

Popular culture and romantic sensibility: Mario de Andrade's dramatic dances

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ABSTRACT

The text examines the notion of dramatic dances in the work of the Brazilian modernist writer Mario de Andrade (1893-1945) and investigates the reasons *bumba-meu-boi* (*the ox merriment, or ox-dance*) - a widespread and popular Brazilian festivity - was so extremely valued by the author. It analyzes the connections found in the use of an ethnographic perspective, a romantic view of popular culture, and the pursuit of authenticity in the construction of aesthetical forms by *andradian* modernism.

Keywords: Mario de Andrade; Ethnography; Dramatic dances; Romanticism; Bumba-meu-boi.

*Why have I sought my path with fervent care,
if not to hope to bring my brothers there?
Goethe, Fausto.*

Preface: Why did Mario de Andrade see in *Bumba* both the “most exemplary” and “oddest” of dramatic dances?

Mario de Andrade soaked Brazilian culture with folklore and emerges today as an insurmountable sphinx in the way of studies on popular arts and cultures. His direct style, permeated by expressive, almost confessional ravishments, gives us the immediate and disturbing illusion that we share with

him an intimate dimension of subjectivity.¹ As the reading extends, we begin inadvertently to treat him with the familiarity of a daily companion: Mario. At the same time, his diffuse and very active ideological presence marks the scenery of contemporary debates. Various themes, as, very especially, the case of *Bumba-meu-boi*, emerge as if impregnated of Mario de Andrade.²

His presence grew in importance during my research on Parintins' *Boi-bumbá* (Ox Dance Festival), in the northern state of Amazonas. Begun in 1996, this research widened its horizons, including reflections both on ox merriments in Brazil and on the contemporary anthropological usage of folklore studies.³ I was surprised above all by the ambivalent form taken by Mario de Andrade's influence.

In his text "Brazil's dramatic dances" (1982), written from 1934 to 1944, Mario de Andrade attempted to appraise these dances, emphasizing *bumba-meu-boi* as "the most exemplary" and also as "the most complex, original, the oddest of our dramatic dances". However, at the end of his studies, our author foretold, in fierce disheartenment, a sad fate for the dances that so fascinated him: "the way things are evolving, death is the destiny!".

The contemporary vitality of the ox merriments and of other popular festivities contradicts, for itself and to our bliss, this fate. Thus, considered under its most concrete angle as a sharp assertion on the future of popular culture, the erudite prevision vanishes. It is true that, from an ideological angle, the very vitality of today's folkloric and popular merriments could testify the posthumous success of Mario de Andrade's struggle for the country's cultural uniqueness. However, when considered from that perspective, the death sentence seems to carry strong subjective connotations, stressing romantic nostalgia, so characteristic in his dealing with popular things, and the author's bitterness and disappointment relative to the ways of the cultural policies of the time. Even so, throughout his study of dramatic dances, instigating intellectual inquietude, sensible and shrewd insights keep the heat of live embers. From this analytical angle, Mario de Andrade insists in resurging from the ashes of his fatal utterance.⁴

In my first text on the Parintins' *Boi-Bumbá* (Cavalcanti, 2001), suggesting a structural perspective, I associated the transformations and expansions of the Ox Dance festival along the last decades, responsible for its Amazonian uniqueness, to a matrix of meaning articulated around the theme of the ox's death and resurrection.⁵ In spite of the theoretical distance from Mario de Andrade's notion of evolutionist myth and contemporary anthropological notions,⁶ the andradian conception of

a “nucleus” of “mythic” meaning sometimes giving order to the aggregate of dramatic dances resonates in the idea of a “matrix of meaning” proposed by my own interpretation. In addition, Mario de Andrade’s formal definition for these dances – a danced sequence of dramatic scenes, freely articulated from a set of characters referred to the central motive – stands succinct and efficient for the understanding of the formal frame of the Parintins’ *Bumbá*.

The theme claimed for deepening. Wouldn’t there be a more intense relationship between the death sentence and the very concept of dramatic dances? Would it be possible at the same time refusing the prediction and keeping aspects of the conceptual formulation? How to account for my own ambivalence with regards to the author? How to understand the idea of cultural and nationalizing “exemplarity” of *Bumba-meu-boi*, so a-critically assumed by so many researchers on the theme? This text results from that search.

Mario de Andrade and folklore studies

Mario de Andrade’s expressive and ethnographic interest in folklore, as well as his search, through folklore, of some art and culture that, being “modern”, would also be, at the same time, “national” and “universal” are well established in the literature (Lopez, 1972; Mello e Souza, 1979; Moraes, 1978, 1992; Travassos, 1997).

In 1946, Florestan Fernandes already pointed to the importance of the approach to folklore in Mario de Andrade’s work:

We must not forget that folklore dominates – and to a certain extent deeply marks – his polymorphic activity as poet, storywriter, novelist, critic and essayist; and it is his favorite field of research and specialized studies. Therefore, when we try to analyze his contribution to Brazilian folklore, we must distinguish what he did as a literate from what he did, say, by default, as a folklorist (1989, p. 150).

