Ethnography as practice and experience

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ABSTRACT
Considering some less orthodox uses of ethnography, not normally germane to anthropology, this article, based upon the reflections and research undertaken at the Urban Anthropology Nucleus (NAU), proposes a discussion on the specificities of the ethnographical research method. Taking a quote from Lévi-Strauss as its starting point, it examines the ideas of authors such as Goldman, Peirano, Da Matta, and Favret-Saada, among others, in order to establish parameters in the the search for specific features in the ethnographic *métier*. Such a discussion leads to three considerations: ethnography as experience, as practice, and as based upon a certain concept of "totality". Finally, the findings from an ethnography on deaf young people is included in the article as empirical support to the conclusions.

Keywords: deaf, ethnography, urban anthropology, Urban Anthropology Nucleus (NAU).

Businesses contract anthropologists and executives
intern in favelas in order to understand consumers.

A kind of Internship

The sentence in the epigraph was the opening line of a story taken from the *Folha de São Paulo*, in the Money Section on the 16th of July, 2007. It proceeded to say that, "The gain in purchase power among the lower class population provoked a transfer of weight in market consumption and, consequently, in the strategies adopted by businesses." The director of one research and consulting agency, consulted by the newspaper in the same story, explained the tendency, saying "Many [businesses] are bringing anthropologists on board and investing in ethnographic research, and the kind of internship in which executives live with lower class families observing daily life within their homes" (Brito: 2007).

This unorthodox understanding of ethnographic research, by means of the market, as a kind of internship among lower class families—and the interest that anthropology and its method are currently awakening in professionals in consultancy, marketing, and market research—evokes another moment in which anthropology also began to enjoy sudden prestige. It was in the 1970s, when the discipline ended up being seen, among the social sciences, as a privileged means of access for understanding social, political and cultural changes that were occurring in the dynamics of Brazilian society and, more specifically, in large cities, the scene of so-called urban social movements. Until then anthropology, dedicated principally to studying indigenous populations, stuck to the margins of pressing national concerns—unlike sociology and political science—that

discuss patterns of economic development and alternative political models for the country.

It was from the military coup of 1964 on—and principally after 1968 when, under a state of emergency, oppression intensified against political parties, syndicates, student organizations, and other segments of civil society—that a new political actor emerged: residents and their associations. Residents are inhabitants of the city with demands for better living conditions and urban infrastructure; the new scene was not the factory yards but the neighborhoods of the outskirts (Durham, 1982; Magnani, 1992). The focus of political action (and consequently, the focus of academia) shifted from activist to city resident, and from workers' parties and syndicates to neighborhood associations located in the outskirts. Those living in the outskirts were the population with the most need and the least social assistance in the city, which stood in strict contrast to the central areas.

With the emergence of these new political actors, the traditional themes studied in anthropology began to gain visibility because they were recognized in the their political role: thus, the interest returned not only to race relations, but to the black movement; not only to the family, but to the role of the woman and the emergence of feminism; not to the resident of the *favela* as the bearer of some sort of "culture of poverty," but as a member of associations with demands, and so forth.

This conjuncture—political, academic, institutional—opened space for studies of an anthropological character concerning the reality of the outskirts of large centers, as it was necessary to know these actors well, their way of life, their aspirations—as concepts that were in fashion at the time such as "class consciousness," "class interests" and others didn't take into account dynamics that occurred in the everyday. Who are they? Where do they live? What are their kinship networks? In what do they believe? How do they pass their free time? On this point, anthropology can be sure it was in its field since whether in treating its traditional theme, indigenous populations, or whether in the studies of "communities" or ethnic groups, questions like these were always present, guiding the research.

Faced with this demand, anthropologists clearly had to deal with complicated problems of the theoretical and methodological order since they were accustomed to studies of groups with well-defined borders and dimensions that allowed for the use of their customary technique. Anthropologists were now faced with movements, with groups ruled by different cultural patterns and with subjects of social practices with political consequences—all at a scale that had been hardly studied by them at that time. This conjuncture—at the same obstacle and challenge—was at the origin of the impulse put to the test by anthropology since the middle of the 1970s, and which continued into the 1980s and beyond.[1]

As much in that moment as now, the interest was for residents of the outskirts, only that in the 1970s and 80s the goal was to understand the emergence of a new social actor and his practices in a sociopolitical context. Currently, nevertheless, as the quote that began this article shows, the target is the consumer and not strictly the interest of anthropology, but through the method that commonly was understood as its trademark. This kind of use of our discipline, for pragmatic ends, generally in the context of market research (but also in some cases by NGOs, state institutions, associations) most often brings with it a series of misunderstandings, among which the is trivialization of ethnography as a methodology, research strategy and intellectual posture (Geertz, 1978)

unique to anthropology. The question put forth—what is ethnography's specialty?—was as if it were possible to separate the method from the conceptual framework.

I would like to return to this question drawing upon the experience of some of the research conducted at the Nucleus of Urban Anthropology (NAU), research that starts with the premise that the city is more than a mere scene where social action elapses: it is the result of those practices, interventions, and modifications imposed by some of the most diverse actors (the state, private corporations, associations, lobbyist, residents, visitors, facilities, road infrastructure, urban real estate, events, etc.) in a complex network of interactions, exchanges and conflicts. This result—always in process—constitutes, in turn, a repertory of possibilities that either compose the range of new arrangements or, to the contrary, emerge as obstacles. It is beholden upon anthropology to capture this twofold moment.

> [...] What it proposes is a *closer and insider look*, but taken from the setting of the social actors, or said again, from the forms to which they reconcile themselves in order to move through the city, take advantage of services, utilize their facilities, and establish meetings and exchanges in the most different of spheres—religion, work, leisure, culture, participation in politics and associations, etc. This strategy supposes an investment in both poles of the relationship: on the one hand, concerning social actors, the group and the practice being studied and, on the other, the landscape in which this practice is developed, understood not as a mere scene, but as a constitutive part in shaping the analysis. It is that which characterizes the focus of urban anthropology, differentiating it from other disciplines and even from other options within anthropology (Magnani, 2002, p. 18, emphasis my own).

