

Contextual Theory, or Theorizing Between the Discursive and the Material

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In this paper I present an example of ethical music-theorizing that orients around three concepts Brazilian musicians invoke to describe aspects of their practice. The first, *balanço*, which refers to the microrhythmic fluctuations that determine correct feeling in musical performance, comes from samba. The second, *ginga*, the dynamic physical motion within which improvisational interactions are grounded, comes from capoeira. The third, the *roda*, the protean circle that defines the performance space, locates across both practices. Beginning with these terms, and the constellations of meanings that flow from them, I engage the ways that practitioners think about what they are doing. They also serve as frames for thinking about and analyzing the empirical data of musical performance. I then advance a meta-theoretical concept that I call *circularidade*, which informs some of the reasons that Brazilian musical structures unfold in the ways they do. In other words, terms like *balanço*, *ginga*, *roda*, and more form the basis of my meta-theoretical frame, which in turn accounts in part for why those concepts exist in the way they do. In this way, I stake out an ethical concept-space that begins with, and is sensitive to, the discursive spaces that stem from the practitioners themselves.