In his analyses of Modernism, Moraes considered Mario de Andrade to be the representative of a “research path, in an almost university sense of the word” (1978, p. 93), showing, with particular clarity, the strategic place the category “folklore” occupies in our author’s cultural nationalism. Now, the association of folklore to a “research path” indicates the perception, on Mario de

Andrade's part, of originality and autonomy in popular facts that do not allow for their simple reduction to a mere (although always sophisticated) instrumental usage, be it ideological or artistic. He was, however, a folklorist by default, willing and not willing, ardently. Mario de Andrade's feelings relative to folkloric research he undoubtedly exerted were, again undoubtedly, contradictory.

In his trip to the Northeast, when he arrived in Natal (RN), in December 15, 1928, "not being able to sleep so great was [his] happiness" and registering important corrections to his *Ensaio sobre música brasileira* [*Essay on Brazilian music*] (1972 [1928]), Mario de Andrade defends himself of the self-declared scholar's impulse. He mocks the aspiration of folklore studies to the status of science, and acknowledges himself as a "collector [...] supplying documentation for musicians" (1976, pp. 231-232). Nonetheless, as confirmed by Travassos (2002), among his many designs, with his reflections, researches and collections, Mario de Andrade decisively collaborated for the development of folklore studies in the country.⁷

Value judgments are pervasive in his research on folklore, for Mario de Andrade cast forth on folklore instrumental and strongly ideological interests. But, Brazil's discoveries,⁸ that affected and annoyed him so much, projected loud and clear subjects that widened knowledge and sociability horizons: *catopês*, *cateretês*, *caboclinhos*, *Chico Antônio*, *Nau Catarineta* ... So many people, so many festivals, so many artists that don't know they are: "Êh things of my homeland, forms of the past and of today / Êh syncope rhythms and slow smells of the backlands/ Piercing against the current the impenetrable thicket of my being..."⁹

In the hybrid soil of his research, there are also hints of voices different from his own voice – the "people's" voices – picked up by the most universal and humanist hues of his approach. For all this, Mario de Andrade emerges as one of the exponential figures of a field of studies defined both by the intellectual interest in the studied facts, and, very especially, by a peculiar existential attitude. From their beginnings to our days, folklore studies are imbued of a noticeable ability to generate enthusiasm, and even enchantment. Even when strongly academic, the interest in "folklore" brings with it something of a desire for social liberation, of the pleasure of crossing over the limits of class sociability, experiencing the universal, a common humankind shared with the people.¹⁰ Thus, it is not only for his search and production of knowledge on the people, but also because he is affected by that kind of human contact that Mario de Andrade can be considered a folklorist.

This enchantment, based on empathy, in the ability to put himself in the other's place and to perceive, in this fictional way, the world from a new angle, is present in the whole ethnographic tradition, decisive for the constitution of the anthropological perspective (Stocking, 1989; Zengotita, 1989; Duarte, 2003). When the question has to do with folklore, Mario de Andrade's involvement with the romantic philosophical tradition is evident. Folklore is, in his work's architecture, a privileged channel of re-linking to a world that aspires to totality.¹¹

Aspiration always escorted by a painstaking and incurable nostalgia: the totality striven for is lost, or in the verge of being inexorably lost in the modern world.¹² Folklore studies are certainly, as suggested by Gonçalves, among the privileged places for the construction of a "loss rhetoric". Rhetoric that, as observed by the author, lies on a strong tension: any principle of conflict, incoherence or fragmentation is expelled from an imaginarily constructed totality – for instance, "Brazilian folklore". Given this, any inconsistency or problem appears in thought under the false disguise of an external attack (Gonçalves, 1997, p. 24).

Approaching the ethnographic and artistic dimensions in Mario de Andrade's work, Travassos observed the presence of another kind of tension, cast as "the paradox of primitivism". That notion synthesizes the intellectual attitude, characteristic of some of the twentieth century's artistic movements that presented the relationship between the "civilized I" and the "primitive other" through the presence or the absence of certain cultural qualities. According to the author, Mario de Andrade figures as "one of the best of the paradox's representatives, for Brazilians" (1997, p. 7).¹³

In fact, Mario de Andrade proposed and experienced the encounter with popular culture in a very ambivalent way. In a variation of evolutionism, popular culture appears in his work as a valorization of the primitive, in a confrontation between identity and otherness through distinct human groups. In addition, and with a romantic flavor, there is the idea that the feeding force of the Brazilian cultural uniqueness lies in popular artistic creations (Cavalcanti *et al.*, 1992). Folklore is then considered as a kind of national talisman, a type of *muiiraquitã*, the good luck amulet always threatened by the risk of loss pursued by the hero of Andrade's most famous novel, *Macunaíma* (1978 [1928]). For if it is true that the qualities lost and looked for by "me-civilized-artist" are to be found in the "other-primitive-people", this so cherished encounter, when it occurs, engenders above all a terrible sharpening of the feeling of loss. The qualities observed in the people are immediately more threatened than ever by everything that represents the very one that re-

encounters them and valorizes them, with the desire to transfer them to himself. The construction of the third term resulting from this encounter, a new Brazilian art as Mario de Andrade wanted, brings with it the discontent of a crack that does not appease even with the most ardent discoveries of the people's expressive talent and sensibility. The connection is not to be held back and seems always on the verge of rupture: "the way things are evolving, death is the destiny!"

