, if not abolished altogether.

Dr Brown's 1783 *Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power, the Progressions,*
Separations and Corruptions of Poetry and Music\(^{36}\) provides a good illustration of this position. Dr Brown argued that Savages - by which he explicitly meant North American Hurons and Iroquois - who 'are in the lowest scale of the human kind', showed an 'unlettered Stage of Ignorance and Simplicity' of the true principles of music. But he maintained that they could nevertheless, if taught well, achieve musical mastery, and thus social, cultural and moral Tightness. In section IV of his dissertation, entitled 'Of the natural consequences of a supposed civilisation', he listed thirty-six items which might be seen as the various steps towards musical, social, and moral Truth. This was, in other words, a more or less complete list of what Dr Brown cherished as the best attributes of European Art music. He suggests here, for example, that Savages be taught cadence: by making sure words and songs are kept in pace, they could learn not to 'strike off Syllables from their Words'; later, he explains how 'by appropriating certain Sounds to certain Subjects, [they] would raise their Melody into a Kind of Natural and Expressive Language of the Passions'.\(^{20}\)

Dr Brown's dissertation might be viewed as a prototype of the discourses that laid the grounds for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonial imperialism, and contributed to its ideological legitimation. The eighteenth-century colonialist vision was essentially ethnocentric, combining a universal view of humanity with notions of particular content\(^{21}\) - most often of national character - both of which were believed, however, to derive from divine will, 'Destiny', or 'Providence'. As I shall argue later, nineteenth-century colonialism was certainly equally ethnocentric, but its claims and contents were derived from the newly discovered scientific 'truths' pertaining to Nature. Natural sciences' discourses provided nineteenth-century colonialism with its most essential ideological weapon: the notion of an irreversible 'otherness' that is biologically determined and, hence, culturally and socially determining.

Difference or the realm of irreversible heterogeneity

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Enlightenment conception of diversity and exoticism no longer prevailed. Prior to the Age of Reason, social order and unity had been ensured by religion or, more generally, by reference to a transcendent totality - whether divinity or a myth. By the late nineteenth century, this unity had ceased to exist, since transcendence had lost its founding and cohesive power, and knowledges had emerged which no longer addressed worldly realities as the reflection of some divine will, but at their own 'worldly' level. Immanence became the main epistemological principle and the foundations of reality were conceived as being hidden somewhere within nature. Accordingly, particularity and strangeness were no longer considered as being determined by something extrinsic to human beings but as answering to their intrinsic features. Once humanity was recognized as a significant immanent totality, heterogeneity was defined as one of us most crucial features: humanity was considered to be a fragmented whole, an entity cut into fixed pieces.
Thus, the perception of diversity or exoticism became the perception of difference. As Guillaumin rightly claims: 'The perception of a difference occurs as soon as the question of the other is addressed in relation to humanity and not in relation to a divine dependence; when the scandal of difference questions the identity of the one who perceives instead of referring to transcendence'. As long as explanations of particulars implied the recourse to a transcendent principle, 'others' could still be transformed, 'otherness' attenuated, and 'conversions' - moves from one group to another, whether through personal choice or constraint - remained possible. Now, particulars became heterogeneities: indisputable, essential, immutable, and irreversible differences. Hereafter, 'others' were different, once and for all; 'otherness' was conceived as the direct corollary of a 'natural fatality'.

COMING TO TERMS WITH 'DIFFERENCE'

A new social order and its impacts on cultural policies

By the late nineteenth century, the heterogeneity of individuals, peoples, cultures, and civilizations was more than an indisputable fact; it had above all been granted the status of a biological reality. This status was in keeping with the new 'regime of truth' that developed during the 1800s, in which biological determination became the leading explanatory principle. Natural sciences were presumed to have disclosed the most fundamental 'Laws of Nature' - most centrally through the discovery of heredity and the development of evolution theories - which enabled them to account for the true origins or causes of differences while explaining their intrinsically irreversible character; according to dominant discourses, 'otherness' was the observable effect of an irreducible disparity in biological somatic potentials. The already existing classifications of individuals and groups into mutually exclusive categories - race being the most significant one - were reinforced, defined in accordance with scientific observations and measures. These new 'politics of truth' reinforced supposedly objective demonstrations of the superiority of certain groups over others - Man (sic) over other beings (including women), the 'white race' over inferior ones, and hence, western societies and cultures over all others. Evolutionist frameworks provided this biological mapping with a global coherence by constructing a 'temporally organized order of things and peoples' in which simplicity and complexity constitute the opposite poles of a single continuum.

