

## Toward the quest for the truth in ethnomusicology: a *mise au point*

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**Abstract:** Since its inception, the field of ethnomusicology has dramatically changed. In the past fifty years of its existence in the United States of America, ethnomusicology has been defined and redefined in order to shed light and clarify on its ultimate goal- objective – *raison d'être*. It is not an exaggeration to assert that over the years, as a socio-humanity discipline, ethnomusicologists are gradually becoming aware of their mission – to contribute to the understanding of human being – rather than limit their activities to the understanding of the mechanisms of their subject – study of music for its own sake. To accomplish this mission, ethnomusicologists have heavily relied on the interdisciplinary nature of their objectives. In the process, ethnomusicologists have been selectively borrowing theories and research models from their sister disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, ethnography, and linguistics, in order to configure their own paradigm. The present essay is devoted to the *mise au point* (to clarify, to bring into focus) of the definition of ethnomusicology and the re-interpretation of the borrowed theories and methodologies as they are applied to the quest of the ultimate goal – the truth – in the field of ethnomusicology.

**Keywords:** ethnomusicology, researches, research methodology in ethnomusicology.

The most challenging aspects of ethnomusicology as a field of scientific research-are its origin, its definition, and its objectives. These aspects not only present challenges to scholars, but also constitute the core of the diverse opinions that are called upon, according to the focus of the activities in various stages of

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the evolution of the discipline, ranging from the comparative study of non-Western music to the study of music within its cultural context. Writing about changes that have occurred in the field of ethnomusicology in the United States during the first 50 years of its existence, Bonnie Wade comments on how scholars have approached their work. Wade indicates,

We [ethnomusicology] have moved, from a predominance of explicitly comparative method, to a predominance of ethnographic research; from a very early focus on music in human history in evolutionary terms, to focus on music in cultural contact; from analysis of structures of items and of systems, to a focus on analysis of structures of meaning; from an understanding of music as reflective of culture, to music as an affecting force in culture, an agent of social meaning; from a focus on place to a focus on space-again, with our antennae alert to the important ideas emerging in other disciplines which ideas we stand ready to explore and to which we can hopefully begin to contribute through our studies of music.<sup>1</sup>

In this light, ethnomusicology should be defined as a field of research for which the objective resides beyond the mere knowledge of music. As in the field of archaeology, where the focus is to reconstruct *homo sapiens*' past, ethnomusicology has music as its subject of study while its object is to contribute to the understanding of the creators of music – human beings –. Therefore, in this essay, I urge scholars [ethnomusicologists, music educators, musicologists] to delve further into activities surrounding music expression in order to decipher its hidden meaning, by answering the primary question of “why is music the way it is”.<sup>2</sup> I also argue that as a socio-humanity discipline, ethnomusicology is an interdisciplinary field of research laden with borrowed research tools composed of theories and methods from its sister disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and ethnography, to name a few. Those theories and methods that have been proven applicable in the quest for ethnomusicological objectives constitute the body of its trends. Other theories, such as emic/etic; insider/outsider, for which interdisciplinary significance is questionable and has not been determined, remain in the ensemble of research issues to be proven

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<sup>1</sup> WADE, Bonnie. Fifty Years of SEM in the United States: A Retrospective. *Ethnomusicology* 50 (2): 190-198, Spring/Summer 2006.

<sup>2</sup> MERRIAM, Alan. *Anthropology of Music*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 7.

suitable for ethnomusicological scrutiny are addressed and tested in future scholarship. The research paradigms adapted by ethnomusicologists are configured in accordance with specific research objectives.

The examination of its history reveals that in spite of changes and for a very long period since its inception, ethnomusicology was mostly preoccupied with its own definition, to determine the nature of its field of research and its objectives – the ultimate goal – or its *raison d'être*. In his attempt to propose a theory for this field of study, Alan Merriam places ethnomusicology together with social sciences and humanities. Its procedures and goals, writes Merriam, fall upon the side of the social sciences, while its subject matter is a humanistic aspect of man's existence.<sup>3</sup> To legitimize its existence as a field of scientific investigation, ethnomusicologists leaned heavily on the conclusion reached by the English philologist John Ellis Alexandre in his study on the existence of various music traditions and their scale systems, which are based on principles different from those found in Europe.<sup>4</sup> During the years that followed, a large number of works were published revealing the variety of music traditions from around the world, most of which pointed out the difference in scales, and all corroborating the theory put forth in Alexandre's study.<sup>5</sup>