Mario de Andrade and *Bumba-meu-boi*

In a masterly essay on the novel *Macunaíma*, Mello e Souza wrote of her attempt to analyze "the great distress projected throughout all levels of the narrative" (1979, p. 56); on the "knowledge of the deep crack that hurts all sectors of Mario de Andrade's reflection [...]" (*Idem*, p. 60); and on debate on Brazilian identity that "will never abandon the writer's tormented reflection" (*Idem*, p. 63). According to this author, though fractured by tensions and contradictions, Mario de Andrade's thought has a unitary character. Sandroni also, when commenting on Mario de Andrade the polygraph, emphasizes his work's unity. The famous alexandrine *eu sou trezentos, sou trezentos e cinquenta* ["I am three hundred, I am three hundred and fifty"], this author recalls, does not exclude nor contradicts his less known complement – *Mas um dia afinal eu toparei comigo* ["but one day in the end I will run into myself"] (1988, p. 12). It is worth remembering, with Anatol Rosenfeld (1973), the beautiful following verses that finish that poem's last stance: *Tenhamos paciência, andorinhas curtas/Só o esquecimento é que condensa/E então minha alma servirá de abrigo* ["Let us be patient, short swallows/Only oblivion condenses/Then my soul will serve as a shelter"]¹⁴. Now, the etymology of the word polygraph suggests the idea of covered meanings. It is not only the "work of distinct themes", and the "quality of writing in various manners" or even in "ciphers", but also "the art of deciphering that kind of writing" (Houaiss, 2001). Every one of us is a polygraph when researching Mario de Andrade. His work appears to us as a vast fragmentary system, where we become entangled in the search for links and knots of meaning, certainly following the author's appeals.¹⁵ Now, among the many levels through which Mario de Andrade's thought moves, there are decisive and recurring elements that establish meaningful interconnections: *bumba-meu-boi*, *the ox merriments*, is distinctively one of them. Moraes (1978, 1992) analyzed the chain of meanings allowed by the notion of folklore in the complex architecture of andradian cultural nationalism. Lopez (1972, 2002) called attention to the special position of *bumba-meu-boi* in this context and examined the presence of the ox as a symbol in Mario de Andrade's poetry. Mello e Souza (1979), in her turn, exemplarily defended the role of artistic

composition and creation model played by *bumba-meu-boi* based on the *suite*'s rhapsodic principle in the very literary creation of *Macunaíma*'s.¹⁶

Reviewing Mello e Souza's book – “a great little study” – Jos Guilherme Merquior (1981, p. 267) stressed the pessimism of the proposed reading based on the illumination of the articulation of the two syntagmatic axes conducting *Macunaima*'s narrative: it is not only the hero that loses and recovers his magical talisman, but also, and above all, the anti-hero that finally ends up losing his talisman because of a funest choice. “In the last analysis, the andradian rhapsody is an “arthurian” romance with a tremendous injection of ambivalence”, writes Merquior (*Idem*, p. 265).

The review sheds light, however, on another fundamental aspect of Mello e Souza's interpretation that is worth of emphasis: the importance of aesthetic form in the solution for our author's nationalistic search.¹⁷ There is here an “optimism of the form”: the novel's model of composition is that of popular music, that is in its turn that of the European forms of suite and variation. The nationalist positive drift of Mario de Andrade's project – “modulation nationalism”, of an aesthetical quality “exceptionally inclusive” (*Idem*, p. 266) – lies then in the formal solution of the expression, and not in the vainglorious reading of the novel's content, of a pessimism near to tragic, as Mello e Souza demonstrated. In *Macunaima*, says Merquior, in the composition of the character as anti-hero, a type of rogue, as well as in the opera, *melos* eats up *ethos*, revealing and invertebrate society, “not a classless society, but a society lacking a class dynamics, that was beginning to live modernization, “bearing it” instead of assuming it” (*Idem*, p. 268).¹⁸

Mello e Souza suggested the structural affinities of the novel *Macunaima* and “the popular dance that best represented the nationality” and masterly showed the main character's, Macunaima, anti-heroic role in the novel. I would like to develop two important aspects of her argument. First, the particularity of dance, as an aesthetic expression in its own right, seems to play an important role in Andrade's inspirations. Second, if *Macunaíma* is really an anti-hero, and if the novel really expresses a pessimistic reflection on the theme of Brazilian cultural nationalism, it is worth to question the residual vainglory that remains implicit in that view of the ox merriments as “the” best representation of nationality. After all, Mario de Andrade saw *bumba* not only as the most “exemplary” but also as the “oddest” of all dramatic dances. With that objective, I examine the conceptual formulations comprised in *As danças dramáticas do Brasil* [“Brazil's dramatic dances]. The understanding of the value complexity, of the conceptual impasses and of the richness of perceptions imbedded in the notion of dramatic dances may contribute to relativize important aspects of the contemporary understanding of the ox merriments. Perhaps it may also contribute to

the integration of this aspect of Mario de Andrade's reflection to the analyses of his work as a whole.

Brazil's dramatic dances

Who will say I don't live contented! I dance! [...]

Dance from the cradle: Yes and No

Dance from the cradle: No and Yes¹⁹

Texts and some context

Mario de Andrade's studies on Brazilian folklore are at a crossing of different motivations. His desire for knowledge of distinct artistic and expressive forms (that is, "popular" forms, different from those practiced and lived by the Brazilian or Paulistan elite of the times); the amateurish experimentation with the idea of ethnography as an experience of direct contact with the people; the search for popular creative processes for expressive utilization in the composition of his own art; and finally the ideological utilization of the idea of folklore in the search for a new cultural nationalism, all these motives are intertwined in these studies. His writings on the theme superpose these different interest layers, involved in each other always in an especially tense way.