It has to do, then, with an inquiry into the specificity of ethnography, not only to establish a clear counterpoint to uses such as those indicated above, but also to differentiate anthropology within the field of social sciences, and even within the options of anthropology proper. The point of departure is that one can neither separate ethnography nor theoretical choices within the discipline, nor the particularity of its objects of study that impose strategies for approaching the population to be studied and for treating them as interlocutors.

Lévi-Strauss, Always a Good Start

The search for clues into the specificity of ethnography could perhaps begin with a quote from Lévi-Strauss (1991), chosen, incidentally, since 2002, to open the event "Undergraduates in the Field: Seminars of Urban Anthropology, an initiative of The Nucleus of Urban Anthropology at USP dedicated to celebrating the fieldwork of students in their first years of college. The quote, from the text, "The place of Anthropology in the Social Sciences and the Problems Raised in Teaching," is the following:

> It is for a very profound reason, which has to do with hanging onto the proper nature of the discipline and the distinctive character of its object, that the anthropologist requires experience in the field. For the anthropologist, it is neither the primary objective of his profession, nor the capstone of his culture, nor a technical apprenticeship. It represents a crucial moment in his education: before fieldwork he can possess discontinuous knowledge that never forms a whole, but only after fieldwork can he fasten this knowledge into an organic ensemble acquiring meaning that was previously lacking (Lévi-Strauss, 1991, p. 415-416).

In the text *From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss*, Merleau-Ponty (1984), for his part, affirms that, "This process of joining objective analysis to lived experience is perhaps the task most proper to anthropology, the one which distinguishes it from other social sciences such as economics and demography." He proceeds to draw a surprising conclusion:

> Of course it is neither possible nor necessary for the same man to have experiential knowledge of all the societies he speaks about. He only has to have learned at some time and at sufficient length to let himself be taught by another culture. For from then on *he has a new organ of understanding at his disposal*—he has regained possession of that untamed region of himself, unincorporated in his own culture, through which he communicates other cultures (Merleau-Ponty, 1984, p. 199, 200, emphasis my own).

If we add more authors to this list, in addition to *experience*, or a new organ of understanding (Merleau-Ponty), other phrases will appear: it is in order to describe this sometimes fleeting, but decisive, moment in fieldwork that every anthropologist often draws upon metaphors and approximations as attempts to reign in the specificity of ethnography. A quick review of some of these attempts is revealing: Mariza Peirano (1995), in *In Favor of Anthropology,* for example, speaks of "residues," certain facts that resist habitual explanations and only come to light in virtue of a confrontation between the theory of the researcher and the ideas of the natives; Márcio Goldman (2003, p. 7) in the article "The Drums of the Living and the Drums of the Dead: ethnography, and anthropology and Politics in Ilhéus, Bahia" refers to the "possibility of searching a decentered point of view through a kind of ethnographic detour; one recalls the "anthropological blues of Roberto DaMatta (1981) and the expression "experience-near versus experience-distant" used by Geertz (1983). Finally, Jeanne Favret-Saada (1990) refers to a determined situation of fieldwork in which the researcher "is affected."

Each one of these expressions—each in its own way, each with different emphases—allows for a glimpse at a cluster of reoccurring notions: the first such cluster is an attitude of estrangement or exteriority on the part of the researcher in relation to the object, which is provided by the culture of origin and the conceptual scheme with which he is armed, and which are not discarded by virtue of contact with another culture and other explanations, those so-called "native theories." In truth, this co-presence, this attention to both cultures is what finally provokes the possibility of an unforeseen solution, a decentered look, or an unexpected departure.

The researcher not only stumbles upon the significance of the native arrangement but (in perceiving this meaning and being able to describe it in his own terms) is capable of learning the logic and incorporating it into the patterns of his own intellectual apparatus, even into his system of values and perceptions.

Thus, with a base in the observations of these authors and of many other anthropologists that always reflect upon their fieldwork, it is possible to postulate, in a synthetic manner, that ethnography is a special form of operating in which the researcher enters in contact with a universe of researchers and thereby shares his horizons. The goal is not merely in order to remain there on the horizon, nor to attest to the logic of his vision of the world, but rather to forge a true relationship of exchange following these horizons wherever they may lead: to compare his own theories with theirs, and in doing

so to, attempt to come out of the exchange with a new model of understanding or, at least, with a new track to follow, a track that was previously unforeseen.

This is an *insight,* a form of approach proper to the ethnographic approach that produces a kind of knowledge different from that obtained in other methodological interventions. It has to do with an enterprise that presupposes a determined type of investment, a patient and continuous work through which, as Levi-Strauss shows, the fragments find an order, even resulting in an unexpected meaning.

Here we are already in the field of metaphors, approximations, and paraphrases, even running the risk of being accused of taking off in a mystical direction, unable to resist making yet another comparison, this time seeking help in the oriental tradition with an example of wide of Zen Buddhist anecdotes. The literature concerning the experience of *satori*—the state of enlightenment of the mind that awakens and secures a new form of perception—brings many histories that show the particularities of this existence. One such story relates the experience of Kyogen, a practitioner who, after many years of meditation and study, achieves enlightenment, or *satori*: during one of the countless times he swept the porch of the monastery, he is touched by the sound of a pebble that, upon being brushed by the broom, hits against the staff of the bamboo. That auspicious sound was the accidental and external factor that made his mind awaken to the resolution of the *koan* (a kind of enigma or paradoxical proposition) proposed by his master and, in consequence, for a new understanding of the nature of things, until then perceived in accordance with his habitual patterns. It was nevertheless not a magical occurrence: neither the bamboo nor the stone had the slightest intrinsic mystical quality for provoking the sudden *insight*. The *satori* was produced in virtue of a predisposition, of a vivid and continuous prior state of attention (aimed, day and night, at deciphering the *koan*), such that the trivial and unexpected incident functions as a trigger, causing rupture and consequently reordering the mind, which is suddenly capable of seeing things in a new perspective.