Thanks to this scientific sanctioning of notions of a radical 'Other', western colonial imperialism had thus found distinct but strengthened foundations. For instance, late-nineteenth-century museums acted as a vehicle for the 'edification of a national public and the confirmation of its imperial superiority'. Bennett explains how the European concept of museums changed accordingly: 'In eighteenth-century museums, such displays [of human remains] had placed the accent on anatomical peculiarities, viewed primarily as a testimony to the rich diversity of the chain of universal being. By the late nineteenth century, however, human remains were most typically
displayed as parts of evolutionary series.' Thus, on a representational level, the new museum concept contributed to the new order 'which organized the implied public - the white citizenries of the imperialist powers - into a unity, representationally effacing divisions within the political body in constructing a "we" conceived as the realization, and therefore just beneficiaries, of the process of evolution and identified as a unity in opposition to the primitive otherness of conquered peoples'.

Of course, the music sector did not escape this new cultural order. While, on the one hand, composers got more interested in the musical sounds and techniques of the rest of the world, on the other hand, the aspiration of the musical establishment was to have the whole world take interest in western musical treasures. Indeed, music played a significant role in the colonialist venture, western achievements being presented if not imposed on other societies as paragons of beauty, truth, and morality. Thanks to missionaries, western music had been introduced to non-westerners long before - in some places, like Japan, as early as the sixteenth century - but such contacts were neither intensive nor long-lived. However, after 1800, especially through religious hymns and masses as well as military band forms, western music was systematically introduced into societies such as Iran, Japan, India, sub-Saharan Africa, and Madagascar. This 'invasion' was supported by a musical system - a set of interrelated theories, techniques, and instruments - considered to be the only ones able to claim universality and to adapt to any other music: after all, were they not the symbols of the superiority of the colonial nations? In this context, 'scientific' musical theory acted as the perfect complement to western cultural hegemony, while western music and other cultural products provided the rationalization and justification for imperial powers. Examining British cultural imperialism in India, Leppert has argued along the same lines: 'I am not suggesting that we get to colonialism from music theory, but rather that the musical order (theoretical systems and the values attached to them) ... is constituted by, and hence reinforces, an identical ideological base of Western self-legitimization.'

Casting off the yoke of natural laws

For a typical illustration of how, in late-nineteenth-century Europe, thinkers accounted for the organization of humanity, its 'internal logic', and the foundations of its constitutive heterogeneities, we can look, amongst others, at the theories advanced by Gobineau. In his *Essai sur l'inegalite des races humaines* (French edition, 1852), he proposed that the essence of all things was to be found on the level of 'natural' attributes which were the explaining factor, the cause of all differences. He claimed that there existed a 'difference of nature' between human groups and that each group acted in strict accordance with its biological potential. In fact, Gobineau argued that the 'quality' of a society, a culture, or a civilization was the exclusive result of race - considered to be the primary biologically homogeneous entity - and therefore concluded that 'the inequality of races ... is enough to explain the whole series of peoples' destinies'. Accordingly, he developed a theory of
social history in which he established a hierarchy of civilizations - equatable with that of races - on the basis of their respective capacity to integrate and submit others over time. He considered racial differences not only as an obvious biological fact but also, and above all, as the ‘determination in the last instance’ upon which all interpretations or descriptions of social and cultural realities ought to rest. In short, Gobineau believed that one could establish a direct causality between ‘natural’ and ‘social’ phenomena. Like most intellectuals of his time, he assumed that there existed a perfect continuity between Nature and Society which not only did permit but also ought to lead to the juxtaposition of biological (e.g. racial) and socio-cultural heterogeneities.

This bio-social syncretism was the organizing principle of most emerging social sciences discourses of the second half of the 1800s. Bodies and minds, physical and mental realities were not only seen as bound together, but were fundamentally conflated. More than this, biological explanations relied upon the founding biological category of race, which was superimposed on culture and history, as well as on class and gender. This posed a significant challenge to the idea of the relative autonomy of social life which was one of the main contributions of eighteenth-century social philosophers. For instance, it contradicted the thesis Rousseau had developed in *Discours sur l'origine de l'inegalite* (French edition, 1755) and *Du contrat social* (French edition, 1761), where he suggested that inequality within societies was ascribable to individual particularities and social dissimilarities; to the combined effects of individual psychology and social consensus. While Rousseau, Montesquieu, Sade, Itard, and many others had all assumed that human diversity was a consequence of psychological and social realities rather than their cause, the vast majority of nineteenth-century social scientists assumed the very opposite!