Oneida Alvarenga (1982) carefully edited the posthumous publication of the three volumes of "Brazil's dramatic dances" (from now on BDD). The essay that bears the same title (from now on DD) precedes the great volume of collected material, with many notes and comments, and constitutes here the reference for our questions. Because of the width of the systematizing and conceptual impulse, this text occupies an important place in the characterization of Mario de Andrade as a student of Brazilian folklore. The body of the text, from 1934, bore revisions and significant additions until its publication in 1944, in the *VI Boletim Latinoamericano de Música* ["VI Latin-American Music Bulletin"], which is the version published in the collected works. Alvarenga (1982, p. 21) points to the fact that it is the only among the author's works on popular dances that presents a "positively defined form". The text went along with the author's life for ten years. The long elaboration period and the fact that it was finally published make it especially revealing of the author's study ways.

In its origin, as Tele Porto Lopez says (1972), the first version of DD, written in 1934, would correspond to the expression of interest maturation on “folklore in itself”. The writing of the novel *Macunaima* (first sketch in 1926-27, published in mid 1928), in the wake of the *Clã do Jaboti*’s [“Turtle’s Clan”] poems, is seen by this author as the beginning of a phase when the scholar’s desire acquired a more defined form.²⁰ This same desire resulted in his trips to the North and Northeast that, taken from 1927 to 1929, were posthumously published in *O turista aprendiz* [The apprentice tourist] (Andrade, 1976). The beginning of the writing of DD was thus intertwined with the creative impulse that, initiated in 1926, would also result in the literary utilization of the travel experience.

It is worth taking a closer look to the relationship between the materials that make up these two posthumous works – the DD and “The apprentice tourist”. The latter book, edited by Tele Porto Ancona Lopez, brings under the same title two of Mario de Andrade’s different but interconnected projects. As pointed out by the editor (Andrade, 1976, p. 89), the first project was so baptized by the author. In his *mais advertencia que prefacio* [“more of an advertence than a preface”] (*Idem*, p. 49), the author informs that these texts, written in notebooks and loose sheets during the trip to the country’s North, taken from May 7 to August 15, 1927, were brought together by himself in 1943, in order to be published. The editor, in her turn, notes that the time to which the narratives refer (to) is not the same, in this case, as that of the writing, for the already mature writer rewrote, in 1942, the 1927 experience (*Idem*, p. 39). In spite of the “smell of modernism grown out of use” that the set brought to him, Mario de Andrade longed for publishing these memoirs of an anti-traveler, “always traveling hurt, frightened, incomplete, always inventing disliked of the odd environment he traversed”. But, if traveling brought to him a strong feeling of disturbance and lack of adaptation, it was also an experience of contact and even revelation. Rereading his old notes, “so close and intense sensations” forced our author to preserve them. “Be patient...” – he says – adding ironic reticence to his legacy. So we know his first trip through a very elaborated diary, full of disclosures and literary tirades lapidated by a playful and ironic sensibility, even when sad. Mario de Andrade wants to talk of himself, establishing a subjectivity that he bears and feels. Expressing it is a quasi-masochist aesthetic pleasure:

I was not made for traveling, hélas! I am smiling, but within myself flows an amazing regret, the color of incest. I enter the cabin, it is too late, I already departed, I cannot regret. A compact void within myself. I sit down on myself” (*Idem*, p. 51).

Lopez qualifies this first account as a “properly literary discourse, artistically worked out” (*Idem*, p. 39). The editor observes, however, already in this first diary an interest in “dramatic dances”. There is the clear-cut case of the *ciranda* dance with the episode of a bird’s death,²¹ found by happy chance and hurriedly registered in June 12 (*Idem*, p. 97), in the High Solimões, up-river, in a hamlet called Caiçara. In his return to São Paulo, this same *ciranda* would be the theme of the first column (December 8, 1927) by the *Diario Nacional*’ new critic.²² This chronicle reveals, in a very characteristic way, the interlacement of the author’s taste for ethnographic description and his interested aesthetic search full of value judgments, and it allows for some valuable observations. First, there is no reference to the expression “dramatic dance”. The *ciranda* dance is here simply a “popular feast” with little dramatic vitality, whose plot was “vague and discontinuous” (*Idem*, pp. 335-336) or, what is more, “a hodge-podge”, without *Boi-bumba*’s “nexus and legitimacy”. The observation reveals, in all letters, Mario de Andrade’s preference for the ox merriment as fully established in 1927. So, although seeing in the episode of the death and resurrection of the bird the liveliest part of the festivity, Mario de Andrade found everything very graceless:

Finally, this dramatic hodge-podge is no more than a children’s play, to which more primitive adults attributed a more characteristic and perceptible interested function, monkeying love, religion, hunting and taboo beasts. Neither is the dance worth anything, monotonous, lacking originality, primitive, very similar to the native dances described by Martius and Lery. What is really good is the music (*Idem*, p. 336).²³

The second project, the 1928-1929 series responds to another travel conception, visibly committed to a more objective narrative of the facts. As Lopez says (*Idem*, p. 41): “it is a diary with an immediate journalistic address”. Mario de Andrade traveled then as a correspondent for the *Diario Nacional*, having planned collections and studies in close contact with Camara Cascudo.²⁴ The text is a collection of the seventy chronicles that, written during his stay in the Northeast, from November 27, 1928, to February 5, 1929, were published in the *Diario Nacional*, in the series “The apprentice tourist”, from December 14, 1928, to March 29, 1929. This second diary’s relation to the DD is especially organic. A great part of the documentation relative to melodies, choreographies and arts described in these chronicles is part of the collection published in the three volumes of “Brazil’s dramatic dances”.²⁵ According to Lopez, the come back from this second trip inaugurated intense studies with a view to understanding the registered dances. Mario de Andrade devoted himself, with characteristic tenacity, to the study of the three evolutionist anthropologists –

Tylor, Frazer and Lévy-Bruhl.²⁶ In the midst of this study project, the author begins the writing of the text (DD) that especially interests us.

