

THE CIRCUIT IN URBAN ETNOMUSICOLOGY
O CIRCUITO NA ETNOMUSICOLOGIA URBANA
EL CIRCUITO EN ETNOMUSICOLOGIA URBANA

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ABSTRACT: The anthropological study in the urban scene has peculiarities in relation to studies carried out in traditional communities. In the urban landscape, groups are inserted in large contexts within complex networks with restrictions and meanings. José Guilherme C. Magnani (2005) intend a form of analysis in which he considers the social actors with their specificities and the space that they operate, the latter being a determining product and factor of social practice, and not a simple scenario. Magnani formulates categories of analysis based on this idea of considering space as an element that can be studied. In this paper we seek an analysis of the methodological contributions that the use of the concept of circuit can bring to urban ethnomusicological research, specifically on study of youth contexts involving popular music.

KEYWORDS: Ethnomusicology. Urban anthropology. Circuit as an analytical category.

RESUMO: O estudo antropológico na cena urbana possui peculiaridades em relação aos estudos realizados em comunidades tradicionais. Na paisagem urbana os grupos se inserem em contextos mais amplos dentro de redes complexas com inúmeras interações e significados. José Guilherme C. Magnani (2005) buscou uma forma de análise em que considera os atores sociais com suas especificidades e o espaço no qual atuam, sendo este último produto e fator determinante da prática social, e não simples cenário. Magnani formulou categorias de análise a partir dessa ideia de se considerar o espaço como elemento passível de estudo. Neste trabalho buscamos uma análise das contribuições metodológicas que a utilização do conceito de circuito pode trazer à pesquisa etnomusicológica urbana, especificamente no estudo de contextos juvenis que envolvam a música popular.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Etnomusicologia. Antropologia urbana. Circuito como categoria analítica.*

RESUMEN: El estudio antropológico en el escenario urbano tiene peculiaridades en relación a los estudios realizados en comunidades tradicionales. En el paisaje urbano, los grupos se insertan en contextos más amplios dentro de redes complejas con numerosas interacciones y significados. José Guilherme C. Magnani (2005) buscó una forma de análisis en la que considere a los actores sociales con sus especificidades y el espacio en el que operan, siendo este último un producto y factor determinante en la práctica social, y no un

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simple escenario. Magnani formuló categorías de análisis a partir de esta idea de considerar el espacio como un elemento que se puede estudiar. En este artículo buscamos un análisis de los aportes metodológicos que el uso del concepto de circuito puede conducir a la investigación etnomusicológica urbana, específicamente en el estudio de contextos juveniles que involucran música popular.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Etnomusicología. Antropología urbana. Circuito como categoría analítica.*

Introduction

In the 1960s there were profound social transformations in a polarized world, between capitalism and socialism, culturally tied to ancient traditions that could not keep up with the speed of change. In this context, there is an explosion of social movements that mainly impact the young strata of the population, generating significant changes not only for that generation, but also for the generations that followed. The advances provided by the media such as television, American cinema, records, tapes and radio, propitiated the emergence of an international youth culture, symbolized, according to Hobsbawm (1995), by jeans and rock'n'roll. The post-war American economic prosperity led to an increase in the purchasing power of young workers, leading to an expansion of the youth market, especially in the music industry.

The youth category gained importance in society in the second half of the twentieth century, scientific research accompanies this growth, especially in the areas of sociology and anthropology. Concepts such as subcultures, urban tribes and youth cultures have gained relevance at this juncture and served as the basis for several studies that addressed young people and their sociability.

The concept of youth has been discussed academically since the beginning of the 20th century from Stanley Hall, however this task faces difficulties due to its own character of historical construction, which keeps considerable variability between different periods, in addition to being approached in different terms, such as adolescence, adolescents, youth and young people (ARROYO, 2013, p. 17). We do not intend, however, to dwell on this discussion since this task would be too extensive and is not the focus of our work, we will stick to a simple definition, understanding youth as “an age class between childhood and adulthood with their own social and cultural place” (ARROYO, 2013, p. 23, our translation).