However, some thinkers did challenge the dominant views, pursuing and reviving that part of the tradition inherited from the encyclopedists. The most well-known among them are of course Comte and Marx. Both rejected the assumption of the pure consubstantiality of natural and social life, arguing that human societies did not obey the ‘laws of nature’ but, rather, that they had laws of their own which were responsible for the diversity of worldly phenomena and their change through time. Comte repudiated the notion of ‘inferior races’, suggesting that it be replaced by a concept of ‘under-developed races’. He denied the substantiation of race and racial heterogeneities which he claimed were the result of temporary delays or advances in terms of social development: ‘Mere differences of intensity and speed are viciously raised to radical diversities . . . in order to push back any truly general conception and hence, any sound explanation’. As for Marx, his challenge to the dominant social science idiom was a dual one. In the first instance, he rejected any recourse to biological categories to explain social phenomena, and referred instead to social class and mode of production in order to account for differences within and between societies. Secondly, instead of defining social development as a continued process, he addressed it in terms of the discontinued succession of specific historicities - i.e. modes of production.

Casting off the yoke of natural laws thus involved the repudiation of the notion of biological temporality put forward by evolutionist theories and the
construction of historicity as socio-historical time. Though in this context differences were still considered as crucial heterogeneities, they were no longer seen as dependent upon some natural or biological attribute; they were considered instead to be of a social and cultural nature, the consequences of the varying properties of societies and cultures considered in their historical development. This vision did not prevent theorists from making all sorts of value judgements with regard to world cultures. However, it did shift the focus of concern towards socio-political critiques, and away from the assumed intrinsic value of a given culture.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, both social philosophies (evolutionism and historicism) had their followers. But by and large evolutionist theories, which had been dominant throughout the 1800s, lost some ground in favour of social-historical theories, at least in those milieux where the various social sciences disciplines (sociology and anthropology, especially) were being developed and institutionalized.32

Acoustical autonomy vs. social relativity

In the field of musical studies, the refusal to subscribe to the supreme authority of nature over society and the rejection of pure biological determination, took the form of a denial of the exclusive acoustical foundations of music. Writers such as Sorokin, Weber, Simmel, and Schering, for example, rejected the assumption of the strictly objective and universal character of music. Whether they studied the relationship between musical genres and institutional settings (Schering), modes of musical expression and patterns of socialization (Simmel), mentalities and corresponding musical tastes (Sorokin), tonal materials and social forms of organization (Weber), they all emphasized the relative social character of music, its variability through time and space, through historical and cultural settings.

Such relativity did not necessarily lead to the view that single musical phenomena were unique and that no overall picture could be drawn; on the contrary, it seemed to encourage comparative perspectives. The results were regarded as so many proofs of the heterogeneity of musical phenomena - at a given point in time in various geo-political spaces (inter-cultural comparison), in a given space at various times (historical comparison), and in a given space at the same time (intra-cultural comparison). Most such comparisons were based on the same hypothesis, namely that the heterogeneity of music was ascribable to the correlation between its musical, cultural, and social components. In other words, musical differences were not seen as attributable to musical 'causes', but as referring to and expressive of the differences between/within the communities in which musics prevailed. This idea of relativity can thus be said to have meant the elaboration of theories which would account for the irrefutable heterogeneity of music and explain it by reference to the no less diversified societies and cultures in which music was produced, played, and listened to. This could be done only if cultural and social attributes were granted a new epistemological and theoretical status: no longer reduced to mere aspects of the scenery or purely passive backgrounds,
they had to be regarded as integral components of all musics - European and non-European, traditional, folk and 'Art' forms.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, socio-cultural theories had become constitutive of a distinctive approach to music of which the determining characteristic was that it addressed music as an emergent property of social and cultural contexts. Music could hereafter be defined relatively as a cultural or social product, a changing, polymorphous phenomenon. Needless to say, this approach radically contradicted the dominant view which asserted that art transcended the social and that music was autonomous - a myth that was reinforced by the social relations of production which had developed during the nineteenth century.33 Those who subscribed to this romantic notion did perhaps admit that foreign, non-European musics and popular and folk forms of European musics - in short, 'inferior genres' - had something to do with their time and space; but they refused to acknowledge that the same relation prevailed in the case of 'Art' musics which, as McClary argues, were considered to be 'in accordance with perfect universal order and truth'.34

