

## ***FROM CLOSE UP AND WITHIN: notes for an urban ethnography***

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### **Introduction**

In this article, it is my intention to articulate two lines of thought: one on the city and another on ethnography. The objective is to explore the possibilities that the latter, a typical anthropological work method, offers for a better understanding of the urban phenomenon, and more specifically for researching cultural dynamics and the configurations of sociability in large contemporary cities. First, I present a summary of some of the most current approaches to the issue of cities and, in contrast to these, which I classify as observing *from outside and afar*, I propose another, ethnographic approach, which I have called observing *from close-up and within*.

In this case, however, we are not talking about any ethnography; rather, I try to distinguish between the proposition I am developing and other experiments also presented as ethnographic ones. I believe, furthermore, that there is no need to go through a lot of post-modern intellectual jugglery in order to usefully apply ethnography to the typical issues of the contemporary world in general and the city in particular: from the earliest incursions in the field, anthropology has been developing and putting into practices a number of strategies, concepts and models that, despite countless reviews and a great deal of criticism and reinterpretation (perhaps as a result of this ongoing monitoring that the specificity of each study requires), constitute a repertoire capable of inspiring and substantiating approaches focused on new objects and current issues.

Below, I explain the assumptions that underlie this proposition and present the categories of analysis, showing how some of them have been employed in recent research. Finally, I indicate the need to also consider observing *from a distance*, indispensable for expanding the horizon of the analysis and complementing the view *from close up and within* defended throughout the article. It is my intent, through these reflections, to make a contribution to the establishment of more specific boundaries in the broad and vague field known as "anthropology of complex societies", for the study of themes that are truly and specifically urban.<sup>1</sup>

## **Approaches concerning the city**

There are countless studies and approaches on the directions and consequences of the urbanization process currently under way, especially in connection with large contemporary metropolises. In order to establish a backdrop against which one might better highlight the proposition I plan to develop, first I grouped these approaches -- as I had previously proposed in a different text (Magnani, 1998) -- into two blocks: the first one only contains those analyses and respective diagnoses that emphasize the disaggregating elements of the process, such as the collapse of the transport system, the shortcomings of basic sanitation, the housing shortage, the concentration and unequal distribution of equipment, and the rise of pollution and violence indices. Based on demographic, economic and social indicators and variables, this is the picture generally applied to the large cities of the underdeveloped world or, to use the euphemism currently in vogue, of emerging countries.

Another view, generally connected with the metropolises of the developed world, forecasts scenarios typified by a magical succession of images, resulting from superimposed and conflicting signs, imitations, non-places, networks and virtual meeting places. This is the city that emerges from the analysis of some semiologists, architects, and post-modern critics, a city identified as the prototype of post-industrial society.

In the first instance, there is a continuity line in which disordered growth factors lead to urban chaos, inevitably; in the second, what is emphasized is rupture, resulting from technological quantum jumps that render not only the preceding urban structures obsolete, but also the corresponding means of communication and sociability; chaos is semiological, here. One is the fruit of savage capitalism, whereas the other is more identified with tardy capitalism.

Although for different reasons, these two points of view – polarized herein for comparative and contrasting purposes – lead to similar conclusions in terms of urban culture: deterioration of public equipment and spaces, with ensuing privatization of collective life, segregation, avoidance of contact, confinement within limited social networks and environments, violent situations, etc.

Despite its schematic nature, this is a fairly frequent view in the media's line of discourse. It is even reflected in certain more academic analyses focused on discussing urban problems: the formula's success lies precisely in the stereotype. One should keep in mind, incidentally, what occurred with Jordi Borja, a well-known Catalan urban specialist, during one of his visits to São Paulo. Having been invited to take part in a television program to talk about the problems of big cities, he was first briefed by the journalist: "I want you to say how badly the city of São Paulo is doing, a catastrophe, nothing works, etc; you should also say that, in general, cities are doing badly, with problems concerning insecurity, contamination, housing shortages, and proliferation of marginal neighborhoods, as there are major problems in all cities."<sup>2</sup>

This point of view, despite its appeal and all-encompassing nature, which covers all and any form of disturbance, from flooding to situations involving risk and violence, as well as the loss of closer personal ties and contacts, evidently does not exhaust the range of possibilities of analysis of contemporary urban issues: there are other ways of segmenting one's views that result in the differences between a certain type of city in developed areas and similar cities in the underdeveloped world reflecting a number of similarities. This is, for instance, Jordi Borja's point of view. He relies on the concept of "world city", whereas others, such as Saskia Sassen (1998, 1999), prefer the expression "global cities".<sup>3</sup>

In both cases, these names refer to the role played by these cities in a highly interdependent economy: as headquarters of multinational conglomerates, centers of financial institutions, producers and/or distributors of certain services, information and images, they constitute the nodes of a broad network that has already become known, in a globalized world, as the "world system". Thus, their influence extends well beyond their respective physical, administrative and national boundaries.

Here the issues are of a different nature: all of these cities, on a certain level, are similar not only as a result of the functions they perform, but of the equipment and institutions that enable the said functions to be performed. Thus, one assumes that a "global city" has a world class hotel network, a selective transport system, sophisticated specialized service agencies and cutting-edge information companies and systems. Saskia Sassen (1999), besides globalization, also mentions "digitalization" to characterize the process that produced global cities.

It is striking that this technology that enables prompt contact and on-line information exchange has not implied in a loss of city power. Regarding this issue, Sassen distinguishes two types of information: on one hand, there is mere data, available to and from any point in the world, provided one is duly plugged into the system; on the other hand, there is the process of interpreting, evaluating and discriminating this mass of information, which calls for live players: qualified people, companies specializing in the widest range of services, such as legal support, consulting, etc., which constitute what the author calls "social infrastructure for global connectivity" (*ibid.*).

Certain examples come to mind immediately as prototypes of these dynamics: New York, ranking first, followed by London and Tokyo. Ranking second, Los Angeles (Davis, 2001), which summarizes and concentrates the advantages and problems of this kind of city – some of whose characteristics can be found in other metropolises, even though they may be in less developed countries.

<sup>4</sup> Barcelona, another well-known case of global city, exemplifies a particular characteristic of this typology: the quest for and investment in a distinctive local "brand". Because, if on one hand it is assumed that these cities have a special infrastructure – which ends up by equalizing them – on the other hand it is essential that each one has its unique feature, capable of rendering it competitive in attracting capital, specialized labor, international events, etc.

This view is based on a new type of urban planning, known as "strategic planning", which, among other measures, plans for partnerships between the government and the private sector for

the implementation of urban renovation projects. One of the most common propositions espoused by this view focuses on downtown areas, in a quest for revitalizing degraded sections and recovering buildings and "historical" or "vernacular" equipment for new uses (Zukin, 2000), so as to attract new residents, users and frequenters. This process, known as *gentrification* (dignification, requalification), proposes new dynamics, especially for downtown areas, since, in addition to adapting them as places of consumption, it institutes a new type of cultural consumption, namely, the "consumption of the place".