In this text we will discuss the concept of *circuit* as formulated by José Guilherme Cantor Magnani, professor at the University of São Paulo and coordinator of the Laboratory

of the Urban Anthropology Nucleus (NAU). Magnani integrates social actors with the spaces in which they interact, these spaces are not mere scenarios, but products of social practice and even a determining factor for these practices.

Music occupies a prominent place in youth sociability, being an aggregating element of youth groups, either through musical practice itself, as a basis for dance styles or as a mere musical taste in common. In the next pages we will deal with research in urban contexts about young people and their music, focusing on the possibilities provided by the idea of *circuit* as an analytical category.

Urban youth research

Anthropology initially focused on the study of so-called “exotic” societies, as can be seen in some pioneering work by Margaret Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski that addressed island peoples in Oceania, or Franz Boas who studied Inuit tribes on Baffin Island. These works considered it necessary to distance the researcher from his research object.

From the 1920s onwards, ethnological research gained strength in an urban context. The city of Chicago had undergone a disordered demographic growth after the first world war, the local market and the urban equipment itself were not sufficient to completely absorb this new demand, leading part of its population to misery and poverty. Authors of the so-called Chicago School, such as Fredric Trasher and Louis Wirth, were interested in investigating this marginalized population.

In the 1960s, Cultural Studies at the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies proposed a new model of urban analysis, this time with a focus on youth. Authors such as Stuart Hall and Dick Hedbige considered youth movements, called subcultures here, as resistance and deviation from hegemonic culture. From the 1980s onwards, this approach was criticized due to, supposedly, be adequate only the condition of young people of the working class (CORTÉS, 2008).

With a focus on the question of identity, and not of deviations as in subcultures, Maffesoli (1987) uses the concept of urban tribes, I understand these as groups of young people, albeit ephemeral and fragmented, that hold a common identification, such as *skinheads*² and *punks*³, this neotribalism is “characterized by fluidity, occasional gatherings

² Youth subculture that first emerged in Britain in the late 1960s. It was a reaction of the working class to hippies and their own social marginalization. Skinheads have transformed the characteristics of the working class into virtue (SHUKER, 1999, p. 258).

and dispersion” (MAFFESOLI, 1987, p. 107, our translation). Magnani (2005) criticizes this term used by Maffesoli, understanding that the word "tribe" can lead to misinterpretations, due to the meaning attributed to it in traditional studies of ethnology, inappropriate in most cases to current youth groups, however this:

[...] does not mean that this term cannot be used to any advantage, but it is necessary to be aware of the limitations and peculiarities inherent to this form of use (MAGNANI, 2007, p. 17, our translation).

In Spain and Mexico, research on youth conducted since the 1990s gives rise to the Ibero-American School that replaces the idea of urban tribes with youth cultures, which are one:

the way in which the social experiences of young people are expressed collectively through the construction of different lifestyles, located fundamentally in free time and in the interstitial spaces of institutional life (FEIXA, 2004, p. 9, our translation).

Youth cultures seek an alternative interpretation to urban tribes, which would be based on the ephemeral, temporary and unstable, the focus moves away from marginality and gets closer to identity, understanding youth and their manifestations as something of everyday life, where young people create their own cultural practices, and does not constitute an abnormality. Córtes understands youth cultures as:

[...] a concept that cannot be encompassed or determined by biologist and functionalist attitudes of youth, but rather as a process in continuous movement (CORTÉS, 2008, p. 265, our translation).