CONTEMPORARY CONSTRUCTIONS OF DIFFERENCE

'Relativity' revisited

Relativity was thus a key notion upon which the newly institutionalized social sciences relied to account for the constitutive heterogeneity of human phenomena. However, in the wake of the partitioning of social sciences, the emergence of specialized disciplinary discourses as well as the development of contrasting schools of thought, the notion of relativity was progressively ascribed new sets of meanings which were concomitant with the 'modern' ways of addressing otherness and of relating to others that developed after the Second World War. As far as musical studies are concerned, within approximately six decades, two main univers de discours developed which were distinguishable by their respective approach to relativity.35 In one case, relativity was rendered equatable with determination: musical dissimilarities were subordinated to contextual similarities, music was seen as reflecting global cultural/social patterns and structures, and difference was constructed as particularity. In the other, relativity was defined as mediation: musical dissimilarities were irreducibly related to contextual dissimilarities, music was conceived as the creative articulation and expression of social and cultural dissimilarities, and difference was constructed as alterity.

Undoubtedly, most theories in which relativity has been conceptualized as determination have ended up trivializing the heterogeneity of musical phenomena they mean to explain, thus reducing diversity to mere appearance. For instance, the underlying assumption of Nettl's ethnomusicological theory of music history36 is that, like any other cultural phenomenon, music answers to the same fundamental, determining scheme: it develops stylistically from simplicity to complexity. Therefore, any particular musical style is but the actualization of an underlying temporal process, the remnant of a remote state of development or the sign of a future one. The modalities of this process may
change according to context but, as its results are presumably always identical, stylistic diversity is only apparent.

Merriam’s interpretation of the cluster theory that was first developed by anthropologists such as Sachs and von Hornbostel - an interpretation originally put forward as a challenge to neo-evolutionist views - rests upon quite similar premisses. He suggests that by regrouping musical cultures according to the musical traits they share (such as the instruments that are used) and the historic affiliations that exist between them (as acknowledged by members of the musical communities), it is possible to locate the original form of a given musical phenomenon and follow its further developments, starting from the centre of its diffusion (cluster). He argues that there exist only a handful of basic cultural and musical models (the most ancient ones), and adds: ‘This does not mean that music does not change; it does change but, with the exception of cultural accident, it changes within what seems to be a culturally determined framework.’ In this anthropological framework, then, differences amongst musical phenomena are seen as determined by general contextual parameters - cultural frameworks - and considered as the results of varied applications of the same basic developmental pattern.

The historical (temporal) perspective of theorists such as Merriam produces a levelling down of difference. For others, such as the sociologist Alphons Silberman, difference is erased through a perspective on the socio-spatial organization of music. Silberman is concerned with ‘how different human groups and societies satisfy their musical needs’; he argues that the rules of organization of socio-musical groups determine their respective actions or behaviours. Within a framework where ‘social structure’ constitutes the determining factor - the smallest common denominator of any socio-musical society - intra-cultural musical heterogeneities are thus reduced to secondary components (various ways of assuming a similar function), or regarded as plain dysfunctions (practices which do not fit into the structure); hence, differences appear as but the normal consequences of dissimilar social institutions which have, nevertheless, the same basic structure and function.

These theories share a conception of relativity, and hence of difference, which is reminiscent of eighteenth/nineteenth-century epistemology. They assume that there exists an overall solidarity between all human phenomena: for Nettl, solidarity is the very fact of humanity, for Merriam it is ascribable to culture, whereas for Silberman it depends upon society. But in all cases, an assumed common humanity provides the ground on which general laws, applicable without distinction to all musics and musical practices, can be elaborated. These general laws are of a social or cultural (not natural or biological) nature, but they are still located outside music, solidarity being once again a tributary of some transcendent principle. Of course, this transcendence is not of a divine nature; or perhaps I should rather say that if there is a divinity, human beings, culture, and society are its new incarnations! By and large, within these discourses difference is once again constructed as particularity: contrasted musical phenomena are, so to speak, deprived of any possible cultural, social, historical - if not musical - specificity since they are regarded as more or less exact replicas from a general (if not transcendent)
social or cultural mould. Similarity has thus overcome heterogeneity; for it is implicitly assumed that despite their differences, musical phenomena share basic traits, if not the same origins and functions. This kind of cultural or social relativism thus clearly leads towards the re-establishment of difference as the mask of a profound common identity.