These propositions are seen by some as part of a "post-modern" trend in urban studies and architecture; there are others, however, who eliminate from the term post-modernity any positive determinations, considering it empty and incapable of introducing rupture vis à vis what preceded it, i.e., modernity: both one and the other are not alternatives but, according to Otilia Arantes, "unified steps in a single process of adjustment of society to the reversals undertaken by capitalism in order to continue to be what it has always been, and of whose metamorphoses urban landscape is the most visible façade" (1998, pp. 12-13). The author also has a rather critical view of both the phenomenon of globalization and of the urban revitalization proposal induced by the latter.

This globalization of capital, to call the thing by its true name, which is economic, technological, and media-related, gives rise to disharmony, segregations and multicultural and multiracial ghettos, at the same time as anarchic deterritorializations, anomalous and transgressive growths[...] Moreover, the new structural crisis tendencies of social regulation and the dismantling of national States transform the alleged local values into merchandise that can be equally consumed and recycled, at the same speed at which capital moves. Generally speaking, this is the node of urban renovation that is underway both in affluent countries and in the peripheral ones, with even more reason (1998, pp. 187-188).

In a more recent collective work (2000), these criticisms are resumed, with the addition of the analyses of Carlos Vainer and Ermínia Maricato. Vainer relies on a more technical point of view and focuses specifically on strategic planning, a model disseminated in Brazil by some multilateral agencies (BIRD, Habitat) and international consultants, especially Catalan ones, based on Barcelona's aforementioned experience.<sup>5</sup>

According to Vainer, this planning model is inspired by concepts and techniques that derive from corporate planning. Its adoption by local governments is justified by the fact that cities are subject to the same injunctions as companies. The urban issue, according to this view, should be looked at from the standpoint of competitiveness: competing for capital investment, technology and managerial competence; competing for attracting new industries and businesses; and competing for attracting a qualified workforce.

Embracing a more militant tone, Ermínia Maricato's text criticizes the use of terms such as "global city", "world city" and "strategic planning", which she sees as fads; on the other hand, she has a more positive view of modernistic planning, precisely because of its "holistic" character, which, according to her, offers a counterpoint to the fragmentation of the post-modern view. She is forceful in declaring herself as favorable to socially inclusive and democratic urbanism and proposes merging "action plans" and "participative budgets".

Finally, following the same critical line of thought, one should refer to the work of Ana Cristina Fernandes (2001), according to whom the new public policies focused on enhancing the value of the local sphere (whether cities or regions) should be considered in the light of the interests of three agents: multilateral organisms together with international consulting institutions, transnational corporations and local elites.

This discussion, in turn, is not foreign to anthropology. There are authors that emphasize the homogenizing effects of the world system on local cultures, also crediting this influence to the "great narrative of western domination", to use the expression employed by Marshall Sahlins in designating this reading of the issue (1997, p. 15). In this article, however, the author demonstrates, based on recent ethnographies, that there is no single logic, nor a single direction in the transnational flow through which people, merchandise and funds move: quite often, this flow ends up by strengthening traditional habits and institutions in one of its ends, the one consisting of the distant village of origin.

However, we do not intend to discuss the international order of things, but rather to define a field within which one may evaluate analytical alternatives that focus on contemporary urban dynamics. Undoubtedly this is a heated discussion and there are many more studies on the reality of large cities, in addition to those we have mentioned here, but some of the clues found in the work of the chosen authors already allow one to establish a counterpoint to the proposition that this paper will propound.

#### The ethnographic view: from close up and within

Taking this debate of the urban issue as a whole, with its propositions and criticism, both of which have been for some time on the agenda of countless summits and seminars of international or non-governmental organizations,<sup>6</sup> certain points in common can be found.

First, one can see that social players are absent. The city is regarded as an entity that is independent of its inhabitants, ideated as the result of transnational economic forces, local elites, political lobbies, demographic variables, property interests and other factors of a macro nature. It seems to be a setting devoid of actions, activities, meeting points, sociability networks. At most, one mentions some performance or another – public art – that appears to be the sole form of intervention capable of causing a change or at least producing a momentary jolt, for the delight of a few and the indifference of most people, who appear to live beyond the reach of such experiments, to judge by the repercussion of some of the events of this nature in the city of São Paulo.<sup>7</sup>

In truth, it is not the lack of social actors that actually draws one's attention, but the absence of a certain type of social actor and the determining role of others. In some analyses, the dynamics of cities is ascribed directly and immediately to the capitalist system; changes in the urban landscape, intervention proposals (requalification, recycling, restoration) and institutional changes are no more than an adaptation to the stages of capitalism, which is erected, in its role of independent variable, as the ultimate and complete explanatory dimension.

In this case, when social actors appear, they are the representatives of capital and of market forces: financiers, real estate agents, private investors. Characters such as the "cultural animators" -- consultants, architects, artists and other intellectuals – may also be present, but only to serve the interests of capital, as "puppet professionals", to use the expression employed by Arantes (1998).

As for the actual inhabitants who through their multiple networks, forms of sociability, lifestyles, movements, conflicts, etc. constitute the element that definitely lends a metropolis its life, they do not appear. When they are mentioned at all, it is as a passive party (the excluded, the exploited) in the intricate urban process.<sup>8</sup> In the more militant texts, undoubtedly, these players are recovered, but as subjects of political strategies such as the participative budget, a "socially including urbanism", various types of associations, etc.

Without disregarding the contribution of engaged and organized action, however, there is a range of practices that may not be visible through a decoding system focused only on politics (at least a *certain* view of politics): it is precisely this dimension that ethnography helps one to recover. The incorporation of these players and their practices would enable one to introduce other points of view regarding the dynamics of the city, going beyond the "competent" examination that decides what is right and what is wrong and also going beyond the perspective and interests of power, which decides what is convenient and profitable.

Finally, although global cities may be the framework for such analyses, some of these studies assume a type of setting for public life that is still derived from the prototype and dimensions of the towns of the European High Middle Ages or even of ancient city-states, whose centrality was symbolized and guaranteed by certain institutions that dominated public space. However, in a contiguous agglomeration with more than ten million inhabitants, such as the city of São Paulo, there is no single centrality but several (Frúgoli, 2000). Rather than looking in vain for an ordering principle capable of ensuring the dynamics of the city as a whole, one ought to try to identify these different centralities and the multiple orders that occur within them and thanks to them.

This is so because the current large urban centers cannot be regarded merely as overgrown cities – hence their handicaps and distortions. The very scale of a megacity imposes a change in the distribution and form of its public areas, in its relations with private space, in the role of collective spaces and in the different ways in which agents (inhabitants, visitors, workers, employees, organized sectors, excluded segments, "deviants", etc.) use and appropriate each one of these modalities of spatial relations.

Beyond nostalgia for the "old modern street" of Berman (1989, p. 162) or the "sidewalk ballet" of Jane Jacobs (1992, p. 50), one undoubtedly ought to ask oneself whether the exercise of citizenship, of urban practices and of the rituals of public life do not have, in the context of the large contemporary cities, other settings: for that, one must look for them using a more appropriate strategy.

This is what one proposes to achieve using anthropology, through the ethnographic method. Large cities are certainly important for analysis and reflection, not only because they integrate

the so-called world system and are decisive factors in the globalized flow and allocation of capital, but also because they concentrate services, offer opportunities for work, produce behaviors, determine lifestyles – and not only those compatible with the circuit of "solvent" users, of major capital, patrons of the network of hotel and the restaurants and leisure options that abide by international standards.