So it is that the "edge" of ethnography—in virtue of some event, trivial or not—is only produced because it is preceded, and prepared by, a continuous presence in the field and an attitude of living attention. It is not the obsession with the accumulation of details that characterizes ethnography, but rather the attention that such details give: to return to the quote from Levi-Strauss, one could say that in some moments the fragments can be arranged in a whole that offer a trail to a new understanding,

Several considerations emerge from this discussion: the first is that one must distinguish between "ethnographic practice" and "ethnographic experience:" while the practice is programed and continuous, the experience is discontinuous and unforeseen. Yet the former induces the latter (just as one depends upon the other), in a way making possible that which Lévi-Strauss (1976, p. 37), in *Savage Mind*, dubs the "right to follow." Secondly: we can postulate that ethnography is the method proper to anthropology in a wide sense, neither restrictive (as a technique) nor excluding (as a determined attitude, experience, or activity in the field). Understood as a method in the wide sense, it embodies the strategies of contact and insertion in the field, a necessary condition for both continued practice and for the ethnographic experience and that leads to the final text. As a necessary condition for the full exercise and incorporation of theoretical choices, what it implicates cannot be highlighted as a conjuncture of techniques (participant observation, application of interviews, etc.) employed

independent of a conceptual discussion. Third: the presupposition of totality. I have already presented and developed this topic in another text (Magnani, 2002), but it is good to return to the central argument to the degree that, in one form or another, the idea of totality as a condition of anthropological research has accompanied the discipline since the classic ethnographies. Furthermore it has persevered, even in specialized ethnographies, notwithstanding the successive rereading, returnings, etc., such as the critiques of Marcus (1991) and Clifford (1998) concerning realistic community.

In the specific case of the city, the discussion begins with a question: what is the unit of analysis, the city as a whole or each cultural practice in particular? In order to introduce this question, I suggest thinking of the social actors not as isolated elements—dispersed yet submitting to an inevitable ensemble—but rather recognizing the survival strategies that are responsible for everyday dynamics through the vernacular use of the city, (of space, of facilities, of institutions) in spheres of work, religiosity, leisure, culture, politics, associations. I propose leaving the social actors in their multiple, varied, and creative collective arrangements, that is, the strategies that they use to traverse the cityscape, taking advantage of their services, utilizing their facilities, and establishing encounters and exchanges in the most varied of spheres, through behavior that is not erratic, but rather presents discernable patterns.

Departing from regularities—from patterns instead of from dissonances or disagreements—as a condition of research supposes a counterpart in the theoretical plane: an idea of **totality** as a conjecture. Clearly, it does not have to do with that notion of **totality** that evokes an organic, functional whole without conflicts. Nor does it have to do with a totality that coincides, in the case of the city, with its political-administrative limits. Yet, to renounce these types of totality does not mean to take the extreme opposite position—a dive into fragmentation—merely because does not delimit a unique order does not mean that there is none to be found. The question of **totality** is put forth, in this manner, in multiple planes and scales.

One characteristic of such presupposed totality of ethnography is found in respect to the double face that it presents: on the one hand, the form as lived by social actors and, on the other, as perceived and described by the investigator. In a well-known passage of "The introduction to the works of Marcel Mauss," in which Lévi-Strauss (1971, p. 24, translation my own) shows the manner in which elements of very different natures can come to articulate a social fact, and that only in this form can they have a global significance, transforming into a totality. The author affirms that the certitude of such fact "corresponds to reality, and is not simply an arbitrary accumulation of more or less certain details." Furthermore, it is known within a concrete experience, from a more social scheme, situated in time and space, to even an individual schematic.

Looking at some reoccurring themes in the field of urban anthropology, any researcher who has studied Candomblé terrains, groups of adolescents, samba schools, soccer fan clubs, leisure practices, neighborhood associations, street dwellers, etc. knows quite well that in these and other similar cases there is a totality that is vividly experienced as much as a pruning of frontiers as code of belonging among group members. Nevertheless, this does not signify the absence of conflicts. Taking the category of *turf* that I have expounded upon in other works (Magnani, 1998, 2002; Magnani; Mantese, 2007) as an example, it is also evident that a given *turf's* members possess an immediate, clear perception, without nuances or ambiguities, of who is, and

who is not, from the *turf:* it is a concrete and shared experience. The analyst, for his part, also perceives such experience and describes them: this modality particular to the encounter, exchange, and sociability supposes the presence of minimal structural elements that become recognizable in other contexts.

Thus a consistent **totality** in terms of ethnography is that which is tested and recognized by social actors, identified by the investigator, and able to be described in categorical terms: if for the social actors it constitutes the daily experience, for the investigator it can be the key and the condition of intelligibility. I assert that one cannot report a given totality, I postulate another kind of totality that is never fixed, that is constructed from the experience of the actors and with the help of hypotheses of fieldwork and theoretical choices, as conditions for saying something more than generalizations and platitudes with respect to the object of study.

Yet, the two planes to which urban studies generally allude—*of* the city and *in* the city—must be considered as two poles of a relation that circumscribes, determines, and makes possible the dynamic under investigation. Consequently, in order to capture this dynamic, it is necessary to situate the focus neither so close as to become entangled with a particular perspective of each participant, nor so far that one can merely distinguish a indecipherable fragment, devoid of meaning. In other terms, there are intermediate planes where the presence of patterns and regularities—always in flux and negotiation—can be distinguished: neither at the level of big (physical, economic, institutional, etc.) structures, of the city, nor in the individual choices. To identify these regularities and to be able to construct as a reference some type of totality within which its meaning can be appreciated, is precisely to count upon certain instruments, certain categories of analysis, such as will be discussed in the following section based upon the findings of a fieldwork experience with deaf youth in the city of São Paulo during a research project conducted by NAU.