By contrast, theories in which relativity has been conceived as a complex process of mediation instead of some sort of deterministic mechanism, have emphasized the constitutive heterogeneity of music; they set the grounds for an alternative construction of difference as alterity, defining it in relational/positional terms. This is, for instance, the case with Chris Cutler's work on popular music, which begins with the repudiation of the idea that popular music is totally homogeneous and perfectly standardized: 'so many commentators persistently confuse pop, popular and rock musics with Folk musics, equally unable to identify correctly the irreconcilable differences between them or the nature and limits of their particular similarities.' Cutler claims that even in capitalist societies where music tends to become a mere commodity, popular music is still a battlefield, a domain where qualitatively varied forms coexist: each has distinctive qualities, depending on its respective social conditions of production (circulation and consumption) as well as upon the specific 'expressive needs' of the various groups (namely, social classes) of which it is the objective aesthetic expression. He thus addresses the history of western popular musics as the dialectical combination of three archetypal modes of production (folk, classical, and electronic), which articulate distinct internal (instruments, musical 'language', etc.) and external (ideologies, etc.) forces of production. By examining their respective innate qualities, he suggests it is possible to disclose the laws governing the development of singular musics - assuming these modes can account for the diverse musical phenomena of which they are the productive sources. Cutler thus attempts to construct a totality out of what he regards as essentially heterogeneous phenomena, and to explain them with regard to their very specificity. His theory of musical history does not rely upon the generalization of one or more characteristics of a given form, but is based on the identification of the rules which govern differences and give the musical domain its global coherence.

In a similar way, in an attempt to identify the anthropological foundations of a musical grammar, John Blacking stresses the importance of the differences existing in both surface structures (sounds, rules of sound combinations, instruments, techniques, etc.) and deep structures (social organization, cultural patterns, etc.). He argues that not only can a singular music be perceived quite differently and be assigned dissimilar meanings by members of distinct collectivities, but also that, under similar conditions, different musical forms can be and are in fact produced. This two-way argument contradicts the notion of culture or society as homogeneous context, and sets heterogeneity - which the author calls 'diversity' - at the centre of any inter-cultural and intra-cultural comparative study. Thus, writing on South African Venda music, Blacking argues: 'The various styles . . . reflect the diversity of its social groups and their degree of assimilation to the political body . . . which is hidden under the apparent homogeneity of Venda's culture and
society. In short, Blacking sees musical dissimilarities as in keeping with the differences existing within and between societies or cultures; despite apparent similarities, each style or form has its own temporal and spatial unfolding, and thus relates to the specific living conditions of the groups whose reality it expresses musically.

**Difference as a relational/positional term**

Within today's social sciences discourses on music, the notion of difference as a relational/positional term - e.g. as alterity - has become dominant. Most theorists now admit that 'different groups possess different sorts of cultural capital, share different cultural expectations and so make music differently - pop styles are shown to correlate with class cultures and subcultures; musical styles are linked to specific age groups; we take for granted the connections of ethnicity and sound.' If music tends to be addressed in relation to social and cultural differences, the assumption that it merely expresses those differences is, however, also being challenged. To use a rather voguish terminology, music is said not only to express differences but also to articulate them creatively, affecting social and cultural realities while at the same time being shaped by them.

Music is thus addressed as a specific signifying practice, one that possesses its own forms, relations, and modes of structuring. This notion of specificity has been made equatable with that of 'relative autonomy' which is another way of asserting that music does not simply reflect its social origins, but manifests its own specificity either through its own representational or symbolic codes and conventions or through its own historical and social conditions of production. In popular music studies, where this argument is assumed to be almost plain common sense, the specificity of different popular musical styles and forms is now usually defined in relation to age, gender, class, or race. And this raises a number of questions.