The presence of migrants, visitors, temporary residents and minorities; of differentiated segments regarding sexual orientation, ethnical or regional identification, cultural preferences and beliefs; of groups articulated around political alternatives, and competing or proposed action strategies and of segments branded by exclusion – all of this diversity leads one to think not of the fragmentation of an atomized multiculturalism, but rather of the possibility of interchange systems on another scale, with heretofore unthinkable partners, enabling arrangements, initiatives and experiences of different hues.

It is clear that one cannot deny all the problems pointed out in the diagnoses, based on countless and consistent studies and also proven through day-to-day experience in major cities, neither can one, evidently, disregard the impositions of the interests of the major transnational corporations and local elites upon the decision-making systems that concern urban order and their influence on the population's living conditions. But the question that hangs in the air is: is that all? Does this degraded setting exhaust the range of urban experiences? Might it be possible to reach other conclusions and reveal other planes by changing the focus of analysis *from outside and afar*, based on other research methods and tools,<sup>9</sup> such as those offered by anthropology, for instance?

It is true that this discipline, as we know, developed its investigative methods mainly from the study of societies dedicated to gathering, hunting and subsistence agriculture, whose lifestyle is based on forms of settlement other than cities; consequently, the strategies of ethnographic research would appear at first to be unsuitable for unraveling the complexities of contemporary cities, immersed in the globalized system.

Nevertheless, it is also generally agreed that anthropology is not defined by a given object: more than a discipline that focuses on the study of primitive people, it is, as Merleau-Ponty states, "a way of thinking when the object is 'another', and one which calls for our own transformation. Thus, we also become ethnologists of our own society, if we look at it from a certain distance" (1984, pp. 199-200).<sup>10</sup>

This issue of "distance" as a condition for anthropological analysis, as is the case of other, related issues – the subject/object relation, putting oneself or not in the other's place, lending voice to the native, the nature of participation in the participative observations, the authorship of ethnographic texts – has already given rise to much discussion and will not be resumed here. However, there is one point worth identifying, as it has implications for the argument put forth in this article: it is the nature, the specificity of knowledge provided by ethnography's *modus operandi*, which — according to the hypothesis that is under discussion – enables it to capture certain aspects of urban dynamics that would go unnoticed in analyses define solely by overall views and broad numbers.

A review of certain attempts to "narrow down" the specificity of ethnography can be revealing: Peirano (1995), for instance, refers to "residues" – certain facts that resist the usual explanations and that only come to light as a result of the confrontation between research theories and native ideas; Goldman (2001) refers to the "possibility of finding, through a kind of 'ethnographical detour', a decentered point of view"<sup>11</sup>; one should also keep in mind the "anthropological blues" of Da Matta (1974) and the expression "experience-near versus experience-distant" employed by Geertz (1983).

In their own way – and with different emphases – each one of these paraphrases, among others, allows one to glimpse certain focuses of recurrent meaning: the first one of them is an attitude of distancing and/or exteriority of the researcher vis à vis the object. This comes from the influence exerted by his culture of origin and by the conceptual schemes with which he is equipped, which are not discarded by merely coming into contact with another culture and other explanations, the so-called "native theories". In reality, this co-presence, this focus on both is what leads to ambiguity, the possibility of an unforeseen solution, a decentered glance, an unexpected way out.

On the other hand, this experience has an impact on the researcher: it "affects" him (Goldman, 2001); it "transforms" him (Merleau-Ponty, 1984), it is produced "in him" and, ultimately, it "converts" him (Peirano, 1995). The researcher not only grasps the meaning of the native's arrangements, but, upon perceiving this meaning and managing to describe in his, the analyst's, terms, he is able to attest to its logic and to absorb it, according to the standards of his own intellectual equipment and even his own system of values. According to Merleau-Ponty, "it has to do with building a reference system with room for the native's point of view, the civilized point of view and their errors regarding each other, building a broadened experience that can become, in principle, accessible to men from another country and another time" (1984, p. 199).

On a more general level, the condition underlying this experience is the assumption that both the researcher and the native participate on the same level: that of the "fundamental phenomena of the life of the spirit" (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 28). Both are endowed with the same cognitive processes, which allow them, on a deeper instance, to attain a communion far beyond cultural differences. After all, "the thousands of societies that exist or have existed on the face of the Earth are human and, as a result of this title, we participate in them subjectively; we could have been part of them and therefore we can try to understand them as if we were part of them" (*ibid.*, p. 26).

Lastly, one must stress that the ethnographic method is not and cannot be reduced to a technique; it may, however, employ or make use of several techniques, depending on the circumstances of each piece of research; it is, above all, a means of approaching and apprehending, rather than a set of procedures. Furthermore, it is not the obsession with details that characterizes ethnography, but rather the attention given to them: at some point in time, the fragments may be arranged in such a way as to offer clues for a new understanding.

Summarizing, the nature of the explanation through ethnography is based on an insight that enables the reorganization of data perceived as fragmented, information that is as of yet dispersed, just loose indications, so as to form a new arrangement that is neither the native arrangement (but one that derives from it, that takes it into account, that was brought forth by it),



nor the one with which the researcher initiated his study. This new arrangement, however, carries the marks of both: more general than the native explanation, which is tied to the particularities of its context, it can be applied to other occurrences; however, it is denser than the researcher's initial theoretical framework, because it now refers to what has been "concretely experienced."

Thus, what is proposed initially as the ethnographic method as applied to the city and its dynamics consists of recovering the ability to look *from close up and within*, which allows one to identify, describe and reflect on the aspects excluded from the perspective of those approaches that, for the purpose of contrast, I have qualified as being *from outside and afar*.

### **The urban ethnography proposition**

The change in focus that is rendered possible by the anthropological perspective, largely as a result of the ethnographic method, has the advantage of avoiding that dichotomy that places individuals and gigantic urban megastructures in opposition to each other.

This polarization, found in some of the postures highlighted in this article, underscores many analyses and diagnoses on the contemporary city and can be more clearly identified in these well-known commonsensical discourses on depersonalization, massification, loneliness, etc., all of them heavily divulged themes, forever at hand when one wishes to discuss major urban centers:

In the midst of the crowds, the individual is alone. Every day, he passes by hundreds of people he does not know. These people live in the same environment, but do not engage in any social intercourse. The same metropolis produces masses but isolates the individual. This context, especially in literature, gives rise to themes that question the loss of traditional social bonds and point to the banalization of life in large cities.<sup>12</sup>

This kind of statement, which evokes vague "traditional social bonds", but that skirts around the possibilities and alternatives offered by cosmopolitan life, disregards the existence of groups, networks, interchange systems, meeting points, institutions, arrangements, paths and many other mediations through which that abstract entity, the individual, effectively takes part in the city, in his day-to-day life.

A simple strategy, consisting of accompanying one of these "individuals" along his daily paths, would reveal a map of movements underscored by significant contacts, in contexts as varied as work, leisure, religious practice, associations, etc. It is on this plane that the perspective *from close up and within* comes into play, its being capable of grasping the behavioral patterns, not of atomized individuals, but of the multiple, varied and heterogeneous sets of social actors, whose daily lives flow along the landscape of the city and depend on its equipment.