However, with the publication of *The Anthropology of Music* by Alan Merriam (1964), ethnomusicologists gradually found a new focus and concern aimed at human behavior, thus providing their discipline with a more significant objective. Merriam defines music in these terms: "Music is a product of human behavior and has structure, but its structure cannot have an existence of its own divorced from the behavior which produces it."<sup>6</sup>

This definition, the first of its kind, considers music as a cultural product. As such, it permits each culture to conceive and perceive music on its own terms and concepts devoid of outside influence. Although this anthropological

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<sup>3</sup> MERRIAM, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> ALEXANDRE, John Ellis. On the Musical Scales of Various Nations. *Journal of the Society of Arts*, xxxiii (27 March 1885, p. 485-527), (30 October 1885, p. 1102-1111).

<sup>5</sup> Most of publications in this category included in their titles the identifying prefix "The music of", for example: J-B du Halde, *On the music of China* (1735); B. J. Gilman, "Zuni melodies" (1889); Charles Russell Day, *The Music and musical instruments of Southern India and the Ocean* (1891); Sir Francis Taylor Piggott, *The music and musical instruments of Japan* (1893).

<sup>6</sup> MERRIAM, op. cit., p. 7.

definition places music in a new and broad framework, its essence is not different from the myriad of definition attempts formulated by writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, when he writes, “Music is the art of organizing sounds to please the ears.”<sup>7</sup> The prevailing weakness of this definition is its Euro-centric perception that dominated the period (18<sup>th</sup> Century) when it was conceptualized. In spite of whatever notion that this definition connotes, the fact remains that the ears to be pleased were those of the composer. While both definitions mean the same, however, the difference between them is in their articulation, i.e., in the latter music is placed on a broader-based cultural pedestal.

Elsewhere,<sup>8</sup> I have argued that the ultimate goal of the field of ethnomusicology, as a socio-humanity discipline, is to contribute to the understanding of humans in time and space through their musical expressions. To comprehend this trend of thinking, let us illustrate it from the archaeological perspective. As a scientist, the archaeologist’s mission is not to seek artifacts from the past for the mere pleasure of gluing pieces together to restore them to their original shapes and beauty, but to reconstruct how those objects were made and, most importantly, how they were utilized by humans for their survival at that diachronic period and space. In short, the ultimate goal of the archeologist is to contribute to the understanding of humans and what was their mode of survival during a moment in our distant historical past in a specific geographic space.

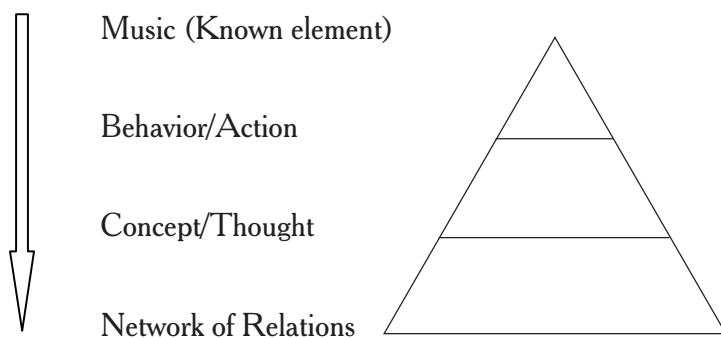
Merriam’s definition of music brought changes to the field of ethnomusicology and clarified the ultimate goal of its research. It sustains that music is its *object* but not its *objective*. Therefore, ethnomusicologists’ attention should include but not be limited to the understanding the physical structure of musical expression, but given to deciphering the cultural phenomena that have influenced the behavior that produced that musical structure. In this fashion, ethnomusicologists would be fulfilling their mission rather than being subservient and behaving like a retriever in a hunting expedition, finding the kill and bringing it to its master without having a taste. To find the meaning, to find the truth of

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<sup>7</sup> ROUSSEAU, Jean-Jacques. *Dictionnaire de Musique*. Paris: Emile et Sophie, 1767.