If these categories are considered to be the most significant 'sites of specificity' of music, are they not therefore also perceived as the most determining 'sites of differences'? Many interesting studies have been done with regard to youth, women, Black musics, etc., that have helped to disclose their social specificity. To my knowledge, though, far less work has been done on MOR (middle-of-the-road pop) or man-white-bourgeois-urban-middle-age music. Does the silence surrounding the musics of the dominant groups mean that difference and specificity are seen as the exclusive attribute of oppressed, exploited, and dominated groups and collectivities: of women (not men), of Blacks (not Whites), of youth (not elderly)? Does the treatment of age, class, race, and gender as 'sites of difference' result in their being treated as 'sites of authenticity' to which a special aesthetic (and political) value is granted, at least implicitly? Frith argues that 'the myth of authenticity is one of rock's ideological effects', but could it be an 'ideological effect' of some analytical discourses too: by focusing on certain musics that are deeply rooted in the community or group that 'lies behind them', do analysts imply that these musics are more authentic, 'better' because they are presumably more 'true' to
the experiences of those groups who presumably bear 'otherness'? If one can easily imagine Quebecois folk musics or Bruce Springsteen being labelled 'authentic', it is less obvious that the same quality would ever be attributed to MOR music. Finally, by addressing music in such terms, theorists run the risk of reproducing the reflection theories they meant to challenge. Even though music is usually addressed as the creative articulation of either race, gender, class, or age (or a combination of those four), some theoretical formulations still tend to suggest, at least implicitly, that music reveals something about the realities of race, gender, class, or age: does not this open the way to new forms of cultural or social essentialism, based on the assumption that these realities exist on their own, outside their 'creative articulation'; through music, for instance? I do not mean to deny the pertinency of age, gender, class, or race but rather suggest, on the one hand, that the differences that are so significant to our understanding of heterogeneous musics and musical practices are socially constructed too, and, on the other hand, that music might well contribute to their very construction, to the process by which they have become the significant categories and culturally meaningful realities they are now in northern western societies.

I would therefore argue that music constructs reality and 'people', and that it does so by constructing differences, the 'other(s)', the 'we(s)', as well as the concurrent times-spaces and social relationships within which they are defined. If this is the case, then questions related to specificity need to be reformulated. It is possible, for instance, that rock musical styles and forms constitute various constructions of age and/or gender that differ from their constructions through painting or literature, as well as from their constructions through other musical forms, such as jazz; in other words, the specificity of musics might depend upon the very differences they display; that is, upon those they construct and their respective way of constructing them. Moreover, the very definition of difference as a relational/positional term needs to be reconsidered since it tends to imply that there exist atomized, mutually exclusive, a-historical, and objective groups: 'sites of difference' located somewhere halfway between the mega-powers of the international order (e.g. political, cultural, and economic institutions that reach far beyond nation/state boundaries) and those of the individual (e.g. the realm of subjective pleasures and desires). Music does not construct age, gender, or race as totally abstract or quasi-bureaucratic categorizations; what it does contribute to constructing are specific, complex sets and patterns of social relations, processes of iteration and differentiation between historically produced objects and subjects, through which individuals and groups define themselves and others.

Social sciences did not come to terms with the issue of difference accidentally but, to a large extent, because the social construction of reality that they meant to account for and explain is itself a complex process of differentiation. Music is deeply involved in this process; its study can thus contribute to a more accurate understanding of the contrasting realities we construct and the various modes of their construction. But this calls for new ways of addressing difference which will break free from the 'logic of categories' and the binary system upon which it is founded.
NOTES

I would like to thank the Service du Personnel Enseignant at Université de Montréal which made possible my participation in a conference at Yale University in September 1988, where this article was first presented. I also wish to acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for supporting the postdoctoral research of which this analysis is part. Special thanks to Jody Berland for her much-appreciated comments and suggestions on the first draft of this text; and to Nick Fonda who kindly acted as my special ‘linguistic consultant’.

In the notes which follow, an asterisk preceding a publication date indicates that I refer to a book or an article written in French; for purposes of clarity, quoted excerpts have been translated.

3 For instance, Alphons Silberman focuses on the functional character of what he calls ‘the socio-musical society’, aiming to demonstrate that the efficiency of music in a given culture is related to the respective contribution of all musical components (e.g. groups) to the main cohesive principle upon which this society rests. See Alphons Silberman, Les principes de la sociologie de la musique (Paris: Droz, *1968).
4 For instance, from the respective point of view of subculture theory and anthropology, Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The meaning of style (London: Methuen, 1979), and Blacking, op. cit., both address music as playing an important role in the social process of group self-identification, thus contributing to the very creation of those socially and culturally significant groups within a given society.
5 I draw here from the conclusions of a detailed theoretical and epistemological analysis of contemporary socio-cultural theories on music which was part of my PhD dissertation: Line Grenier, Elements pour une problematique sociologique de la musique comme forme de connaissance (Montreal: Université de Montréal, *1988).
6 In the wake of Pythagoras, Rameau and Helmholtz, and others, music used to be considered as a physically, acoustically determined phenomenon. Sounds having been defined as purely acoustical phenomena obeying the laws governing any vibrating body, so-called ‘musical sounds’ were defined accordingly, as physical objects having scientifically and objectively determined properties that testified to their universality. See Pierre Schaeffer, Traité des objets musicaux (Paris: Seuil, 1977), for a critical account of those theories and their crucial impacts on western music and musical theory; and M. A. Duchez, ‘Des neumes a la portée’, Canadian University Music Review, 4 (1983), 22-65, who explains the importance of this acoustical definition of music in the development of modern notation. One of the first explicit criticisms of this approach came from A. J. Ellis, ‘father’ of ethnomusicology. In an essay published in 1885, entitled ‘On the musical scales of various nations’, he wrote: ‘The final conclusion is that the musical scale is not unique, it is not “natural”. It is not even necessarily founded on the laws that determine the constitution of sound, so magnificently elaborated by Helmholtz, but laws that are very diverse, artificial and freakish’ (quoted in C. Boiles and J. J. Nattiez, ‘Petite histoire critique de l’ethnomusicologie’, Musique en Jeu, 28 (1977), 28). Ellis thus argued the very definition of music implied the combination of both ‘contextual’ - social, cultural, economical, demographical, etc. - parame’ers and those already acknowledged ‘musical’ ones. He was not the first thinker to take into account social and cultural contexts but, as I shall argue later, the status he granted
these contextual parameters was rather new: his notion of context as an integral component of music, contrasted significantly with that of passive scenery to which it used to be reduced in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discourses.