Although the perspective that I classify as *from close up and within* is associated with ethnography, not all research proposals based on anthropology or referring to the ethnographic method seek this type of knowledge. There is, for instance, a type that I characterize as the

*passing glance*: it consists of meandering through the city and its nooks and crannies, observing the spaces, equipment and typical characters, as well as their habits, conflicts and expedients, allowing oneself to become imbued with the fragmentation that this succession of images produces. The final narrative, generally in the form of an essay, ends by expressing this experience through metaphors. The greater the creativity of the analyst, the more suggestive these metaphors and the range of established relations will be: "hybridization", "porousness", "flexible territoriality", "non-places", "spatial-temporal configurations", "disjunctive landscapes", etc.

Without diminishing the importance of the advantages that this research strategy can provide, one must also be aware of some of the consequences generated by the profusion of terminology and the multiplicity of categories associated with the said advantages: to the extent that they remain attached to the metaphorical plane, they may end up duplicating, in the text, the heterogeneity perceived in the initial experience.<sup>13</sup> A challenge for all those whose theme of study is the contemporary city is therefore to construct more economical analytical models, capable of keeping the researcher from reproducing on the plane of interpretive text the fragmentation through which large metropolises are often depicted in the media, the fine arts, photography, and artistic interventions in public spaces.<sup>14</sup>

In any event, instead of a *passing glance* that follows the choices and path of the researcher himself, what is proposed here is to look *from close up and within*, but based on the *arrangements* of the social actors themselves, i.e., the ways they rely on to move around the city, enjoy its services, make use of its equipment, and set up meetings and interchanges across a wide range of spheres of activity: religiosity, work, leisure, culture, political or associative participation, etc.

This strategy assumes an investment in both ends of the relation; on one hand, in the social actors, the group and the practice, all of which are under study; and, on the other hand, the landscape in which this practice is carried out, defined not merely as a setting, but as an integral part of the chosen analytical angle. This is what characterizes the focus of urban anthropology, distinguishing it from the approaches of other disciplines and even of other anthropological alternatives.

### ***The assumption of totality***

There is, however, an antecedent question: what might be the unit of analysis in the proposed strategy? The city as a whole or each cultural practice in particular? Or, in the terms of a more familiar dichotomy, is it about anthropology *of* the city, or *in* the city?

To introduce this question, it is advisable to resume a point the approaches discussed thus far have in common: most of the studies that I classify as *observing from outside and afar* ascribe little importance to the social actors responsible for the plot that supports urban dynamics; when they appear, they are seen through the prism of fragmentation, individualized and atomized in the impersonal setting of the metropolis. However, contrary to the views that favor, in the analysis of the city, the economic forces, market logic, and decisions of investors and planners, I propose to rely on the said social actors not as isolated and dispersed elements, submitted to an

inevitable massification, but rather as people who, through the vernacular use of the city (of its space, equipment, institutions) in the spheres of work, religiosity, leisure, culture and survival strategies, are responsible for the city's daily dynamics. I postulate starting with the social actors and their multiple, different and creative collective *arrangements*: their behavior in the city's landscape is not erratic but, rather, it reflects patterns.

To use regularities and patterns as one's starting point, rather than the "dissonances", "lack of encounters" or "hybridizations" as the condition for research, assumes the opposite on the theoretical plane: the concept of totality is the key assumption. Obviously, this is not a totality that evokes a complete, functional, conflict-free organic entity; neither is it a totality that coincides, in the case of the city, with its political and administrative boundaries: when one talks about São Paulo, for instance, the application of ethnography to an area of 1,525 km<sup>2</sup> inhabited by some 12 million people is unthinkable. However, renouncing this type of totality does not mean embarking on the extreme opposite, i.e., diving into fragmentation. Although one may be unable to outline a single order of things, that does not mean that no order exists; there are particularized, sectorized orders; there are arrangements and regularities.

An initial representation of totality, as the underlying ethnography assumption, is that supplied by the classic vision of a community whose members know each other, have face-to-face relations, are linked by interpersonal interchange patterns, etc.:

[...] I defend the idea that the knowledge of social anthropologists has a special quality, due to the area in which they exercise their artistic imagination. This area is the living space of some small community of people who live together in circumstances in which most of their daily communications depends directly on interaction. This does not encompass all of human social life, and it encompasses all of human history even less. However, all human beings spend a large proportion of their lives in contexts of this type (Leach, 1989, pp. 50-51). To this perspective, one may add well-known passages – that of Evans-Pritchard, "from the door of my tent I could see what went on in the camp or the village" (1978 [1940], p. 20) and that of Malinowski, "in my morning walk through the village, I could observe the private details of family life[...]" (1978, p. 21). Despite having been criticized by post-modern authors, these images continue to be associated with research situations not only within the context of "small scale societies": they continue to be tempting in order to circumscribe the territory of research, with identified and well-known characters within clearly defined boundaries. In some of my other work (Magnani, 2000, p. 20) I have discussed its application to the setting of large contemporary cities, characterizing it specifically with the expression "the temptation of the village."

But if a clearly defined segment of society is a prerequisite for the proper exercise of ethnography, the need for totality goes beyond the need to be able to rely on the object of research within clearly defined boundaries. An incursion on indigenous ethnology can help clarify matters: if concrete spatial boundaries – the village, the camp, a defined portion of territory, upstream or downstream from such and such a river – is an indispensable base for ethnographic observation, other set boundaries, however, though they may be broader, are employed to situate, evaluate and compare the detail of ethnographies. Thus, references such as "the Amazonian landscape", "the south American lowlands" and others found in texts on indigenous ethnology enable one to determine recurrences and broader patterns of interchange

and communication on the planes of cosmology, shamanism, mythology, rituals, etc.: without this passage, one runs the risk of remaining entrapped within the narrow limits of a case study. Thus, the issue of totality involves multiple planes and scales.

A second characteristic of totality as an ethnographic assumption concerns its dual face: on one hand, the way in which it is experienced by the social actors and, on the other hand, how it is perceived and described by the investigator. In a well-known passage of the "Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss", in which Lévi-Strauss shows how elements of a very different nature may come to be articulated into a social fact, and that only in this form can they have global significance, transforming themselves into a totality, the author states that the guarantee that such a fact "corresponds to reality and is not a mere arbitrary accumulation of more or less correct details" lies in its becoming known within a concrete experience, from a more social plane, located in time and space, to the individual plane (Lévi-Strauss, *in* Mauss, 1971, p. 24).

To remain in the field of urban anthropology, those who have already studied Afro-Brazilian religious centers (*candomblé*), groups of youths, samba schools, organized soccer rooters, etc. know perfectly well that in these and in other analogous cases there is a totality that is vividly experienced by the members of the group, both as the definition of a boundary and as a code of belonging. Taking as an example the category of *turf*, which I have discussed in some of my other work, it is equally obvious that the members of these groups have an immediate, clear, unequivocal and nuance-free perception of who is or is not part of the *turf*: This is a concrete and shared experience. The analyst, in turn, also perceives such an experience and describes it: this particular kind of encounter, interchange and sociability presupposes the presence of a certain minimal number of structuring elements that make it recognizable in other contexts.