Research with Deaf Community
"Will There Be Music?"

This was the question that occurred to me when, in 2002, I attended the *festa junina* (June fest) of the deaf community in the neighborhood of Cambuci, in the north zone of the city of São Paulo. The history began with an invitation to bring together a research group concerning deaf culture composed of linguists and historians from: the first reaction was surprise, since I had little or no experience with the theme. When, however, it was explained to me that the purpose of the invitation was that I might contribute an anthropological focus—and in particular that of urban anthropology—to a research project already underway, including descriptions of Brazilian Sign language (*libras*) on the part of the linguist and life histories on the part of the historians, the proposal began to make sense.

The request was to identify the social network of deaf persons in the city, using the categories of *turf, patch, route, circuit,* used in the research of NAU. The month in which the invitation came also had a bearing upon the course this participation took. It was the epoch of the *festas juninas* that occur at all the schools, institutions, neighborhood associations, churches, clubs, etc., and the question that was put forth was do schools and associations for the deaf also commemorate these festivities? Another

inevitable question soon came to the surface: does the *festa junina* of a deaf association include music?

For someone who has studied different forms of leisure in the city, the study of parties is not only an obligatory course of research, but moreover constitutes a privileged access point into the understanding of rules that are the basis of networks of sociality. In this case, besides being a good choice for research, the novelty of the theme promised new challenges. Nevertheless, before presenting the ethnographic paths taken and following the leads that arose in the inquiries mentioned above, it is worth emphasizing a few surprises that emerged in virtue of entering, along with a group of students from NAU, into "the deaf world"

Silence!

We attended many film screenings exploring this "deaf world." The first series of screenings occurred between the 11th and the 15th of June 2002 at the Alceu Amoroso de Lima Library in the neighborhood of Pinheiros in the city of São Paulo. What follows is an excerpt from the fieldnotes written by César Augusto da Silva:

> The audience at the screening was mostly made up of deaf people: deaf people of different ages, different social levels, and different levels of fluency of sign language and spoken Portuguese. Many who did not speak did not read the subtitles, paying attention instead to the translation of the interpreter […] I felt like a stranger. They spoke enthusiastically in sign language, laughed, looked at me and spoke of me, while I, embarrassed, understood nothing. Some of those present had never been to the cinemas. Many were teenagers from the peripheries. I would have liked to have talked to them, but I could not, given the language barrier.
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> One of the strange things about the screening was the presence of the interpreter to the side of the screen, in a quite uncomfortable position, sit facing the public to interpret sign language, twisting his neck in order to read the subtitles. During all of the films that I attended, I sat in my chair with my gaze and my attention in three directions. […] I looked attentively at the interpretation. I wanted to see how all the sounds and all the words turned into images in the hands of the interpreter. How did the sonorous sign that I understood transform into visual signs that the deaf people understood.
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> {…} in addition to watching the interpretation in sign language, I looked to see the reaction of deaf people watching the films. When something surprised them, they emitted sound, made facial expressions that the hearing do not make, that made clear their feelings, they spoke with a friend next to them in sign language to make a comment or to remove any doubts.

The second film was a screening at Cinema SESC. We saw the classic "The Country of the deaf (*Le pays des sourds*, de Nicolas Philibert, 1992) on the 27th of September 2003, one of the activities commemorating the National Day of the Deaf, which was the 26th of September. The most striking memory was not about the film itself, but the noise during the projection. The deaf people emitted sounds, as I already noted. César, in the text above, laughed, coughed, stood up—in short nothing at all what I expected during a film screening and, *hélas*! even less so in a film treating the subject of deafness. Notwithstanding there was a contrast here: in a screening among the hearing, and the "speaking," one expects total silence, whereas in a screening frequented by the deaf, noise appears "normal." Normal? Yes, since if they don't hear nothing from the film—dialogues, soundtracks—then they are going to be little bothered by sounds that they produce. But could it be so simple? The contrasts were only beginning.

The Ethnography of Festas Juninas

It was the participation in the *festas juninas* of deaf people in the city of São Paulo, in 2002 that constituted the beginning of the ethnography of this multidisciplinary field of study, which was anticipated by particular questions: the first was to evaluate the conditions of conducting ethnographic research in a field with a new theme, principally under the lens of leisure and sociability, an approach previously chosen to direct the observation; the second would be to see if it were possible to achieve a "closer and insider look (Magnani, 2002) without any competence in the native language, sign language, and without knowing what is conventionally referred to as "deaf culture." On the other hand, this same unfamiliarity was regarded as responsible for one of the classic conditions in the realization of ethnographic research, which is estrangement: for he who is introduced for the first time into an environment that is strange to him, everything is significant, nothing can be prematurely hierarchized in a scale of values between the significant and the insignificant: everything is worthy of observation and registry.

To begin, it is helpful to present the common characteristics of the four spaces of observation: ADEFAV (the Association of Aurally and Visually Impaired in Cambuci), DERDIC (the Division of Education and Rehabilitation of Communication Disturbances in Vila Clementino) *Instituto Santa Teresinha* (in Saúde) and e EMEE Helen Keller (Municipal School of Sepcial Education in Aclimação). All the festivals were promoted by institutions for deaf people, not institutions of deaf people. Two of them, Adefav e Derdic, are aimed at capacitation and rehabilitation: the first, Adefav, works with deaf people, people boht deaf and blind, and people with multiple sensorial impairments.; the second, linked to PUC/SP, specializes in hearing, voice, and language impairments. The last two are educational institutions for deaf people.

All the festivals were *festas juninas* that is, inserted in a festive cycle of wide reach, in big cities just as in small villages and surrounding countryside in the country, from the north to the south, presenting a basic routine and performances already established: tents selling typical food and drinks, the use of clothes and costumes to portray the character of the "caipira" (hillbilly), as well as jokes and games, campfires, and square dancing.