Magnani has dedicated himself to developing analytical tools that are more appropriate to cultural dynamics and urban sociability through a *close and inside look*, in contrast to the classic approach of looking *from outside and from afar*, without, however, ignoring the need for distance as a complement which aims to broaden the horizon of analysis. Magnani emphasizes the character of constant development of the methodological guidelines of anthropology, seeking adaptation to the studied themes:

[...] since the first forays into the field, anthropology has been developing and putting into practice a series of strategies, concepts and models that, despite the countless reviews, criticisms and reinterpretations (perhaps even thanks to this continuous monitoring required by the specificity of each

³ Punk appeared in England between 1977 and 1980, it is a fast and aggressive style, under the motto “do it yourself” encourages young people to form their own bands even without mastering the technique of their musical instruments (SHUKER, 1999, p. 222).

research), constitute a repertoire capable of inspiring and supporting approaches to new objects and current issues (MAGNANI, 2005, p. 11, our translation).

For Magnani, debates on the urban issue sometimes understand the city as an entity apart from its inhabitants, understanding the urban environment as “a scenario devoid of actions, activities, meeting points, networks of sociability” (MAGNANI, 2005, p. 14, our translation). In this case, there is not an absence of social actors, but the prevalence of one over the other with a predominance of representatives of capital.

We believe that Magnani's fundamental contribution was to perceive the importance of spaces, in urban ethnographies, as fundamental elements of sociability and as a place for exchanges and interactions. Magnani (2002) sought to identify the particularities of these spaces and created a family of analytical categories that could handle the complex urban social phenomenon and function as a kind of model applicable in different situations. This categorization makes it possible to face the semiological chaos of urban ethnographic research and to delimit more effectively the vague field of “Anthropology of complex societies”. The idea is to go beyond the fragmentation that seems to characterize cities, seeking in reality to identify patterns and regularities in the behavior of social actors using categories such as cutouts that aim to delimit spaces and allow the exercise of ethnographic description. These categories are: *piece*, *spot*, *path*, *gantry* and *circuit*. We will describe these categories based on Magnani's article entitled *De perto e de dentro: notas para uma etnografia urbana* (From up close and from the inside: notes for an urban ethnography).

The *piece* is a geographical space with the regular presence of members who communicate with each other and have a recognition code. This notion of *piece* is basically formed by two elements: one of a spatial nature, with a clearly demarcated territory; and another of a social order, constituted by a network of relationships that extend across the territory. The *piece* (which can be a bar, snack bar, party halls etc.) is a “place of passage and meeting” and to be part of this sociability space it is necessary to be located in a certain network of relationships, in which the members of the *piece* they recognize themselves as having the same symbols, tastes, values, ways of life and consumption habits (MAGNANI, 2002, p. 21).

The *spot* occurs when some places become a point of reference for a diverse number of visitors. It has a larger physical space than the *piece* and people of different origins circulate through it, without the need for close ties between them. *Spots* are contiguous areas with certain equipment, for example, a leisure spot can be located in a certain region with a

concentration of bars, cinemas, theaters, cafes, restaurants etc., constituting points of reference for certain activities.

Unlike what happens on the *piece*, where the individual goes in search of equals, who share the same codes, the *spot* gives way to unexpected crossings, to encounters to some extent unexpected, to more varied combinations. In a certain *spot*, it is known what type of people or services will be found, but not *which ones*, and this is the expectation that works as a motivation for its regulars (MAGNANI, 2002, p. 23, our translation).

The *paths* are ways between the *pieces* and the *spots*, as these spaces are not isolated in the urban landscape, the social actors circulate among them according to a certain logic, following routes that are not random. The *path* is a way of using space that refers to flows in a more comprehensive territory in the city and in the *spots*. “Thus, the idea of a *path* allows one to think about both the possibility of choosing in the inside of *spots* and the opening of these *spots* and *pieces* towards other points in the urban space and, consequently, to other logics” (MAGNANI, 2002, p. 23, our translation).

The *gantries* are characterized by empty spaces in the urban landscape, they are crossing points, not belonging to any *spot* specifically, but located between them, for Magnani it is one:

No-man's-land, a place of danger, preferred by liminal figures and for performing magical rituals - often dark places that need to be crossed quickly, without looking sideways (MAGNANI, 2002, p. 23, our translation).

The *circuit* is “a starting point for addressing the theme of the behavior of young people in large urban centers” (MAGNANI, 2007, p. 18, our translation), serving as a complement or opposition to *youth cultures* and *urban tribes*.