The *Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros* [Brazilian Studies Institute] – IEB, at the University of São Paulo – USP, keeper of Mario de Andrade’s archives, has previous versions to that published by Andrade in 1943. This last version, which was later published by Oneida Alvarenga (Andrade, 1982) will serve as our basic reference, although a consideration of all previous versions will allow us to fix and elucidate relevant points.²⁷

The text’s argument and general direction are already clearly defined from the first version. This version, dated 1934, has 27 pages and ends up in the section corresponding to the next to last page of the published version, with the words “Rio Grande do Norte” (Andrade, 1982, p. 69). This dactylographed end is followed by this noted penciled by the author: “today’s decadence of dramatic dances”. The decadence theme would be developed then in the text’s “second version”, this same year. With additions that scarcely altered its content, this section corresponds to the published (1944) version’s long and last paragraph. The third version, also from 1934, corresponds to the dactylography of the revisions undertaken by the author on the previous one. The construction process is interrupted and apparently is only taken on again 10 years latter, in 1944, with the revision of this version and, finally, with the writing and revision of the fourth version that corresponds to the published text.

The idea of the dance’s degradation, therefore, is already present from the text’s inception, integrating the approach to the theme. It only becomes more despaired from the version finished in 1934 (Andrade 1934b) to that of 1944.²⁸ The revision sequence basically operates through interposed additions along a text whose central axis is defined from its inception. This procedure (addition of notes, of bibliography and above all of unpublished sections or sections already written for other ends) makes the final text’s composition into something oddly similar to the very composition process of the dramatic dances as described by Mario de Andrade: swollen by elements that stuff the central argument in an intriguing process of “discretionary juxtaposition”.

The text

Mario de Andrade was certainly self-taught in themes relative to folklore and anthropology. We should keep in mind his exteriority to the nascent academic world of the social sciences that, from 1920 to 1940, established loose frontiers in São Paulo (Peixoto, 2002). However, even considering

Mario de Andrade's ambivalence relative to his scholar impulse, the DD text undoubtedly belongs to this scholar that, in his painful way, he also was.

In this text, the voice that speaks, in a way eager to take a position as such, is Mario the researcher, taking off in an ambitious flight. Some expressive impulses emerge here and there. He does not resist telling us that it was his "passionate curiosity for the people's things" (Andrade, 1982, p. 43) that led him to a *ciranda* in the high Solimões in 1927. By the way, it was only partly observed, for his "folkloric passion" had already delayed the boat's departure, kept waiting at the docks. Various formulations appear unpretentiously as from his "sensations" (*Idem*, p. 30, for instance). However, the wealth of bibliographical citations, the reflexive utilization of his experience in observation and dance registration, the widespread development of the notes and the desire to systematize information collected "from all the documentation I know of" (*Idem*, p. 46) establish the text's dominant line, marked also by the restless search for pristine meanings.

The artist is obviously there, fascinated by the expressive dimension of the dances. But this is not enough, and the scholar is also strongly attracted by the need to give them conceptual coherence, and understanding their origin. The expression "dramatic dances" was created precisely with a view to revealing the underlying unity of cultural facts up to then called by different names. A good part of the text's difficulty derives from the intercrossing of these various questioning threads.

Mario de Andrade's interest in music is at the point of departure of his reflexive investment. Dramatic dances are, as the first phrase in the text says, "one of the more characteristic manifestations of Brazilian popular music" and, what is more, a point where the people presented a positive evolution "over the original races and other national formations of America" (*Idem*, p. 23). Mario de Andrade sees in these dances a Brazilian and original solution ("positive evolution") in popular culture: there is in them dynamism and creation. And this is a decisive point if we recall his idea about the Brazilian precariousness in terms of our own traditions (Moraes, 1978; Travassos, 1997).

And there is more. Right, music leads him. But the association of music to dance and drama found in these popular forms seems to suggest a solution for one of Mario de Andrade's critical problems in his aesthetic search, that of the integration of art and life. In dance as a partner to music there is artistic expression in a form that is full of life.²⁹ Before this perception, and adopting a reading perspective already stressed by some scholars, these dances would be, say, art with an immediate

“social functionality”; and with this there is a hint of the well known ideological developments that lend to the idea of folklore a clear nationalist expression. There is, however, another possible angle that stresses the pure perception (that is, neither instrumental nor ideological) of original and distinct aesthetic forms in these dances.³⁰ In these folkloric merriments, the human body, expressing itself as a whole and collectively, is itself the vehicle of artistic forms.³¹ The integrity of this form of expression deeply moved Mario de Andrade.