Music is one of the constitutive elements of this party and, if it can appear excessive and unreasonable at a meeting of deaf people, it is not so, insofar as it is a structural part of this specific kind of commemoration. Hearing people—parents, relatives, and friends of the deaf participants—also enjoyed the festival, which shows how these events can be wider points of encounter, putting various categories of people into contact: it has nothing to do with isolated cultural ghettos, but rather with ample spaces of encounter and exchange.

The general environment of these festivals was one of merriment, as happens in the other *festas juninas* that spring up around the city at this time of year. In the case of institutions that catered to deaf people however, a differentiating element was that the target-public appeared more important than the spatial factors: while *festas juninas* occurring in neighborhoods or schools generally brought people together that were related through territorial or institutional proximity, the festivals of deaf people congregated people sharing the condition of being deaf; it was possible to note, in the

little time on conviviality, various faces that were at almost all the parties: it was as if there was a calendar that the deaf knew and consulted, regardless of place or institution where the festivals occurred.

These festivals, while constituting moments of celebration and exchange of deaf people *qua* deaf, allowed for encounters and exchanges between them across differences, whether of social class, education, origin, or neighborhood: it was as if one could appreciate, beyond the common condition that unified them, the differences within, which made some of them interesting in relation to others; but it also opened space for the emergence of friction and divergences. It afforded a public intersection with the universe of the hearing, but under a condition of superiority to them, inverting the everyday situation; there at least, during the festival, deaf people were the majority, communicating in their own language,[2] exhibiting their own corporeal postures and styles; the hearing constituted the minority. The following are excerpts from fieldnotes of the first two festivals.

> At Adefav, the festival, which fell on the afternoon of June 7th 2002, was on the street, in front of the institution. Around 253 Lacerda Franco Street, tents, tables, chairs, and a small stage were distributed. In a way, the space thus constituted was an extension of the area of the association, to which it served as a rearguard, and offered the basic infrastructure for the festival: the deposit, bathrooms, a kitchen, refuge, and dressing-room…As the institution attended children with multiple deficiencies, in addition to deaf people, this combination allowed for child-care geared toward the specific. The festival reminded me of a situation described in the text, "When the street becomes the house,"[3] where, seen from another perspective, the house is shown to expand and include the space of the street. The closure of various public streets was a common strategy in neighborhood parties, going so far as to include experiences such as "village fairs." (Vila Pompéia, Vila Madalena and others). In this way the street is newly appropriated by residents in a holistic manner, in determined occasions manner in the context of the grand metropole, making it possible to walk without danger, to march in parades, to appreciate, exhibit oneself and move from one space to another.
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> A unique experience was the contact with Cláudia Sofia, a blind and deaf woman that frequented Adefav; after observing her form of communication with other deaf and blind people, we asked the directors of the institution to enter into contact with her, and we were promptly attended.[4] The experience was marking; the director recounted that there was another girl, also blind and deaf, that frequented another *circuit*: because she was evangelical, she did not frequent these festivals, but rather sought contact with people of a similar condition in temples and churches.[5] Sofia was one of the people that we returned to meet at the next festival, Instituto Santa Teresinha, the invitation to which read:
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> "The Instituto Santa Teresinha invites you to a traditional festa junina will occur on the 15th of June from four o'clock to ten o'clock, 364 Jaguari street at the OEMAR sports complex. The bearer of this invitation will raffle for the following prize: 1 digital camera—clone."
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> My entrance ticket, which cost three *reais*, had the number 1,529; since I arrived around eight o'clock at night, it can be taken as an indicator of the quantity of people that had entered the event at that point. It was, in fact, a new experience. In contrast to the tranquil and familiar climate of Adefav, the environment here was more agitated, the people were quite excited and there were really a lot of people. The bus driver in the surrounding area recounted he had seen people from other cities and even other states. I had the sensation of entering into a "community in festival," in a village in effervescence: never had I seen so many deaf people together and this density allowed for the vivid and rich perceptions of their forms of sociability, of their particularities as a differentiated group.

Like a stranger, I walked in the middle of it all appreciating the clusters of conversation, of groups of friends, the couples, the conversations, the way they dressed; Because I did not understand sign language I did not stick with any one group, nor did I try to understand what they were saying; what interested me in this moment was the immersion into a new environment whose basic mode of communication was foreign to me. What were the rules of etiquette? Could I pass through the middle of a circle of conversation? How would I ask forgiveness for committing a *faux-pas*? Completely ignored by all, there yet remained other symbolic codes and other planes of observation for me. I was obliged to hone my gaze, as meaning could not come across through the medium of sound. These moments are rare in ethnographic experience; practice shows that one soon enters into the universe of the other, which puts an end to this capacity to marvel by making everything familiar to the observer.

At a certain moment I climbed the rows of bleachers that were in front of the court where the festival was occurring and, there on top, I had access to a quite uncustomary spectacle; a disparity among the crowd and the noise that they would have been making in a festival of hearing people; in contrast, there was a fervent of hands in a kind of frenetic pantomime, at least to the eyes of the uninitiated. The spectacle was really impressive in terms artists and choreographic. I asked myself if the noise, the cacophony of music at the highest volume, would have the same effect upon a hearing person, in terms of ecstatic experience, as the effect produced by the "sea of hands" had upon a deaf person.

I was given a copy of the journal "Senses—social inclusion with good vibrations," where I received the program along with explanations concerning the advantages of a specific brand of telephone for deaf people, I spoke with Cláudia Sofia, I met a participant of our research group (Lia), and I got in line to buy tickets for the tents that sold drinks, sandwiches, etc. In the street, I was given a pamphlet titled "Why me?," from an evangelical church, with serious considerations to this question addressed by various people with grave illnesses and physical disabilities. The response in the pamphlet consisted in recognizing our own sins and awaiting the grace of God as a means of enduring the pain and suffering. Nothing could be further from the dominant mood at the festival I had just witnessed.