It is a category that describes the exercise of a practice or the provision of a certain service through establishments, equipment and spaces that do not maintain a spatial contiguity, being recognized as a whole by habitual users: for example, the gay circuit, the circuit of art cinemas, the neo-esoteric circuit, the dance halls and black shows, the people-of-saint, the antique dealers, the clubbers and many others (MAGNANI, 2002, p. 23-24, our translation).

Magnani considers it important to draw attention to sociability and not to expressions related to the generational issue and to consumption patterns, as proposed by youth cultures, which, for this author, still place youth groups in the subculture category. Permanences and

regularities are emphasized instead of fragmentation and nomadism from the perspective of urban tribes. Thus, Magnani describes the general lines of his proposal:

Instead of the emphasis on the condition of "young people" that supposedly refers to the diversity of manifestations with a common denominator, the idea is to privilege their insertion in the urban landscape through the ethnography of the spaces where they circulate, where their meeting points and conflict occasions are, in addition to the partners with whom they establish exchange relations. More specifically, what is sought with this option is a point of view that allows the articulation of two elements present in this dynamic: behaviors (recovering aspects of mobility, fads etc., emphasized in studies on this segment) and spaces, institutions and urban equipment that, on the contrary, has a greater (and more differentiated) degree of permanence in the landscape (MAGNANI, 2007, p. 19, our translation).

Next, we will focus on the possibilities of applying the concept of circuit in urban ethnomusicological study.

The circuit in urban music

The academic research developed in the area of music, for a long time, was restricted to Western classical music, understood as a representative of high culture. To this day, this approach is still a considerable part of production, probably due to the predominance of classical education in music degrees, including in Brazil. Much of the work that relates to popular music, whether linked to the cultural industry or traditional manifestations, comes from areas such as anthropology, sociology and history.

Despite this, since the 19th century, German musicology already contained a subdivision called *vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*⁴, roughly equivalent to what we understand today as ethnomusicology. The term went through several denominations such as ethnological musical research, folklore and musical ethnology, anthropology of music and even music of strange peoples, establishing itself in the 1950s as ethnomusicology (PINTO, 2001, p. 224).

Anthropologist Alan P. Merriam, with his 1964 work *The anthropology of music*, outlined general guidelines for the anthropological research of music, this ethnomusicological approach foresaw the integration of methods of studying anthropology and music. The latter is defined by Merriam as a form of social integration between musicians and receivers, constituting a form of communication and relationship between individual and group.

⁴ We can translate this term as comparative musicology.

Pinto describes the general guidelines that characterize a musicological and anthropological approach. In musicology the musical phenomenon is in the foreground and in anthropology the researcher sees music as an element inserted in its cultural context, what Merriam proposed was a combination of this approach in the ethnomusicological process. For Pinto, for a long time, ethnomusicology was considered a hybrid science "belonging to musicology as to its contents and anthropology when it comes to its research methods" (PINTO, 2001, p. 223, our translation). About the possibilities of interaction between music and anthropology Pinto tells us:

The fact of permeating so many moments in people's lives, organizing festive and religious calendars, inserting themselves in traditional manifestations, representing, simultaneously, a product of very high commercial value, when conveyed by the media and globalizing the world at the sound level, makes of music a complex subject rich in possibilities for anthropological research and knowledge (PINTO, 2001, p. 223, our translation).

Despite the aforementioned space occupied by classical music in the academic production of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in music, in recent decades, research objects have increasingly come to incorporate popular forms and other cultural and ritualistic manifestations.