7 In Line Grenier, 'The construction of music as a social phenomenon: Implications for deconstruction', Canadian University Music Review (to be published), I have argued that this differential approach represents one of the three dominant conceptual fields within contemporary musical studies. The others are the hierarchic approach conveyed by formalist theories, and the generic approach developed mainly in symbolic theories.

8 For instance, Chastellux, Essai sur l'Union de la Poesie et de la Musique (1765), Chabanon, De la musique consideree en elle-meme (1785), Rousseau, Dictionnaire du musique (1767), or Amiot, Memoires sur la Musique des Chinois. Notes de l'Abbe Roussier (1779).

9 'Most polemical battles in the history of music theory and criticism involve the irreconcilable confrontation of these two positions' (Susan McClary, 'The blasphemy of talking politics during the Bach Year', in Leppert and McClary (eds), op. cit., 15). This confrontation needs to be taken into account since it has played a determining role in the emergence of socio-cultural theories and still has its importance in some contemporary debates.

10 'Whether the event is happy or sad, the melody has nevertheless the same character', quoted by Bardez, Les ecrivains et la musique au XVIIIe siecle (Paris: Slatkine, 1980), 1.

11 'Imitation theory would want to impose a more or less adaptable and variable code of correspondences between musical "signified" and real signifier. In opposition to the aristocratic conception of the "seduction" of the senses' (Bardez, op. cit., 104). In Man and His Music: The story of musical experience in the west (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1980), 490, Harman and Mellers have argued that this imitation theory was particularly popular in France.

12 According to Saint-Mard, music embodies melody and harmony: the former - a simple and easily recognizable line - is the vital part, whereas the latter is as discreet as possible an accompaniment (Bardez, op. cit., 16).

13 This strong interest in origins was largely maintained until the mid-nineties, and has been one of the characteristic traits of early ethnomusicology (1900-1940). See Bruno Nettl, The Western Impact on World Music: Change, adaptation and survival (London: Collier Macmillan, 1985).

14 See Bardez, op. cit.

15 That the dominant 'Art' music idiom be considered as being somehow closer, more intimately related to this transcendent totality than 'exotic' musics, is in keeping with the forced integration described above.

16 Incidentally, the idea of a presumably universal musical totality is still with us today; it constitutes an essential dimension of modern objective aesthetics in which, as Shepherd rightly explains, 'it is assumed that there is a fixed set of musical criteria against which all musics can ultimately be judged' - John Shepherd, 'Toward a sociology of musical styles', Canadian University Music Review, 2 (1981), 121.

17 Some did attribute more significance to 'contextual' dimensions. For instance, Chabanon's work can be viewed as elementary sociology, at least with regard to the role of musical uses and functions: 'In which circumstances do Savages, Niggers, and folk people make use of Music? In their amusements. Which use do we make of this Art? It presides over our Celebrations' (quoted in Bardez, op. cit., 8). The reader has noticed how Savages, Niggers, and folk people are conceived as equally
'exotic'. In a society which was still extremely hierarchical, in which only a small proportion of the population had access to Art music (i.e. to 'classical' music), such an attitude was common; not only were peasantry and lower-class peoples considered as having strange attitudes and beliefs, but their musics were perceived as being as exotic as those of American Indians, Africans, etc.