The other two festivals observed occurred at DERDIC and EMEE Helen Keller in Vila Clementino and Aclimação, respectively. The first, whose entrance fee was the cheapest, one real, was on 22/06/2002, at 435 Dra. Neyde Aparecida Sollito Street. Despite having arrived, with Valéria, almost at the end of the festival, I still managed to buy a can of beer to enter into the ambiance and make the rounds. Once again, Lia was there, and she presented us to some important people in the milieu. It wasn't possible to evaluate the excitement of this festival, but the group that remained showed the same pattern of intensity of communication among themselves. The presence of guests accompanying the students was more visible, and bingo was happening in one of the side locals contiguous with the court.

At the Heller Keller school, 314 Pedra Azul street, the festival was on the 29th of June and the entrance fee was also one real. Carin, Danilo and César were also present. As at the *Instituto Santa Teresinha*, there were many people, much excitement and the circulation was intense. There was a soccer match going on in the multisport complex and I could appreciate the already noted physical disposition and involvement of deaf people with the sport. One common joke in *festas juninas*, that consists in putting someone in a confinement (which he can only leave by means of some kind of payment) was made with—let us say—much enthusiasm and…physical vigor. In the room to the side, which was already a part of the school, there were computers showing documentaries related to important people in deaf history, their conquests, and a video showing newscast for deaf people, made at that very school.

Solemnly Ignored!

The fieldwork of these four *festas juninas*, that allowed the first contact with deaf people, in a privileged environment of leisure and sociability, marked the beginning of further research. I was initially excited by the results of my experiences in two such parties: the festival of the street, organized by Adefav, and the other, by the *Instituto Santa Teresinha*—a traditional private high school dedicated to deaf students. I thought of these experiences as successful, since I could make good contacts, obtain insights, and track interesting leads (which would be the object of further analysis). Thus, without waiting any longer, I resolved to make a new incursion into the deaf world in that same year of 2002. It was the "festival of the Cowboy", organized by the Deaf Association of São Paulo, located in Jabaquara park, in the south zone of the city:

> I bought a ticket and, once inside, I managed to make contact with a person that, by means of lip-reading, understood my question, confirming that, "yes, it was the festival," in that typical voice of a deaf speaker.
>
> I searched out a good place, sat down waiting what would happen, since there were still few people. In short, people arrived, effusively greeted one another and soon entered into conversation in sign language— I sat there in a chair all the while, waiting for something to happen (but hoping that first an interpreter or acquaintance would arrive to translate, since I could not understand anything, and furthermore could not circulate because the area was small). Each moment more deaf people arrived. They knew each other, they made small excited groups, having fun, laughing, communicating, and I was absolutely on the outside, without the slightest chance not only of understanding what they were saying, but to provoke some kind of contact. I felt out of their visual focus, I was perceived in a glance and immediately classified as someone outside the turf, impossible to integrate because I didn't dominate the language of recognition and communication. The uncomfortable situation built up until the moment arrived when, after almost three hours of isolation, of silence, and being unable to understand or participate, and absolutely frustrated with this experience, so different from the two prior experiences, I resolved to leave.
>
> But, arriving at home, and putting into practice a rule that I am accustomed to tell students after returning from the field, which is to reread and reexamine their fieldnotes, I realized—and I noted it as relevant data—that what happened to me was the same thing which happens to them when they, the minority, are in an environment dominated by hearing: they are ignored by virtue of their difference. Thus, through an unexpected path, a new and contrasting impression was part of the legacy that I was only beginning to accumulate in my research on the theme.

From observations and impressions obtained in the course of fieldwork in these festivals, some general considerations, paths and questions for future incursions were noted. In the first place, I called attention to the age distribution of the participants: they were in the great majority, youth, between approximately 14 and 30 years. I had to ask myself if this predominance was due to the fact that it had to do with festivals in a school environment and if older deaf people had a resistance to participating in public events or not. I could investigate if in other events—religious, scholastic, cultural, etc.—this predominance of youth was maintained. Could it also have something to do with a better *performance* of sign language?

Another question to be further explored was in relation to the origins of class positions, as well as neighborhood locale. Would there be, for example, some negative correlation between better control of sign language and levels of income or education? In other terms: did upper class deaf people tend to receive training aimed toward speaking, with the help of speech-language pathology, in contrast to deaf people from poorer populations, for whom sign language was the only was the only alternative for

communication left? In this case, what would be the degree of generalization and reach? Could one not, in this case, be restricted to a kind of "dialect of the outskirts?" Evidently, it is a question relevant to the domain of sociology as well, whose approach goes beyond the scope of a research specifically focused on festivals and leisure, but which has to do with the amplitude of a field of exchanges and experiences to which deaf people, in various degrees, modalities, and nuances, have access. Among the festivals observed it was markedly possible to note the presence of groups of friends and families in two in particular Adefav and the Helen Keller School. At the *Instituto Santa Teresinha*, in an environment more cosmopolitan, groups of youth tended to predominate. As far as I could see, the festivals always included certain representatives of an important segment of deaf culture, interpreters. What was their role in this type of event? Were they, in their own way, there enjoying the party, which in a way also belonged to them? What was the network of spaces of leisure and encounter of interpreters, whose work, (and without a doubt, values, interests, etc.) was tied to this specific world?

This incursion into the field really showed, in a lively and convincing form, the existence of a differentiated segment and the presence of a particular mechanism of symbolic elaboration and communication. A question to further pursue is: what, in all of this, is the status of the so-called "deaf culture" and of this instrument of communication, sign language. What is the degree of universality present and in what way does it absorb traces, marks, and expressions related to the specific circles of socialization.

Such inquiries, obviously, are more general and transcend the ethnography in spaces of leisure: they point to other questions in the background and require more theoretical, multidisciplinary reflection as well as other lines of research. What the empirical plane of observation showed was just as much the existence of a politically consistent nucleus, formed by deaf people that that communicate through sing language—and that is placed as a reference, and an interlocutor, for example in public politics—as deaf people that coalesce through other connections, of a religious or leisurely nature. It is necessary to identify, observe, describe, and analyze the relation, passages, conflicts and exchanges between these different poles of convergence.