<sup>8</sup> MUKUNA, Kazadi wa. Ethnomusicology and the study of Africanisms in the music of Latin America: Brazil. In: *Turn up the Volume: A celebration of African music*, edited by Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1999, p. 184.

the music, ethnomusicologists must delve beyond the sonic. In the equation to be deciphered, music is the known element while the unknown – the meaning/truth – exists beneath layers of a variety of phenomena that constitute the individual's *vécu* (life experience) and influences his/her behavior. Therefore, in an ethnomusicological quest, the truth is that which links music to the epistemological network of an entire culture, the source of all influences on human behavior.<sup>9</sup> The source of it all resides in the culture and the latter is contextually intertwined in the web of circles of network of relations that constitute a community or society. The following diagram derived from Merriam's definition interpreted in reverse proceeds from the known to the unknown.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 1 – Merriam's Model Esthetic Paradigm**

This logic brings to mind an interesting anecdotal story that occurs toward the end of the film "The Planet of the Apes" (20th Century Fox, 1968). In spite of the area being declared off limits by the authorities, archaeologist Cornelius and his wife Zhura find some artifacts at the forbidden zone site sustaining the theory that revealed the truth feared by the authorities that the apes' civilization was subsequent to that of humans. To prove this truth beyond the shadow of doubt, Cornelius and Zhura had to interpret a series of visible

<sup>9</sup> Boris Asafiev and Arnold Schoenberg, paraphrased in: EERO. Tarasti. *A theory of musical semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 43-47.

<sup>10</sup> MUKUNA, Kazadi wa, op. cit., p. 182-185.

and invisible facts at the site ranging from the palpable human faulty heart valve and eyeglass frames to the human baby doll which the keeper of the faith could not find a reason to dismiss its presence in the site. The most convincing argument was the unspoken evidence – the speaking human doll that neutralized any possible argument that the protector of the faith could have advanced, especially in the civilization where humans were mutes. Similarly, ethnomusicology requires meticulous scrutiny beyond the concrete study of music on its own terms, as suggested by William Bright when he distinguishes the quest for the endo-semantic level of music, which focuses on pure musical analysis, and the exo-semantic level of music, which reveals the circum-musical sources of the influence leading to its meaning/truth. In this essay I am making a closer observation of selected theories that have recently become integral body of trends in ethnomusicological scrutiny.

## 1. REFLECTIVITY OR CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

One of the trends often misunderstood by born-again ethnomusicologists is the application of the “reflectivity” theory, which seeks to reveal the extent to which a cultural manifestation is reflected in music, or to what point the creative process of music is determined by cultural activities of a community. This theory is often confused with “reflexivity”, the anthropologically-derived theory primarily focused on the process of self-assessment through the study of others. However, an excellent model of reflectivity is encountered in the work *Musical practice and creativity: an African traditional perspective* (1991). In this study Meki Nzewi demonstrates how among the Igbo of Nigeria the concept that governs the process of offering art objects in the *Mbari* ceremony provides the Igbo’s very essence of the musical creative process. He implies that the improvisational creative process in instrumental music, like *Mbari* art, is an attainment in itself. It exists as a process of fulfillment during the creation and ceases to exist after its completion.

Although the parallelism between cultural manifestation and the creative process of music can be corroborated with examples from various cultures in Africa, in his study, Meki Nzewi focuses first on the understanding of the *Mbari* ceremony, a non-sonic aspect of the culture and second traces parallel on the relation between this cultural aspect and musical production. Nevertheless,

distinctions are to be made between categories of musical compositions to reveal that those performance-compositions belonging to categories of social and religious contexts, for which the efficacy of their ritual requires rigorous fidelity in music and dance reproduction, follow a different set of norms. In this context, Meki Nzewi continues, musical composition or dance exists in perpetuity and does not necessarily become “a past referential framework for a new creative experience every subsequent performance occasion.”<sup>11</sup> With this book, Meki Nzewi has proven the core of the reflective theory that music mirrors elements of the context in which it was produced; likewise, these elements provide its contextual analysis. The importance of contextual analysis resides also in the fact that it is geared toward elucidating the object of ethnomusicological study, which is to understand why the music of a given culture is the way it is.