Far from being exclusive to eighteenth-century discourses, this idea of context as backdrop has constituted one of musicology's assumptions since. Drawing from Kerman's critique of modern developments in that particular field, it could be argued that it still is: in Contemplating Music, Kerman claims that musicology has yet to integrate 'the entire matrix of extra-musical social and cultural factors which to some extent form music and to some extent are formed by it' (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 168.

London: Davis & Reyner for the Royal Society. Reprinted by Garland Publishers, New York, 1971. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any information concerning the author, his status, profession, etc.

ibid., 39.


Stalk/brass and White (1986) quoted in ibid., 93.

ibid., 92.

Richard Leppert, 'Music, domestic life and cultural chauvinism: images of British subjects at home in India', in Leppert and McClary, op. cit., 75.

Quoted by Todorov, op. cit., 159.

Renan (1871) claimed that 'Nature has created a race of workers, it is the Chinese race . . .; a race of landworkers, it is the Nigger . . .; a race of masters and soldiers, it is the European race'. A few years later, LeBon argued along the same lines, 'The lowest strata of European societies are homologues of primitive beings', adding that 'The average Parisian female skulls are some of the smallest skulls observed, almost at the level of those of Chinese, slightly above the female skulls of New Caledonia'. Quoted in Todorov, op. cit., 136-8.

In Systeme de politique positive (*1848-1954), 2; quoted in Todorov, op. cit., 48.

This is probably the most important epistemological difference between Comte's and Marx's theories: if their conceptions of history can be said to be of a teleological nature, only Comte's can still be viewed as a form of social evolutionism.

Of course, this does not mean that social scientists rejected the concept of evolution altogether. On the contrary, numerous neo-evolutionist frameworks were developed afterwards; if theorists no longer assumed that social and natural worlds were perfectly identical, they nevertheless retained the idea of a unique temporal solidarity enabling the classification of all socially and culturally heterogeneous phenomena within a single, continuous scale. See Claude Levi-Strauss, Anthropologie structurale (Paris: Plon, *1958) for a detailed and critical account of neo-evolutionist theories in anthropology, and Zygmunt Bauman, Culture as Praxis (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) for an analysis of their equivalent in sociological theory.

As Janet Wolff argues: 'The dissolution of the bond between artist/author and patron was more or less completed under industrial capitalism, and the artist, like
other kinds of producers, was compelled to operate through the market - producing works and looking for buyers . . . . Essential to this development was the growth of numerous cultural institutions which effectively mediated between the free-floating artist and potential patrons: dealers, critics, publishing houses, journals and so on.’ Janet Wolff, *Aesthetics and the sociology of art* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 3.

34 As McClary reminds us, such views are still with us today: at a Bach Year celebration, she was told outright by prominent scholars that Bach (unlike “second-rate” composers such as Telemann) had nothing to do with his time or place, that he was “divinely inspired”, that his music works were in accordance with perfect, universal order and truth! See Leppert and McClary, op. cit., 14.

35 I draw here from a comparative analysis of socio-cultural theories which focused on: definition and status of context with regard to musical objects; definition of performance and other forms of actualization of the music/society relationship; relations between uses and functions, material and symbolic musical elements; definition of society, in terms of order and/or conflict; definition of diversity in relation to time and space (see Grenier, op. cit., *1988, chapter 3, 84-206). As the following examples should illustrate, both *univers de discours* cross over institutional as well as disciplinary boundaries.


37 Allan Merriam, *The anthropology of music* (Evaston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1978). This interpretation is in keeping with the tradition previously established by Sachs and von Hornbostel who, themselves, followed the *kulturkreise* theory developed by Groebner and Schmidt.

38 Merriam, op. cit., 297; my italics.

39 Silberman, op. cit., 15.


45 Specificity has in fact become an issue in the field of art and culture studies as a whole. For instance, Janet Wolff (op. cit.) claims that there is a growing agreement among sociologists of art, especially, on the urge to account for the specificity of art and artistic practices. In *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1981) Raymond Williams argues that while it is necessary to recognize that aesthetics take different forms in different societies, this does not mean that it can be ‘dissolved’ into some indiscriminate social or cultural practice; in a similar way, Stuart Hall stresses the importance of not ‘dissolving’ the specificity of cultural practices into society or history. See ‘Cultural studies and the Centre: some problematics and problems’, in Hall, Hobson, Lowe, and Willis (eds), *Culture, Media, Language: working papers in cultural studies* (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

46 Shepherd, op. cit.


48 Frith, op. cit.