Thus, a consistent totality in terms of ethnography is one which, experimented and recognized by social actors, can be identified by the investigator and described in categories: for the first group, it is the context of experience; for the second, the key to intelligibility and the explanatory principle. Given that one cannot rely on a totality provided *a priori*, it is argued that it ought to be constructed based on the experience of the actors and with the help of work hypotheses and theoretical choices as the condition for one to be able to say more than mere generalities about the studied object.

Therefore, the two aforementioned planes – that of the city as a whole and that of each cultural practice assigned to this or that group of actors in particular – should be considered as the two poles of a relation, which circumscribe, determine and enable the dynamics that are under study. Consequently, to capture these dynamics, one must focus neither so close as to become confused by the particular perspective of each user, nor so far as to only distinguish a broad section, but one that is undecipherable and devoid of sense. In other words, neither at the level of the major physical, economic, institutional, etc. structures, nor at the level of individual choices: there are intermediate planes in which one can distinguish the presence of patterns and regularities. Furthermore, to identify these regularities and to be able to construct, as a reference, some kind of totality within which their meaning may be appreciated, one must have certain tools and categories of analysis, as will be discussed below.

### ***The family of categories***

These totalities are identified and described by categories that have a double code, as stated above: they appear as a result of recognition of their empirical presence, in the form of concrete and effective arrangements among the social actors, but they can also be described in a more abstract plane. In this case, they constitute a kind of model that is applicable to contexts that are different from those in which they were originally identified. They are therefore the result of the ethnographic work itself, which recognizes the native *arrangements* but which describes them and operates on a more general plane, identifying the terms and articulating them into systems of relations. The notion of *turf*, for instance, presupposes a spatial reference, the regular presence of the *turf*'s members and a recognition and communication code between them.

This is actually the first of a series of categories that end up by forming a terminological "family" -- *turf*, *route*, *patch*, *gateway*, *circuit* -- and which appeared in the context of research on leisure in the underprivileged outskirts of São Paulo.<sup>15</sup>

Contrary to current views according to which leisure is an irrelevant issue in the day-to-day life of workers, what was actually witnessed through observation in the field was a broad and varied range of uses of free time during weekends in the underprivileged districts in the outskirts of São Paulo: circuses, dances, parties celebrating christenings, birthdays and weddings, soccer tournaments, fêtes, religious celebrations and rituals, picnicking excursions, outings, etc. All of these were evidently of the simple and traditional kind, devoid of the glitter and sophistication of the leisure industry's latest novelties. They also lacked explicit political or class connotations, though they were deeply linked to the lifestyle and traditions of this population.

Closer observation of the rules governing the use of free time through these forms of leisure made it evident that its dynamics extended far beyond the mere need to replenish the energy spent during the work day; to the contrary, leisure represented an opportunity, through both old and new forms of entertainment and reunion, to establish, strengthen and exercise those rules of recognition and loyalty that ensure a basic network of sociability.

On the other hand, these types of leisure did not constitute an undifferentiated whole, randomly available and to be enjoyed by all: there was an order. One could distinguish, for instance, typically male kinds of entertainment, as opposed to women's entertainment; children's entertainment vs. that of adults; young men's and young women's forms of entertainment, and so forth.

Taking the places where the entertainment was practiced as a starting point, it became possible to distinguish a system of oppositions for which the first terms are "at home" versus "away from home". The former, "at home", covered the forms of leisure associated with rites celebrating significant life cycle changes, with the family as their framework, namely, christenings, birthdays and weddings, and other types of parties. The latter, "away from home", was in turn subdivided into "in the neighborhood" and "outside the neighborhood". The first group included leisure and meeting places such as bars, snack-bars, dance halls, parochial halls and centers of Afro-Brazilian religious practice (*candomblé* and *macumba*), soccer fields, the circus, etc., all of them within the neighborhood. They were, therefore, subject to a certain type of control, of the kind exercised by people who are in some way acquainted with each other, either because they

live close to each other, or because they use the same equipment, such as the bus stop, public phone, grocery store, drugstore, healthcare center, or sport courts, as available.

When the space – or a segment thereof – thus defined became the point of reference for distinguishing a given group of frequenters as belonging to a network of relations, it was given the name "*turf*". The term actually designates that intermediate area between what is private (home) and what is public, where a basic type of sociability takes place, one that is broader than that which is grounded on family ties, but that is more stable, significant and dense than the formal and individualized relations imposed by society (Magnani, 1998, p. 116).

An initial analysis showed that two basic elements formed this notion: one of a spatial or physical nature, configuring a territory with clear boundaries or consisting of certain types of equipment, and the other of a social nature, in the form of a network of relations that extends over this territory.

The characteristics of the equipment that defines the boundaries (bars, snack-bars, halls, soccer fields, etc.) indicated that the territory whose boundaries were thus defined constituted a place of passage and encounter. However, passing through this place or even frequenting it with a certain regularity did not cause one to belong, to be entitled to a piece of the *turf*: it was necessary to be situated (and to be recognized as such) within a particular network of relations combining the ties of the family, the neighborhood, the origin, all of them links defined through participation in community activities, sports, etc. Thus, it was the second element, the relations network, which instated the code that enables separating, ordering and classifying: it was, ultimately, through reference to this code that one could establish who was and who was not part of the *turf*, and to what extent ("colleague", "mate", "namesake", etc.)

This category, a native one, has transcended the *locus* of its original application and, based on a dialogue with other propositions, such as that represented by Roberto da Matta's opposition of *away from home* versus *home*, it is now used to designate a particular type of sociability and appropriation of urban space.

According to da Matta's well-known formula, there are two planes, each one of which bundles a series of attitudes, values and behaviors paradigmatically, one of them concerning what is public and the other what is private. The *turf*, however, pointed to a third domain, somewhere in between *away from home* and *home*: whereas the latter is the place where the family is to be found, a place to which *relatives* have access, and the area *away from home* is the domain of *strangers* (where, in moments of tenseness and ambiguity, one relies on the formula "do you know whom you are talking to?" to define positions and mark one's rights), the *turf* is the place where one's *colleagues*, one's *mates* are found. Here no interpellation is required: they all know who is who, where each one comes from, what each one is like and what one can or cannot do.

Thus, a native category ended up being described in more formal terms, which enables attempting its application to other contexts. Up until then, the context was an underprivileged district on the outskirts of São Paulo. The issue raised in *Festa no Pedaco* (Turf Party), however, resulted in a new research project<sup>16</sup>. The first question was what might be going on in other parts of the urban territory (the central areas, for instance), generally characterized by anonymity

and by impersonal relations, which people from a wide range of origins pass through. In this area, how are networks of sociability established, since they are no longer underscored by neighborly relations or by shared daily practices?

It was easy to recognize the existence of different types of *turf* in the city's central areas, when these areas were clearly residential: the rationale was the same. As for other locations, used mainly as leisure and meeting points, there was a difference relative to the original concept of *turf*: here, contrary to what occurred within the context of a neighborhood, the frequenters were not necessarily acquainted with each other – at least not through links constructed via the neighborhood's day-to-day life – but they *recognized* each other as bearing the same symbols that reflect similar tastes, orientations, values, consumption habits and lifestyles.