## 2. SEMIOLOGY AND MUSIC

As with any field of scientific investigation, the biggest struggle lies in the quest for its identity, i.e., a definition that will reveal its *raison d'être* and summarize the essence of its activities. This is also true of semiology. Nattiez writes “Semiology does not exist. By this, I [Nattiez] mean that there is no ‘general semiology’ (in the same sense as a ‘general linguistics’) – that is, no collection of concepts, methods and rules that permit analysis of the symbolic, in whatever domain it may exist.”<sup>12</sup>

In his study *Cours de linguistique generale* (1949), Ferdinand de Saussure warns that: “Linguistics is not a part of, a privileged memo of the general science of signs: it is the semiology that is part of the linguistics; but specifically, a part that takes care of the large and significant units of the discourse.”<sup>13</sup> Unlike Peirce,<sup>14</sup> who sees the sign in three operational systems

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<sup>11</sup> NZEWI, Meki. *Musical practice and creativity: An African traditional perspective*. Bayreuth: Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth, 1991, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> NATTIEZ, Jean-Jacques. *Music and discourse: Toward a semiology of music*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 33. (translated by Carolyn Abbate)

<sup>13</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure paraphrased in BARTHES, Roland. *Elementos de semiologia*. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1987, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> PEIRCE, Charles Sanders. *Collected papers*. Vols. 1, 6<sup>a</sup>ed. Hartshorne: Charles, and Weiss, Paul. Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 1931-58, 2: 275.

(icon, index, symbol) as expressed according to its role in a specific context, de Saussure defines the sign as a combination of a *concept* (an idea/word) with the *sound-image* it evokes in the receiver's mind. Seen from this prism, the understanding of music as a sign is a starting point to view musical semiology and to accept that this sign can be translated into other systems of communication outside of verbal language. In other terms, musical creation is profoundly related to the processes of construction of significance based on signs culturally accepted. Charles Boilès warns:

Finally, we come to the name of the field itself, which reveals one of the dangers of introspection to be an unsuspected form of ethnocentrism. Semiology of music has mostly been concerned with what Western European scholars consider to be *music*, i.e., art music; they propose to study signs of music as they know it and not as it is in all of the world's cultures or even in sub-groups of their own culture [...] There is much to be learned from studying musical signs as they exist among cultures of contrasting music traditions rather than limiting our scope to one type of musical expression in our own culture.<sup>15</sup>

It is only from this perspective that semiology theories, methodologies and concepts can be correctly applied to music.

Ethnomusicology operates with the dynamic concept of sign as proposed by Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990),<sup>16</sup> and by Charles Peirce cited in Jakobson (1973).<sup>17</sup> Additionally, those analytical aspects of signs proposed by Nattiez have served to study music in general. However, being conscious of the confusion that may arise from the analysis of work itself with the constructive process and the interpretation of sign, Nattiez proposes an analytical paradigm that includes a threefold approach: 1) analysis of the *poietic* process, similar to the creative

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<sup>15</sup> BOILÈS, Charles, op. cit., p. 27-28.

<sup>16</sup> Saussure defined the sign as a combination of a concept with a sound or an image, dividing them in two entities: the *significate* and the *signifier*. The first addresses the expression (a term which is also used by Peirce (spelling?)), and the second refers to the meaning (or as Peirce would prefer, *interpretant*). Peirce developed this model revealing that a sign is not an static concept, but for it to be interpreted, the receiver (to whom the message is intended) constructs new signs equivalent or more developed, in a process that he determines as interpretation. Nattiez goes beyond this by demonstrating that this interpretation varies from "reader" to "reader", in that it is rooted in personal experiences (*vécu*) of the receiver. The theory of communication operates with six basic concepts: sender, message, receiver, context, milieu and code. Semiology is utilized in all of these.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in JAKOBSON, Roman. *Linguística e comunicação*. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1973.



procedure by the producer; 2) analysis of the *esthetic* process, which focuses on the product from the receiver's perspective; 3) analysis of the trace or at the *neutral*/level, that examines the physical manifestation, symbolic material such as text, score, recording, and such. Even this paradigm has to be modified prior to being applied to ethnomusicological scrutiny. The object of the latter is to take into serious consideration the context, i.e., the sum behavior from all network of relations that have impacted the composer. The shortcoming of this paradigmatic model as suggested by Nattiez, resides in the center of focus being placed on the listener of music, ignoring the impact of the listener's cultural experience on the product.