The last account of a folkloric merriment in the *Apprentice tourist*'s second diary, written in the northeastern state of Paraíba (February 5th, 1929, at 11 p.m.),³² shows well the kind of emotion elicited by these dances in our author:

It has no chants and only from time to time a speech, so schematized; so pure that reaches the maximum emotive force. Just imagine: more than an hour had elapsed and the people kept dancing, dancing without a stop, fiercely. *Matroá* is one of the important figures at the bal. He is the old *caboclo*, certainly, a kind of *pajé* [shaman] of the dance's tribal figuration. Suddenly, *Matroá* began a wheezing choreography, brutal, left arm crooked, arch under it, two hands on the breast, holding life. Each time more. Bowing, bowing, he hardly lifts his feet. The whistle sounded twice, everything halted. *Reis* spoke to *Piramungu*, boy *caboclo*:

- *Piramungu!*
- Sir.
- They killed our *Matroá!*

Tururu, tarara, tururu, tarara... the piece continued. The dance moved anew and *Matroá* went on twisting a leg on the other, he does not lift his feet from the floor, he got ten minutes moving while standing up, hard to die as in every theater and in life.

This is what perfection is. I went dizzy. These pure words, just that. I felt sorry, I do not know how I felt, I was dizzy, under a strong emotion.

Matroá fell down and began contorting himself. The mock Indians then began another choreography, circling the moribund and putting an end to his life, with their arrows. *Matroá* defended himself, arrows from one side and the other. Suddenly he stood up, alive. The death dance was over, and *Matroá* danced as everyone else, alive as you and me (Andrade, 1976, p. 320).

Mario de Andrade sought in folklore expressive forms capable of generating identification and genuine emotions. He sought the beauty resulting from this.³³ It is no other, it seems to me, the reason for his impatience, and even disheartenment, with the monotonous nature or the lack of aptitude of some dance presentations that are at times the bases for his sense of these forms' "decadence". Our author gets impatient with the "failure" (Leiris, 2002), an integral part of anthropological grace, and not exclusively aesthetic or expressive, of rituals that strongly depend on their agents' dexterity and talent.

The concept

The studious endeavor in conceptualizing, through the notion of dramatic dance, the nature of dispersed but related cultural facts comes with this artistic search. In this conceptualization, the movement of Mario de Andrade's thought is itself akin to a dramatic dance – now shaken, now hesitant, now lucid and tense, and finally tragic. Given the complexity of the argument, I unfolded the search for conceptual unity into three intertwined plans in the text: aesthetical form, thematic content and common origin.

a) Aesthetical form

The formal definition emphasized the presence of dance accompanying the music and dramatization of a theme in this type of cultural fact. The focus that commands the look is that of the musician, for these dances "obeying a given traditional theme, follow the formal principle of the suite, that is, musical work constituted by the series of various choreographic pieces" (Andrade, 1982, p. 71, n.1). To this is added the taste for the dramatic, especially dialogued theatricality.³⁴ The rhapsodic form of composition, common to all dances, reveals itself in a particularly clear-cut way in *Bumba-meu-boi*. The idea of suite, that indicates musical compositions of a nature also choreographic, is widened in Mario de Andrade's conceptualization, including the dramatized dimension of the merriment.

The tension between a more integrated view of dramatic dances and a more fragmented one, unfolded along the whole text, is again present. The more integrated view emerges in a somewhat veiled way in one of the definitions that has been widely adopted by subsequent researchers:

[...] dramatic dances are divided in two very distinct parts: the *procession* choreographically characterized by pieces that allow for the dancers' dislocations, generally called "chants"; and the dramatic part itself, (...) characterized by the more

or less choreographic representation of the plot, requiring a fixed arena, room, stage, courtyard, house or church front (*Idem*, p. 57, my emphasis).³⁵

A passage of the first version of the DD, excluded afterwards, allows us to clearly perceive the valorization of intellectual and aesthetical unity enhanced by the idea of a dramatic plot:

I had the opportunity of attending to a *Boi Bumbá* – Amazonian name of BMB, at the hamlet Humaitá, at the Madeira. I collected from it various chants. It was an admirably united play, where all episodes joined in the nucleus of the ox death and resurrection, always in reference to it. It was legitimately *Bumba-meu-boi's Reisado*, to which were added episodes developed from the theme itself. It is what also happens with the *cheganças*, with the *congós*, where sporadic episodes are still associated in order to form a harmonious whole, in a way similar to the formation of *Odyssey*, whether its author was Homer or time (1934a, p. 19).

At the same time, however, the fragmentary view is also present. For the dramatic dance of *bumba-meu-boi* is not, as says the author in the immediate section of the published version of DD:

[...] a unitary whole in which an idea, a sole theme is developed. Its length, as well as its ideological meaning, *does not depend from the basic theme*. Generally, the theme gives way to a sole episode, rapid, dramatically concise. An this basic nucleus is then filled with themes added to it; romances and any other traditional pieces, even of yearly use, are glued to it; texts and even nuclei of other dances are annexed to it. At times, even these additions do not have any connection to the nucleus (Andrade, 1982, pp. 53-54, my emphasis).