Music is an almost indispensable element in the sociability of young people in the city, in his article *The circuit of urban young people*, Magnani describes ethnographic research conducted at the Center for Urban Anthropology at USP, the research described refers to the straight edge, a kind of vegan variant the punk movement; the Black ballads and samba circles, the boys and *streeteiros* at the Conceição subway station, the leisure spot in Vila Olímpia, the meeting point and raves⁵ at the Ouro Fino Gallery, university *fórró*, graffiti artists and young instrumentalists. The straight edges are fond of punk music, the black ballads and the samba circles are formed from the black music *circuit* of downtown São Paulo, the boys and *streeteiros* are connected to hip-hop⁶, the basis of their dance; the meeting point of Ouro Fino Gallery is frequented by connoisseurs of electronic music; the university *fórró* is obviously linked to the northeastern musical genre, and the young instrumentalists who meet weekly on Teodoro Sampaio Street are instrumental music instructors. Of these

⁵ Type of party that arose in the USA and the United Kingdom in the 1980s, they are usually held in large spaces and have a long duration. Dance music serves as the soundtrack to these events (SHUKER, 1999, p. 234).

⁶ Cultural phenomenon that includes clothing, language, way of walking among other elements. Its musical core is rap (SHUKER, 1999, p. 232).

examples presented, only the graffiti artists and the participants in the Vila Olímpia leisure spot are not directly involved with genres or musical movements.

From these indications, we can see that music is important in the sociability of young people, and in some cases, it is the central component that links the members of a certain youth group, as occurs in the group of young instrumentalists. Sometimes the aggregating element is dance, as occurred in the university *forró circuit*, in boys and *streeteiros*, and probably in black ballads and samba circles, in which case dance styles are associated with musical genres, which makes music fundamental in the constitution of groups.

Due to the frequency with which music presents itself as the foundation around which youth groups unite, we believe that musical language provides the possibility of understanding the functioning of youth groups themselves, their symbols, their sociability, their communication codes and their visions about politics and society. In a more ethnomusicological view, in cases where musical practice occurs among members of the group, the analysis may occur in an inverse way, seeking to understand how life in this circuit of young people affects their musical production or even how these aspects influence each other.

The concept of *circuit* is promising in studies that focus on popular urban youth music, we believe that in most cases there is a *circuit* that includes the execution and enjoyment of musical performances.

the novelty that circuit introduced in this “family” of categories, due to its ability to link domains not necessarily marked by spatial contiguity, as occurs in the others, was to connect discontinuous and distant points in the urban fabric, without losing, however, the perspective of totalities endowed with coherence - even in the vastness of the city of São Paulo - and in this way build more consistent analytical units (MAGNANI, 2014, p. 3, our translation).

In a classic ethnographic study, the village or tribe circumscribes the research universe, it is assumed that the sociability relations and exchanges of social actors take place in that territorial space. In a city, especially in a metropolis, there is a marked dispersion that makes it difficult to exercise ethnography, the *circuit* allows the study of a certain group even in the chaotic urban scene. Arroyo understands that although the concept of a *circuit*, as proposed by Magnani, originally applies to large centers:

enables the study of the interaction of young people with music to encompass a wider universe than that studied in much of the literature centered on the concepts of youth subcultures, urban tribes and youth cultures (ARROYO, 2013, p. 37, our translation).

Final considerations

The conception of music as an area subject to scientific knowledge is relatively recent when compared to other traditional fields of knowledge, one way of seeking its consolidation was by appropriating methodologies from anthropology, history, sociology etc. In the specific case of this work, we approach methodological concepts derived from ethnographic studies.

Because these studies in the field of ethnology have a longer “maturation time” and the fact that their production is more numerous, it is understandable that their advances occur, to a certain extent, faster than in the field of music research, including in the field of music, our specific case, in which we deal with youth groups in the urban setting. We believe, therefore, that the appropriation of these new procedures can contribute to advances in ethnomusicological research, which has expanded in the direction of the studies of popular music, which includes urban music.

We emphasize that this perspective of interdisciplinary interaction has a lot to contribute to the advancement in the most diverse areas of knowledge, the different views, derived from each methodology, help us in the task of obtaining a more complete understanding of our research objects, in the case of ethnomusicology, a hybrid area between music and anthropology, these mutual contributions are even more relevant. We believe that the circuit concept, as formulated by Magnani, has a lot to offer in music research.

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