The danger with this model is that the opinion expressed by the listener about the music reveals his/her personal *vécu*, but does not necessarily belong to the composer or his/her cultural fabric. Closer observation of the analytical model proposed by Nattiez should be compared with that suggested by Alan Merriam's definition of music cited earlier. In this definition, music is the known element in the equation. The objective of this exercise is to find the unknown, and this is the composer's *vécu*. In the latter, the equation is solved, the hidden meaning of music is deciphered by understanding the make up of the experience that have impacted the concept which have influenced the composer's behavior for him to produce the music in a given way. It would provide the answer to the question – "why is this music the way it is". It is only by applying this research paradigm that the paramount ethnomusicological goal can be properly be reached and with it, the revelation of the sought truth.

This proposal seeks to entertain a fundamental concern that continues to haunt ethnomusicologists: a delimitation of the parameter in which a sign operates, considering that music is created in a cultural context, and that both the creative process and its interpretation are rooted in the same context. Therefore, an ethnomusicologist should concur with the observation made by Boilès (1998), that most non-Western cultures have not developed a concept with which to discuss a musical behavior.<sup>18</sup> Sharing this view, John Blacking (1981), affirms that it is necessary to create an analytical paradigm that is anthropologically oriented that will incorporate all ethnic perceptions. Thus, expands Blacking, the analysis has to begin with the classification of what is

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

socially accepted; even if this implies a conflict with the idea that ethnomusicologist has about the nature of the music in the given culture. To Blacking, code and message are inseparable in music: "In the analysis of oral traditions, the musical product cannot be isolated as a *niveau neutre* (neutral level) from the performance meanings it has to those who are making it and perceiving it."<sup>19</sup> He maintains that the ideal approach of the semiology of music is in the observation of different structures between its contingents. It is only in this fashion that one can reach an understanding of its reality. Thus, the music concept is the product of processes of interaction in which its signifier/meaning is obtained with the sum of its signified/interpretants in a community. This justifies the preoccupation in the development of the semiology of music, defining what is considered music and what is not. In other words, if the definition of music is culturally derived or varied according to the composer, interpreter, listener, and the analyzer of the phenomenon in question, Blacking suggests we should incorporate all ethnic perceptions about music to observe how they are related.<sup>20</sup>

However, semiology is just another borrowed tool applied in ethnomusicology to the quest for the truth in music as its multiplicity is evidenced in the relation of music to human beings. As an intricate system of signs, music is created out of a specific cultural context. Like all signs that are culturally defined, music symbolism contains several meanings within a limited sphere where it operates semantically.<sup>21</sup> Music that is created, performed or listened to is a product of varied contexts and the listener must be aware of the diversity of cultural influences on the music. In other words, in ethnomusicology, the goal of semiology is to concentrate on patterns rather than content, to seek out structure rather than to interpret meanings.<sup>22</sup> Ethnomusicology takes the advantage of the profound analysis provided by semiology, to contribute to the understanding of the human being through the understanding of the structural

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<sup>19</sup> BLACKING, John. The problem of 'ethnic' perceptions in the semiotics of music. In: STEINER, Wendy (ed.). *The Sign in Music and Literature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 189.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> MUKUNA, Kazadi wa. The universal language of all time? *International Journal of Music Education* (29): 47-51.

<sup>22</sup> MONELLE, Raymond. *Linguistics and semiotics in music*. Chur: Hartwood Academic Publishers, 1992, p. 5.

configuration of his [human] musical creation. Therefore, in ethnomusicology, semiology should be approached as a science that studies musical signs in their cultural context that leads to the understanding of the music product, rather than as a science that studies the signs of music.<sup>23</sup> As a discipline of scientific inquiry for which the subject – music – is a universal phenomenon, in Boilès' expression, ethnomusicology operates within a specific perimeter to reveal the *designatum* (sound image) of considerable interest for the culture in which it originates. It sheds light on the creative process of music in its cultural context to justify the mixture of its universals into a texture and evokes the unique significance belonging to a people.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. SEMANTIC AND MUSIC

As a continuum of the semiology, the semantic is applied to ethnomusicological inquiries to explain the creative process of meanings of musical signs identified semiologically. Commenting on the semantic power of music, Igor Stravinsky (1936) asserts:

I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc... *Expression* has never been an inherent property of music. That is by no means the purpose of its existence.<sup>25</sup>

The non-sonic aspects incorporated in music are important in this process for being referential to the context where music was produced. Two structural levels can be considered in music as proposed by William Bright (1963): the *endo-semantic* and the *exo-semantic*.<sup>26</sup> Whereas in the former case, sonic elements such as pitches, structure of musical phrases, and timbre constitute

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<sup>23</sup> BOILÈS, Charles, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> STEINER, Wendy (ed.). *The sign in music and literature*. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 3; see also Boilès cited in MONELLE, Raymond. *Linguistics and semiotics in music*. Edinburgh: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992, p. 187.

<sup>25</sup> STRAVINSKY, Igor. *An autobiography*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1936, p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> BRIGHT, William. Language and music: Areas for cooperation. *Ethnomusicology* VII, 1, 1963, p. 26-32.

the focus of the study, in the latter case, attention is directed to non-sonic (extra-musical) aspects that have influenced the nature of music as an expression.

It can then be asserted that as a reflection of social and cultural values belonging to a given group, music incorporates interpretation rooted in the *vécu* (life experience) of individual producer. Therefore, in order to attain an interpretation that is closer to the reality of a musical sign – truth – the ethnomusicologist must consider various aspects (individual memory), the sum of which when brought together (collective memory), reconstruct a picture that is as close as possible to the truth.<sup>27</sup> According to Nattiez, music is set apart by the complex networking of interpretants.<sup>28</sup> Monelle points out: “If music is an inherent language, based on natural correspondences between sounds and meanings, then it is what semiologists would call an *indexical sign*.”<sup>29</sup>

I must concur with Stravinsky when he states that feelings and imitations are not meanings but qualities.<sup>30</sup> The interpretation that is attributed to music is related to various contextual factors. In one of his well-known compositions “O Trenzinho do Caipira” (Rural Train),<sup>31</sup> Heitor Villa-Lobos brings forth the sound of a moving train through musical instruments. The question that can be asked here is “would this sound be recognized by all listeners even those who never experienced it before?” Would they all have a similar emotional response? If the contrary is true, what would it be? All these will depend on the *vécu* of the individual listener, as I have affirmed elsewhere that “music only operates semantically as a vehicle of communication in a given cultural perimeter.”<sup>32</sup> If sound in itself is incapable of carrying meaning, then any meanings derived out of music must stem from extrinsic [*circum*] or extra-musical associations.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> HALBWACHS, Maurice. *La mémoire collective*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968.

<sup>28</sup> NATTIEZ, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>29</sup> MONELLE, op. cit., p. 12. Indexical sign means that which is identified with a specific object, i.e., in Brazil, the *berimbau* is identified with Capoeira.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Bachianas Brasileiras no. 2.

<sup>32</sup> MUKUNA, Kazadi wa, op. cit., p. 47-51.

<sup>33</sup> MONELLE, *ibid.*, p. 9-10.

## ISSUES

In ethnomusicology, issues are those theories for which the debate about their applicability has not been resolved. Although some theories, “emic/etic”, “insider/outsider”, ethnicity, identity, “globalization”, and “world music”, have become buzz words among scholars, they continue to be controversial in their application. Their meaning resides in the philosophical realm that is open to more than just opinions and discussions. Theories such as “Quantum Theory of Music”, borrowed from physics and proposed for use in ethnomusicology by Ki Mantle Hood,<sup>34</sup> and “Musical Anthropology”, suggested by Anthony Seeger his book *Why Suyá sing: a musical anthropology of and Amazonian people* (1987), a sort of play on word from Alan Merriam’s seminal work the *Anthropology of Music*, sound impressive but remain at the trial phase.

## CONCLUSIONS

Shifts, as outlined by Bonnie Wade,<sup>35</sup> delineate not only the various evolutionary stages of ethnomusicology, but they also reveal the ambiguity that has been clouding this field from the way research is conducted to the way the results are presented. Addressing ideas about culture, Wade writes,

We have moved from an understanding of culture as a unified complex of elements that work together to create an integrated, homogeneous whole, to culture as an ordered system of meaning, and of symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place.<sup>36</sup>

These difficulties sustain various concerns that any young field of inquiry has to endure before discovering the real essence of its objectives. On the other hand, glancing through the list of borrowed theories and methodologies above, it should become clear that as a socio-humanity discipline, ethnomusicology has a crystalline credit that allows it to borrow freely from any sister disciplines.