The formal unity of dramatic dances oscillates then between an integrating definition that postulates the existence of a basic thematic nucleus commanding the plot by aggregation and addition, and a fragmentary view, according to which the themes aggregated would not have any necessary connection to the presumed nucleus. In spite of the apparent simultaneity of these two ways of being of the dances in real life, the fragmentary form of being was associated by the author to the presence of the deleterious urban influences and civilization's evils. Mario de Andrade, however, always hesitates before these views, and finally this perception of disordered fragmentation as a

possible way of being of the dramatic dances gets associated to the loss of the synthetic and dramatic character of the theme's supposed basic nucleus. This association will have important consequences in the text's pessimistic solution.

b) Thematic content

The unity of the symbolic motive leads to the theme of the cultural fact under scrutiny. This theme would be in principle exposed in the representation of the above mentioned dramatic plot, the "basic nucleus" of the merriments. But we just saw how the author also said that the length and ideological meaning of the ox dances "does not depend on the basic theme". The development of the argument operates with this imprecision. Dramatic dances include *Pastoris*, *Cheganças* and *Reisados*.³⁶ In the distinction established between this latter and the former two, there is a clear-cut hierarchy of cultural ancestral character. Immediately, the theme of the "death and resurrection of the dance's main entity" is emphasized, occurring in *Bumba-meu-boi* and other folkloric forms generally classified as Reisados [...]" (*Idem*, p. 25). The term *Reisados* is, then, the chosen one to involve all this class of dances that refer to "the theme of immemorial magical meaning where there is the death and resurrection of a beast or plant" (*Idem*, p. 39). Now, in the *Pastoris* and *Cheganças*,

[...] dramatic dances of a close Iberian origin [...] there is only the fundamental element of any drama [...], that is, the struggle of a good against an evil, that collective dances, shielded from individualistic feelings (mainly amorous), characterize in the notion of danger and salvation (*Idem*, p. 25).

In this case, the agglutinating theme would be the principle of opposition of good and evil (*Idem*, p. 39).³⁷

In the establishment of the symbolic content, what seems to predominate is the more integrated version of formal unity presented in the previous section. The "theme" is exposed in the "basic nucleus", and functions as "aggregation principle" presiding over and ordering the series and juxtaposition characteristic of the various musical and dramatic pieces that make up these dances.

c) Common origin

A third reflection plane of the text seeks a common origin for all dramatic dances, and the identification of the influences received by them through time. It is an unstable terrain; mainly if

we observe that the idea of history slides many times to a speculative mythical history and is often expressed through an unbridled search of cultural facts' worldwide dissemination.³⁸

In Mario de Andrade, this search for origins is implicitly led by the formal definition of dramatic dances that, as we have seen, privileges a theme's music, dance and dramatization. Known documentation indicates an extraordinary flowering of these dances by the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, at the same time as the formation of a popular culture of wide catholic basis.³⁹ These dances found their place in the festive dates of that calendar, in special Christmas, carnival and the June saints.⁴⁰ The first part is a procession, and Jesuits in Brazil systematically used processions in the christianization that converted pagan ceremonies into Christian celebrations.

These revelries with which not only the "blacks" from this western Indies, but also "Guinea blacks", and even whites followed catholic processions with dances, were certainly in the country the main incentive in traditionalizing the principle of the bal-procession used by our dramatic dances (Andrade, 1982, p. 33).

The dances' dramatic character, in its turn, would find roots in the Passions of the Middle Ages.⁴¹ In Brazil, the people recurred to the themes of Iberian romances for creating theatrical plays. The origin of the various *Reisados* lies in this remarkable transposition process from a verbal and poetic form to the dramatic danced form.⁴² But in this set, *Bumba-meu-boi* is in a unique, and to a certain point anomalous place.

Reisados and Bumba-meu-boi

Mario de Andrade lists the 24 *reisados* "that the books indicate to me" (Andrade, 1982, pp. 50-53). In this list, established distinctions confuse themselves, suggesting to a contemporary reader above all the presence of a cultural universe characterized by extreme formal mobility. Thus, for instance, the "Belle Barge" *reisado* belongs in the "*Chegança of cearense sailors*", having intruded among us in the *Nau Ctarineta* romance (*Idem*, p. 50-51); and nine related *reisados* had already been aggregated during the thirties to *Bumba-meu-boi*: "the most important of them all, being an obligatory final part of all *reisados*. Spread through almost all of Brazil, it remains alive up to now", especially in the Northern and Northeastern regions of the country (*Idem*, p. 50).

However, it is worth noting that, differently from other *reisados*, for whom there is an identification of the romance at the origin of the danced dramatization of the theme,⁴³ there is no romance for *Bumba-meu-boi*. In *Bumba*, the “story’s” theme, the element that supplies a unity principle for the dance composition, is essentially “mythic”, it comes from pristine humanity layers.⁴⁴ That is, it seems to me, one of the important reasons why this *reisado* has precedence over all others. In Andrade’s formulations, the ox merriment emerges as a link between Brazilian popular culture and a universal human dimension. We may perhaps derive from there its power of attraction as a great welder of other *reisados*.

Bumba-meu-boi is the very “mythic” theme, expression of the primitive and ancestral. In this condition, the merriment expresses the basic unity of the human, so dear to cultural evolutionism. In Mario de Andrade, that unity is also transformed in a possible expression of a Brazilian universality (more than a unity proper). The author idealizes and transfigures the Ox dance. The chain of reasoning is tortuous, full of gaps filled by mental juggling.