The spatial component of the *turf*, even if inserted in equipment or more broadly accessible space, has no room for ambiguities, provided it is impregnated by the symbolic aspect that lends it the form of characteristic appropriation. A segment of the research report makes this idea clearer:

[...] On this street [24 de Maio], one of the number of galleries found in the area stands out: the Presidente Commercial Center, housing record shops specializing in funk, disco and other dancing rhythms (Mania Blacks Records, Truck's Records), besides other services, such as black hairdressers (Gê Curl Wave, Almir Black Power, Gueto Black Power), which strengthen the particular grammar of its characteristic occupancy: this is black turf, where young women and women congregate around certain brands of blackness and particular esthetics, music, rhythm, shows and dance halls (Chic Show, Zimbabwe, Skina Club, etc.) ("*Os Pedacos da Cidade*", research report, p. 52).

Gangs, bands and groups proclaim through their clothes, language, body posture and musical preference the *turf* to which they belong. In this case, it is not a space whose boundaries are home or the neighborhood, yet the "*turf effect*" persists: regardless of where they come from, what they are seeking is a point of agglutination for the development and strengthening of bonds. When young black people leave their homes and go to this piece of *turf* in the Presidente Commercial Center<sup>17</sup>, they are not going there necessarily to work on their looks or buy records; they are going there to meet their peers, exercise the use of common codes, appreciate the symbols chosen for marking differences. It feels good to be there, the chit-chat is cool, one learns about things... and that is the way that this sociability network is woven.

Therefore, if the *turf* category showed itself to be useful for describing a form of sociability in a context other than that of its origin, within the scope of the neighborhood and the district it was necessary, as seen, to make some adjustments.

However, the incursion into the center showed other patterns of use and of spatial order. There is a type of appropriation, when the issue concerns spots that function as a point of reference for a more diverse number of frequenters. Their physical base is broader, enabling people from several origins to circulate without the establishment of closer ties between them. These are the *patches*, contiguous areas in the urban space that are endowed with pieces of equipment that mark their boundaries and enable – each one with its specificity, competing or complementing – an activity

or predominant practice. In a leisure *patch*, the equipment may consist of bars, restaurants, cinemas, theatres, the corner café, etc., which either through competition or through complementation contribute to the same effect: constituting reference points for the practice of certain activities. On the other hand, a *patch* characterized by activities connected with healthcare, for instance, is generally established around some sort of anchor institution – a hospital – with a range of services grouped around it (drugstores, private clinics, X-ray services, laboratories, etc.), and so forth.

The marks of these two forms of appropriation and use of space – the *turf* and the *patch* – on the broader city landscape are different. In the first instance, in which the determining factor consists of the relations established between its members (as a result of the handling of symbols and codes), the space, as a point of reference, is of limited relevance, being of interest mainly to its habitués. One can easily move to another spot and take the relevant bits and pieces along.

To the contrary, a *patch* centered on one or more establishments is implemented in a more stable fashion, both in the landscape and in the imagination. The activities it offers and the practices that it fosters are the result of a multiplicity of relations between its pieces of equipment, buildings and access paths, which ensures greater continuity, transforming it into a physical point of reference, both visible and public with regard to larger number of users.

In contrast with what happens on the *turf*, which the individual goes to in search of his peers, who share the same codes, the *patch* gives way to unforeseen encounters that are, up to a point, unexpected, resulting in more varied combinations. On a given *patch* one is aware of the type of people or services one will find, but one does not know *who the specific individuals* will be. It is this expectation that operates as the motivation for the *patch*'s frequenters.

The city, however, is not an agglomeration of exclusory places, bits of *turf*, or *patches*: people move between them, making their choices from the many alternatives – this one *or* that one, this one *and* that one – based on a certain rationale. Even when they visit their habitual *turf*, within a given *patch*, they pursue paths that are not haphazard. One is now talking about *routes*.

The term *route* arose out of the need to categorize a way of using space that is different, firstly, from that described by the *patch* category. Whereas the latter, as we have seen, indicates a territory that functions as a point of reference – and, in the case of the neighborhood's life, it evokes the permanence of ties with the family, the neighborhood, one's origin and others – *route* applies to recurrent flows in the more broadly encompassing space of the city and within the urban *patches*. It is the extension and, above all, the diversity of the urban space, beyond the neighborhood, that drives the need to move through distant and non-contiguous areas; this is the first application of the category: in the broader and more diversified landscape of the city, *routes* connect pieces of equipment, places, and *patches*, whether complementary or alternative.

Another application concerns the interior of *patches*. Given that they presuppose more concentrated equipment, each piece of which fosters, in its way, the activity that lends that *patch* its particular characteristic, the *routes* that go through them are short and can be covered on foot: they represent choices or angles within that *patch*, understood as a contiguous area.



Thus, the idea of a *route* enables thinking both about the possibility of choices within *patches* and the opening of these *patches* and pieces of *turf* toward other points in the urban space and, consequently, toward other rationales. Without this opening one runs the risk of falling into an alienating perspective, both restricted and overly "communitarian", of the idea of *turf* – with its recognition codes, reciprocity ties and face-to-face relations. It has been stated that *turf* is that intermediate space between home (i.e., what is private) and that which is public or, to use a well-known system of opposition, between *home* and *away from home*. It is not, however, a closed and impermeable space relative to the latter and the former. To the contrary, it is the notion of *route* that opens the *turf* outward, toward the scope of what is public.

*Routes* lead from one point to another through *gateways*. These are spaces, landmarks and empty areas in the urban landscape that configure passages. Places that belong neither to the *patch* over here, nor to the one over there; they escape the classification system of either and, as such, they suffer from the "curse of boundary emptiness".<sup>18</sup> No man's lands, dangerous places, preferred by figures who are *on the edge* and for carrying out magical rituals – they are often gloomy places that must be crossed quickly, without no glances sideways...

Finally, there is the notion of *circuit*. This is a category that describes the exercise of a practice or the offer of a given service through establishments, equipment and spaces that are not contiguous in spatial terms, but that are nevertheless recognized as a whole by their habitual users, such as, for instance, the gay circuit, the circuit of artsy cinemas, the neo-esoteric circuit, or the circuit of dance halls, black shows, antique shops, clubbers, or devotees of Afro-Brazilian cults (*candomblé*), among others.

Resuming, in order to differentiate better: although the *turf* and the *patch* have clear spatial boundaries in common, the relation of the *turf* with space is more transitory, because it can move from one place to another without ceasing to exist, given that the other component constituting it is symbolic, since a common code is strongly at play. The *patch*, on the other hand – bound by the pieces of equipment that complement each other or compete with each other in supplying certain goods or services – has a more stable relation with space and is more clearly visible in the landscape: it is recognized and frequented by a broader circle of users.

The notion of *circuit* also designates the use of urban equipment and space – consequently enabling the exercise of sociability through meetings, communication and the use of codes – but with greater independence from space, with no dependence on contiguity, as is the case of the *patch* or the *turf*. However, it also exists in an objective and observable way: it can be surveyed, described and located.