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<sup>34</sup> HOOD, Ki Mantle. The quantum theory of music II. *World Music Reports*, (s/d), 1 (1): 10-15.

<sup>35</sup> WADE, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Op. cit., p. 196.

It should also be accepted that whatever the borrowed theory, it has to be modified before it can be applied, or it has to be re-interpreted first to fit the quest of ethnomusicology objectives. When this process fails, the borrowed methodology becomes obsolete and often it is dropped by the wayside during the evolutionary phases of the ethnomusicology, or simply remains abandoned among the issues. An excellent example of this is the semiological paradigms poietics-esthetics-neutral proposed by Nattiez discussed above that have been modified for application in ethnomusicology. Whereas the first of these paradigms stresses the musical analysis from the composer perspective, the second addresses the same analysis from the listener point of view, and in the third, the focus is placed on the music for its own sake.

As a form of modification, in the esthetics perspective, one must understand that the listener in question is the researcher. In my humble opinion, the biggest problem in this case resides in the lack of clarity from authors who avoid to take a stance *vis-à-vis* to the identity of the known and the unknown elements within the equation. This is not only vital, but it is crucial. To this respect, Boilès suggests that the scholar has to take into consideration all the factors about the music in order to determine which paradigm (poietics or esthetics) to apply to the study. If the known element in the equation is music, which is heard, then the unknown that ethnomusicologist is searching for – the truth/meaning – is found in the sum of behavior derived from all the circles within the network of relationships in which the composer is the link, for they denote a large portion of composer's *vécu*.

In other words, the appropriate paradigm to adapt in an ethnomusicological scrutiny is the esthetic and not the poietic. It is only by applying this procedure that an ethnomusicologist will have reached the goal of his/her ultimate objective that I have been advocating in several of my writings<sup>37</sup> – to contribute to the understanding of humankind through their musical expression in time and space through their musical expression. This is laid out by Merriam in these words: “In order to understand why a music structure exists as it does, we must also understand how and why the behavior which

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<sup>37</sup> MUKUNA, Kazadi wa. Prefácio. In: LEME, Mônica Neves. *Que tchan é esse?* Indústria e produção musical no Brasil dos anos 90. São Paulo: Annablume Editora, 2003, p. 16; see also MUKUNA, Kazadi wa. Preface. *African Urban Studies* 6 (Winter 1979-80), p. vii.

produces it is as it is, and how and why the concepts which underlie that behavior are ordered in such a way as to produce the particularly desired form of organized sound.”<sup>38</sup> Anything less than this, the researcher should not address as an ethnomusicologist but as a “Retrieving Dog”.

**Resumo:** Desde a sua concepção, o campo de etnomusicologia tem mudado muito. Nos seus primeiros cinquenta anos a etnomusicologia vem definindo e redefinindo seu campo de pesquisa, seu objetivo final – *raison d'être* –, e se afirmando como uma disciplina das ciências humanas, sobretudo da sociologia. Não seria um exagero afirmar que no decorrer dos anos a etnomusicologia tem se conscientizado de sua missão final – a de contribuir ao conhecimento do ser humano – e não apenas limitar-se às atividades de compreensão dos mecanismos de seu assunto – estudo de música por si mesmo. Deste modo, a etnomusicologia vem se adaptando à interdisciplinaridade. Nesse processo, a etnomusicologia vem seletivamente tomando emprestadas as ferramentas de teorias e métodos de pesquisa de disciplinas irmãs como a sociologia, a antropologia, a etnografia e a lingüística, e configurando-as ao seu próprio paradigma. O presente artigo visa colocar em foco a definição de etnomusicologia e a re-interpretação das ferramentas de pesquisa emprestadas e sua re-configuração dentro de um modelo único aplicado em busca do seu objetivo final – *a verdade* – no campo de etnomusicologia.

**Palavras-chave:** etnomusicologia, pesquisa, metodologia de pesquisa em etnomusicologia.

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<sup>38</sup> MERRIAM, op. cit., p. 7.

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