To such an end the question of the city, in strategic terms, is crucial. The degrees of use, the forms of mobility, the multiplicity of points of encounter, the opportunities for work, study, etc. offered by diverse urban scales is what will determine a larger or smaller field of exchanges, allowing for the construction, fortification, and exhibition of marks of identity that become legitimated to the degree that they are assumed by those "on the inside" and exhibited by those "on the outside." It is necessary, thus, to identify the *turf,* the *circuits,* and the *routes*[8] that constitute diverse modulations or gradations of public space where the construction of multiple identities can be perceived—in contrast to the confinement of private space, that, with difficulty, managed to make the passage from a negative stigma to a positive sign of belonging.

Conclusion

It was departing from these experiences that the NAU team returning to research deaf culture had access to other spaces of exchange and socialization, such as religious ceremonies, conferences, meetings, and theatrical presentations. In each of these contexts new paths were emerging, putting into question issues whose details go beyond the scope

of this paper. The ethnographic impressions from the first incursions in this world opened, as will be seen, a new and challenging field. Thus, from these limited reports, that related in an episodic manner some of the situations of the field, it is possible to return to the reflections posited at the beginning of the article. The first of these is the ethnographic experience, in two circumstances different: as a **first impression**, in contact with a theme and a fieldsite completely unknown and, secondly as **revelatory experience**, with the research already underway. The first case of the encounter with a blind and deaf woman, Cláudia Sofia Indalécio Pereira, at the festival of Adefav, cited above illustrates such an experience. It called to attention the form through with she communicated with other blind and deaf people, a system called "tactile signing:" it had to do with a modality in which the hand configuration in the production of signs is not, obviously, seen, but sensed through physical contact, in a type of "four-hand ballet."

Thus, we asked the director of the institution to get in contact with her. The mode of communication used by the young blind and deaf woman with hearing and speaking people was nevertheless, altogether other, and still more surprising: it was called "tadoma:" the blind and deaf person deciphered the speech of his or her interlocutor by putting his or her hand upon the face of the person speaking such that the thumb gently touched the split of the lips, to accompany the movements while the other fingers sensed the vibration of the vocal chords passing through the throat. This young woman with whom we spoke on this occasion, was one of the few people that communicates through this method in Brazil.[9]

Cláudia Sofia recounted that she had been deaf since she was six years old (and therefore had already acquired the *performance* of Portuguese, in an oral mode, as a mother tongue) and managed to communicate by virtue of lipreading. Later, at around sixteen years old, she turned blind, which impeded her from communicating since she didn't know any other means for receiving information. One day she touched the lips of her interlocutor at a close proximity, asking that he speak normally with her. From this moment Cláudia Sofia managed to perceive what was said by others, not by sound, but by the vibration sensed on the points of her fingers, thus developing her own version of "tadoma". At the festival at which we met her, each person from her circle of friends that approached her to speak touched in a specific point of her body, repeating or not the touch, so that she could identify right away who had arrived and who wanted to converse. To enter in contact and interact with this person and her surprising form of communication was really a marking experience.[10]

The other ethnographic experience that was classified as such a "first impression" was the situation described above as the "sea of hands" at the *festa junina* at the *Instituto Santa Teresinha*. To be so touched by that experience in the middle of people taken as deficient, specifically in the auditory capacity, but in obvious and frenetic state of communication, that metaphor was all that remained to describe the spectacle, seen from up high on the bleachers—the unexpected refuge and post of observation for a stranger. It did not occur to any "native" deaf person to climb up there only to observe something so absolutely natural, according to their perspective. Nevertheless, to the measure that one is accustomed to the "uncustomary" nature of these **ethnographic experiences of first impression**, they gently go by the wayside—resolved, forgotten or subsumed in others. Yet, as happened in this case, their evocative power has the ability to mark the entire study.

Something different from these situations occurred at the Cowboy Festival, also recounted above under the title "Solemnly ignored!" To qualify this new situation, I want to return to a condition already posited by other authors (Peirano, 1995), known as the revelatory experience, since it is the kind that occurs through the course of research, once having overcome the initial moments of estrangement and wonder. In this case in particular, it was the sensation of isolation in the *turf* of deaf people that "affected" (Favret-Saada, 1990) the researcher, making him experience a condition previously only perceived in a rational manner. When I passed more than two hours isolated, without any communication with the participants of the festival, I could live the experience of being immersed in this world where the register that allowed for the circulation of meanings was suspended and substituted by another unknown register: such was the case of the deaf, in their everyday life, in the world of speakers. If the experience of immersion at the festival at the *Instituto Santa Teresinha* was an epiphany, here there was a tone of discouragement. But it was highly revelatory: it opened other horizons.

Ethnographic practice—continuous, planned, with chronograms—would bring other evidence through the course of research: the first, the discovery of signs as a natural language endowed with grammar—contrary to the common sense idea that considers it mimetic, and yet, universal; secondly, I perceived it as a diacritic sign of a "strong nucleus" of the "deaf movement," constituted by scholarly deaf people, activists in favor of specific rights, speakers that take sign language, and exhibit it, as a differentiating element. Instead of a minority marked by deficiency, they considered themselves members (and legitimate representatives) of a "linguistic minority," the bearers of a "deaf culture" and even "deaf pride." If in the first moment, they constituted out privileged informants and hosts to a world whose horizons were yet unknown to us, in little time ethnographic practice allowed (in spite of them) for the expansion of this world with other actors, until then unrecognized or discredited: the "speaking deaf" that value speech as a strategy of inclusion; deaf people hardly proficient in sign language, those that read lips, that that use apparatuses of coclear implants,[11] deaf people of lower class or social condition, whose space of sociality and apprenticeship are evangelical churches, interpreters of sign language—these and other personalities that would also appear had their place and were a part the "deaf world" understood in the sense that Howard Becker gives to the term (Becker, 1982; Becker; Pessin, 2006).[12] Now, yes, it was in front of this greater **totality**, capable of containing nuances, behaviors, values, etc. that, from the perspective of our first informants, the politicized deaf, would need to be dismissed, since they were irrelevant if not false or equivocal.