In principle, all equipment connected with the offer of a given set of goods or services, or with the exercise of a given practice, is part of the *circuit*, but some of it is seen as a point of reference and of support for that activity. More than a closed set, the *circuit* may be regarded as the beginning of a classification. Thus, one can distinguish main circuits, that encompass other, more specific ones: the circuit of acupuncturists or astrologers, for instance, is part of the main neo-esoteric circuit and maintains contact, links and interchanges with it.

On the other hand, the *circuit* comprises several levels of coverage, and the contour of its boundaries depends on the questions posed by the researcher. The devotees of Afro-Brazilian cults in the city, as shown by Rita de Cássia Amaral (2000), have their own circuit and lifestyle, but it is possible, for instance, depending on the research objectives, to cover and consider only the circuit of Africanized centers of worship, or to extend it to other kinds as well, including or not the centers of worship of Angolan origin, and even those of other Afro-Brazilian cults, such as *umbanda*. Leaving the properly religious field, the circuit may encompass Afro-Brazilian martial arts (*capoeira*), samba schools, and Afro-Brazilian carnival groups of a semi-religious nature (*afoxés*), as well dance schools, exhibitions of African art, restaurants, and so forth.

Each one of these ranges is in contact with the same system of symbolism and interchange – it continues to be the universe of devotees of Afro-Brazilian cults – but with each expansion (or reduction) of the scope, provided the reference to a field recognized by the users is not lost, one is working with different issues, defined according to the purposes, questions and literature employed by the study.

There are multiple applications of this to other research themes: thus, in my study of urban neo-esotericism (Magnani, 1999), a theme in which fragmentation appeared to be the norm, I was able to describe several circuits derived from the main neo-esoteric circuit. One of them is the circuit of urban shamanism (*ibid.*, 2000), which may include indigenous shamans, psychologists, body therapists, ayahuasca users and phytotherapists. With regard to spaces, it combines consulting rooms in the city with country estates in the suburban regions of São Paulo (for the rituals) and contacts in other areas of the country (the Diamantina plateau, the Veadeiros plateau, etc.) and abroad.

Rosani Rigamonte (2001) showed that northeastern culture in the city of São Paulo is based on a circuit that includes not only the well-known Northeastern Houses and dance halls dedicated to typical Northeastern music (*forró*), but also small towns in the inner-state areas of the state of Bahia, such as Piripá, Barrinha and Condeúba, which, among others, play host to a considerable wave of northeasterners established in São Paulo, during the traditional saints' feasts held in June (*festas juninas*). These towns are part of the circuit not as a distant and nostalgic reference, but as the actual center of a far-reaching system of interchange, which even involves a particular mechanism for sending letters, money and consumption goods throughout the year via a parallel transport system, arriving and departing from Silvio Romero square in the north section of the city of São Paulo. On Sunday mornings, this square becomes a piece of northeastern *turf* and is frequented by people intending to send packages to their family members or waiting for news from them.

Bruna Mantese, in her research on the *straight edge*, shows that the circuit of this segment of the *hardcore punk* scene has established a connection with the Hare Krishna circuit and that, instead of this approximation serving as an example of yet one more "dissonance" in the metropolis, it presents a constant interchange system, based on a common interest (albeit driven by different motivations, religious in one case, political in the other) shared by these two groups, outwardly so far removed from each other: vegetarianism.<sup>19</sup>

This is therefore a process that enables one to face the issue of "semiological chaos", that impression one gets every time one isolates a given individual and confronts him directly with the city; under these conditions, the sensation of anonymity, fragmentation and disorder is inevitable. This impression, as stated above, is the result of observing from *outside and afar*. By adjusting the focus of analysis, however, it becomes possible to see the different circuits that the user recognizes and follows in establishing his own paths, whether on the professional plane, or on the planes of leisure, consumption, devotional practices, survival strategies, participation, and many others.

## Conclusion

As a more general purpose, this article postulated that anthropology has a specific contribution to the understanding of contemporary urban issues, and one that is quite different, thanks to the ethnographic focus, from the way other perspectives and disciplines broach the issue. This proposition also foresaw deliberately imposing certain boundaries to the broad and ample field known as "anthropology of complex societies", reserving the title of urban anthropology, in the strict sense of the expression, for the study of social groups and their practices, in so far as properly inscribed in the texture of the city, i.e., articulated in and with the landscape, equipment and urban institutions, regarded not merely as a setting, but as an integral part of these practices.

This is a first approach to the complexity of contemporary urban dynamics. On this plane, the urban anthropology unit of analysis consists of different practices, rather than of the city as a whole or of a specific form of settlement, configuring something that is anthropology *within* the city, rather than – at least for the time being – *of* the city.

In order to identify these practices and their agents, a strategy was proposed which was called observing *from close up and within*, as opposed to views that were classified as observing *from outside and afar*. Based on the very arrangements developed by the social actors in their multiple contexts of activity and use of urban space and structures, this form of examination goes beyond the fragmentation that at first sight appears to characterize the dynamics of large cities, trying to identify the regularities and patterns that preside over the behavior of the social actors. It is based on segments with clearly defined boundaries that enable the habitual exercise of careful ethnographic description.

Identifying these practices means that the chosen section makes sense both to the actors themselves and to the analyst: it is an empirically defined totality, but one that is capable of having the elements that structure them recognizable as patterns, one that can be described and formalized, constituting a more general model. It points to a logic that transcends the original context, with descriptive and explanatory power.

I have developed certain categories that describe the ways in which some of these sections of the urban landscape present themselves – *turf, patch, route, circuit* – trying to show the possibilities that reveal themselves to identify different situations in the cultural dynamics and sociability of the metropolis: the notion of *turf* evokes ties and the phenomenon of belonging, as well as the

establishment of boundaries. The *turf*, however, may be part of a *patch*, something that is more consolidated and visible in the landscape; this in turn includes many *routes*, as a result of the choices that it offers its frequenters. As for the *circuit*, a category capable of handling a system of interchanges and encounters within the broader and more diverse contexts of the city (and even beyond it), it may include particular *turfs* and *routes*.

As one can see, these categories do not exclude each other. To the contrary, it is precisely the passages and articulations between their domains that enable one to take into account, in the segment covered by the research, the scale of the cities and the different analytical planes. They constitute a grammar that allows one to classify and describe the multiplicity of choices and the pace of urban dynamics,

not by focusing on individuals but on more formal arrangements within which these choices are made.

Large contemporary metropolises cannot be regarded merely as cities that grew too much and in a disorderly fashion, enhancing disaggregating factors. They also spurred the creation of new standards of interchange and spaces for the exercise of sociability and the rituals of public life. There is no point in voicing generalities about the disappearance of the old street, held as the symbol by *antonomasia* of public space, nor to limit oneself to proclaiming that its functions were taken over by the "tyrannies of intimacy" or by zones devoid of sociability: if within certain contexts it has become incapable of supporting old uses, the experience of public life to which it is associated can be found in new arrangements. A given leisure circuit that articulates points in the city that are distant from each other is as real and meaningful for its users as the neighborhood is within the context of the overall district.