As was said at the beginning of this article, this **totality** does not constitute a empirical edit, it is more a presupposition, a condition of research, but can present itself and unfold in a form of identifiable arrangements that allow for descriptions of alliances, links, networks. These totalities are identified and described by categories that present, as has been confirmed, a double status: they emerge from recognizing your empirical presence, in the form of concrete and effective arrangements on the part of social actors, but can also be described in a more abstract plane. In this case, they constitute a kind of model, capable of being applied to contexts distinct from that that in which they were initially identified. They are, however, the results of proper ethnographic practice, that recognizes the native arrangements but that describes them, and works with them, in a

more general plan, identifying its own terms and articulating them in systems of relations (Magnani, 2002, p. 20).

The *circuit* of settings in which these *festas juninas* were realized, in a calendar widely known in the deaf world, is one example; that of religious institutions with their differences in forms of evangelization (the ministry of the deaf of Baptist Churches, that of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the pastors of the deaf of the Catholic Church), each of which was different with regard to the implications for the network of sociality of deaf people. The great quantity of young interpreters of sign language belonging to the evangelical churches was one of the paths that permitted the identification of this *circuit* of churches as a relevant factor in constituting the deaf movement, and Brazilian sign language, as Assis Silva e Teixeira (2008) shows.

In this way, the native category of a deaf world,[13] instead of being discarded as an ideological expression (one of limited reach in the language of deaf activists), was appropriated, retaken and described as a category of analysis, able then to give consistency and extend—at least on the horizon and current state of research on this theme of São Paulo—to a universe constituted by a series of the most diverse social actors, practices, regulations, associations, settings, agencies, etc. The *deaf world* was a universe structured in *circuitos*, cut by *trajetos*, repartitioned in *pedaços*, separated by *patches*, complex and differentiated. It was very distant from the vision that circulates in common sense, even a vision obtained through recourse to some "kind of internship"…

To capture this dynamic, it is necessary to put the focus neither so close that it is confused with a particularistic perspective of each user and neither so far as to distinguish a comprehensive scope, but indecipherable and deprived of meaning. In sum, if the "closer and insider look" allows one to capture the subtleties and distinctions (Geertz, 1978, p. 35) by means of different forms of ethnographic experience, a more distant look is also necessary in ethnographic practice, complimentary to the analysis, in a mode that those "discontinuous knowledges" of which Lévi-Strauss spoke, that do not yet form a whole, can "an organic set," acquiring "a sense that was lacking in them before." (Lévi-Strauss, 1991, p. 415-416).

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1 The collection *The Anthropological Adventure – Theory and Research* (Cardoso, 1997) raises and discusses some of these challenges. 2 In general, sign language is imagined as a mimetic code, costitued by a set of gestures that are more or less allusive to the world of objects, and consequently, is universally intelligible. In the field of linguistic studies, it was the work of Stokoe (1960) and his analysis of American Sign Language (ASL) that, for the first time, sign language was analyzed as a natural language with specific grammar and all the complementary constitutive parts—phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics—rather than pantomime. Currently, in virtue of new research, (Klima; Bellugi, 1979; Liddell, 2003; Liddell; Johnson, 1989; etc.) there are no doubts among linguists that sign language is a natural language among the deaf. These studies have significantly contributed toward innumerous countries developing policies recognizing various sign languages. In the case of Brazil, sign language was called “libras" (língua brasileira de sinais) and was known as the official language of the deaf according to Federal Law 10.436, of April 24th 2002, under the Federal Decree 5.626, of the 22nd of December 2005. 3 See Santos e Vogel (1985). 4 Also participating in this camp were students César Augusto Assis Silva, Carin Hosoe e Danilo Gersosimo. 5 The contact with Cláudia Sofia and her form of communication with other deaf and speaking people is recounted later in the article. 6 See, *a propos*, Magnani (1997). 7 In classic studies of states of ecstasy and possession, the role of music, rhythm, songs, hymns, etc., are discussed as means of producing altered states of consciousness. The question is what situation could produce a similar effect upon a deaf person: the profusion and intensity of sign language? Colors? The vibration felt by the body as a whole, with wider and more general perception? 8 It is what opens beyond the limits of the city, installing wider

networks and fluxes. 9 This denomination derives from the name of two deaf children, Winthrop Tad Chapman e Oma Simpson, students trained in this system by professor Sophia Kindrick Alcorn in the 1920s, at the Kentucky School for the Deaf, in Danville, Kentucky (EUA). 10 These and other details about the festivals referred to here are further developed in the chapter "As festas juninas no calendário de lazer de jovens de jovens surdos na cidade de São Paulo", in Magnani; Assis Silva; Teixeira (2008). 11 Cochlear implant is an electronic apparatus composed of two parts—one internal, surgically implanted and another part used external to the body—that seeks to carry out the function of ciliated cells, providing electric stimulation to the spiral ganglionated cells remaining in the auditory nerve of the cochlea. 12 See also Vilhena (1990). 13 Among other things, “deaf culture,” “deaf pride,” “linguistic minority,” and deaf community,” are widely used as much by members of the deaf movement as by the authors of so-called “deaf studies”—this term, according to Skliar (2001), only applies to the studies of education under theme of deafness, but it is possible to extend its scope to the areas of linguistics, psychology, speech therapy, computation, and others. Some expressions considered stigmatizing in certain environments, such as “deaf-dumb” and “hearing-impaired,” are also a part of the “deaf world” in certain circumstances. “Hearing-impaired,” for example, is used in contexts in which it is convenient to form alliances with other bearers of special needs in order to obtain common objectives in the public political sphere