Finally, however, one must reiterate that the objective is to continue looking for a more general rationale, to evolve from observation *from close up and within*, as is typical of ethnography, to observation *from a wider perspective*, now moving toward an anthropology of the city, seeking to understand the presence of broader principles and longer-lasting structures. It is only by referring to broader planes and models that one may transcend but incorporate the domain in which social actors move, immersed in their own arrangements, albeit collective.

## NOTES

1 This article is based on a lecture I presented during the 1st Cycle of Seminars of the Metropolis Study Center in August of 2001 at Cebrab, São Paulo, and my report "The paths of the metropolis", presented to the CNPq (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) at the end of period of research undertaken with grants from this body (2001). My thanks to Piero Leirner, Rita de Cássia Amaral and Luiz Henrique de Toledo, from the Nucleus for Urban Anthropology (NAU) for reading the first draft, as well as for their comments and suggestions.

2 Borja, (1995, p. 11). His declaration continues: [...] "I replied to him: Yes, that's true but I am more interested in seeing what type of response to these problems is possible. So the interview was no longer of interest to him and he cancelled it. We were already at the door of the studio waiting to start the interview and even so he cancelled it." [my translation].

3 Another similar concept is that of "global city regions". Cf. Scott, J. Allen *et al.*, 2001.

4 See, for example, the comparison made by Caldeira (2000) between Los Angeles and São Paulo. Marques and Torres (2000), on the other hand, discuss how pertinent the application of the category "global city" is in the case of São Paulo and its relative position in the system of world cities.

5 The Catalan group includes, among others, Jordi Borja and Manuel de Forn and, to a certain extent, Manuel Castells.

6 Among others, Eco 92, in Rio de Janeiro, and Habitat II, held in Istanbul, Turkey from June 4 to 14, 1996. In São Paulo we can mention the seminar given by Jordi Borja at the World City Conference, "21st Center Encounter", organized by the 'Long Live the Center' Association (São Paulo), in 1994, as a preparatory step for the International Center XXI Seminar, and "Culture and the city; Brazil-Germany Seminar", held in São Paulo's Goethe Institute from June 7 to 9, 2000, which included researchers from USP, Unicamp, UNB and among the German institutions present, the Universities of Hanover and Berlin, as well as the Bauhaus Foundation.

7 The laser light show on the Anhangabaú Viaduct, held on the occasion of one of the steps in the "Art and the City" Project in 1996, was much celebrated by the media. For some seconds it projected the image of a passer-by on an immense screen, momentarily highlighting this person and taking him out of "the anonymity of the crowd". Now we would only need to follow this same passer-by a little more in his daily round to see the network of relationships (work, worship, leisure, neighbors, etc.) to which he belongs.

8 We can see that even in the analysis of Sharon Zukin, the "vernacular" is by definition the dominant element in the landscape, always modeled by the institutions that hold power (2000, p. 84).

9 Further clarification is due here: choice of this focus does not mean discarding the all-embracing strategies and analysis models of the city that are based on research techniques that favor quantitative and documentary data, etc. On the contrary, taking into consideration the issues that only they can raise, I think they are complementary and the focus here proposed gains another dimension when allied to the conclusions of studies carried out using other methodologies, .

10 The term that Merleau-Ponty uses is, in fact, "ethnology"; and in certain contexts the interchangeability between anthropology, ethnology and ethnography is still common. The difference between these terms varies and depends on a series of injunctions that go from academic-institutional to national traditions. Lévi-Strauss connects ethnography to field work and a more limited approach to the object being studied, by associating ethnology and

anthropology to the establishment of syntheses that are increasingly more all-embracing. Nevertheless he states that "ethnography, ethnology and anthropology do not constitute three distinct disciplines or three concepts of the same studies. They are in fact three steps or three moments in the same research and the preference for one or the other of these terms only expresses a predominant attention that leans towards one type of research that could never be exclusive of the other two" (Lévi-Strauss, 1991 [1954], p. 396).

11 "I think that another possibility for the 'anthropology of complex societies' is to maintain the traditional focus of the discipline on the central institutions of the society being studied and by means of a type of 'ethnographic detour' look for a 'de-centered' point of view. In the case of politics this is an issue of facing up to the native representations about the dominant political processes as true political theories produced by observers who are sufficiently distant from the object to be able to produce views that are real alternatives to the dominant ones and to use these representations and theories as guides for anthropological analysis" (2001, p. 7). This concern in the anthropological field with the study of the central institutions in society begins to give rise to more systematic reflections, such as occurs in the NUAP, the Nucleus for Political Anthropology, and also in the NAU (USP's Nucleus for Urban Anthropology); with regard to this latter case cf. Bevilaqua and Leirner (2000).

12 Passage from an editorial published in the *Folha de S. Paulo* daily newspaper, "A network of solidarity", February 20, 2000.

13 With regard to this, see the analysis of Ulf Hannerz (1997) on three metaphors – flows, frontiers and hybrids – in the anthropology he calls "transnational", which is concerned with studies on globalization. For a polarization of the two styles of ethnography, see the comparison made by Geertz (2001) of Pierre Clastres and James Clifford.

14 We must, however, make a proviso here: the fact that this proposal uses a research strategy that implies rambling, allowing oneself to be impregnated by the "fragmentation effect", does not mean that the walk as such, as a technique for collecting a certain type of data, must be abandoned. On the contrary it constitutes a valuable resource for a first look at the landscape and what surrounds it, in which the object of the study is inserted and with which they maintain links.

15 In this item I resume the categories that were worked out as research on the city advanced, starting with *Festa no pedaço (Party in the turf)* (1984); I took advantage of some passages from previously published books and articles.

16 This project was called "*Turfs of the city*" and was developed between 1989 and 1990 in the city of São Paulo, with the support of the CNPq and the participation of those who are involved with the Nucleus for Urban Anthropology, both during the data collection phase as well as in the discussions that followed field visits.

17 Beside the Municipal Theater in the center of the city. This also is the *turf* of rock bands connected with the heavycore scene.

18 Cf. C. N. Santos and A. Vogel (orgs.), 1985, p. 103, alluding to the expression 'the curse of border vacuums', the title of one of the chapters in Jacobs (1992, p. 257).

19 "The Straight Edge Movement in São Paulo: metropolis, identities and urban appropriations", a Scientific Initiation Project (PIBIC/USP/CNPq), August/2001 to July/2002. As the research has shown, it is hardly worth classifying this group as an "urban tribe"; to describe its circuit means to identify and explore all its connections and interchange systems, which in addition to the one indicated above, involves contacts, for example.

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## ABSTRACT

By interrelating two lines of analysis, one having to do with the city and the other with ethnography, this paper seeks to discuss possibilities which are opened by an anthropological approach to the study of urban dynamics. Discussion of analytical charts for study of contemporary urban phenomena allows for a characterization of what may be termed as an "outsider and long-distanced view". A contrasting "insider and close-up view" is outlined. Theoretical presuppositions are explicated and research strategy is proposed. As a way of demonstration, recent ethnographic examples are used. Finally, it is suggested that a "distanced" view may effectively broaden and complement the proposed perspective, making possible an articulated project involving well delimited ethnographic research design and more general levels and models of analysis.

**Keywords:** Anthropology; Ethnography; Metropolis; Urban culture; Circuit

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