Mario de Andrade is now an evolutionist and intellectualist anthropologist, involved in the meanders of Sir James Frazer’s golden bough and seduced by the possibility of reasoning as a primitive, suggested by the reading of Edward Burnett Tylor. He unveils then the “mystery” that in primitive mentality, “in this point identical to the popular one, may explain another mystery or any reality”.

Destitute of the defenses of technique, in his struggle against ... the rest, still unable to organize it in an efficient manner, the notion of a higher force affirms itself, and he applies it immediately to beasts, plants, minerals and facts [...]. And, thus, in primitive cultures emerged a homeopathic, mimetic magic, the cult of plants, of springtime, Persephone, the totem and, mainly, for generic, the notion of death and resurrection of the earth, the sun, the ox, the beast, the plant, of God [...] (*Idem*, p. 24).

If the death and resurrection theme is a pristine human motive, imposed by the renewal of the natural cycle of plants, the predilection for the ox in Brazil would have also specifically Brazilian reasons. The economic center of colonization was the ox, a true follower in the taming of the hinterland begun by the *bandeirantes* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Lopez, 1972, p. 127 ff). In Andrade’s view, nothing more “natural” than the mythic valorization of the animal.

The very variation of the insertion of the Ox merriments in the popular catholic calendar that intrigues the author – for the Ox dances are found up North among June feasts and in the Northeast at Christmas time - would find a plausible answer through a frazerian reading. Lopez transcribes a handwritten card that shows well the nature of Mario de Andrade’s intellectual urge:

Bumba-meu-boi or *Boi-bumbá!* (“Dance my ox “ or “Ox Dance”) In a bad comparison, the Ox seems to take on a position of Dionysus, symbol of flowering and of fecund time. Now it is curious, then, that its celebration in the North comes in June, winter time, time of overflowing in the rivers, of less fevers, easiness in plants, while in the Northeast it is too when there comes what they call “winter”, Christmas time, time of the waters, time of flowering, and of easiness. There seems to be a deeply human reason and religious in its own way in that choice of dates (*apud* Lopez, 1972, p. 128).

In both cases, we would be facing the apex of plants honored through the sacrifice of its animal symbol, the ox.⁴⁵

But this deeper and fuller sense would already be lost. To use an important Tylor’s notion, the Ox merriment would be a “survival”,⁴⁶ a notion that Mario de Andrade seems to have fused with his Freudian readings in the notion of “symptom”. The Ox merriment, as Telê Ancona Lopez says, is “symptom-Brazil” (1972, p. 132). A cultural fact revealing a possible Brazilian universality:

But in Brazil this is amazing. And *Bumba* may perhaps represent the most beautiful critical notion of our national phenomenon, unconsciously brought about by the Brazilian people. Idiom unity, religious unity, many are the invented reasons to name this absurd phenomenon that is Brazilian unity. It would perhaps be more reasonable to point to the ox merriment unity. The ox dance is really Brazil’s main unifying element (*apud* Lopez, 1972, pp. 131-132).

Tension: fragmentation and integration

Among all dramatic dances, then, *Reisados* are prominent, and among them, *Bumba-meu-boi*, the ox merriments, for its ancestral character, universality and Brazilianess. In this valorization, a strong tension is drawn. For, on the one hand, *Reisados* emerge such as concretely found by Mario

de Andrade: aggregated and juxtaposed, in a process in which *Bumba* would be, so to speak, an expansionist *reisado* imposing over the others a kind of dramatic hegemony. However, on the other hand, there is the idea of an original “integrity”, expressed in the representation of a “story” (##), ideological requirement of synthesis: “Above all, this is what *Reisado* is: a danced and sung representation, consisting in a sole episode that synthetically encompasses the whole of the theme’s meaning” (Andrade, 1982, p. 53).

Mario de Andrade was then led, perhaps in spite of himself, to account for the distance that separated the state of *reisados* as he actually saw them, and the presumed original integrity, whose expressive effects he also seems to have experienced, at least emotionally, in some happy occasions, as in the above mentioned *Matroá* episode.⁴⁷ In a conscious slightly ironic way, Mario de Andrade invented a fully speculative history of the formal evolution of dramatic dances: “It seems, however, that *from now on or since its origins* [my emphasis], the aesthetically admirable shortness of the *reisado* became unsatisfactory to the people” [Andrade, 1982, p. 53]. “Popular psychology”, adept to “longer artistic creations”, would at once have begun to add two or more *reisados*. In this process, the “ox complex” became dominant:

The dramatic dance of the *Bumba-meu-boi* thus became a sole *reisado*, which does not bear this name, and that, while not being native from Brazil, but Iberian and European, coinciding with Black African magic feasts, became the most complex, oddest and most original of all our dramatic dances. At times, even a true review of various pieces, with the dramatization of the *boi*’s death and resurrection as the final episode (*Idem*, pp. 53-54).

In addition to the intellectual hesitation over the “historic-racial” origins of the dance, this is a critical point. It reveals a deep disagreement between what Mario de Andrade’s artistic sensitivity sought, and at times truly found – the admirable expressive shortness that so moved him – and what the researcher found more often in front of himself – the indefinable and disorganized forms, a festive world in state of permanent mutation, that contradicted the desire of “fixing” an expressive form as ideal. Implicit in the text, this disagreement generates a degree of tension that verges on laceration. The presumed and sought for initial integrity (perhaps we get closer here to the idea of the “lack of character” of his national “anti-hero”, Macunaíma) collides with the predominant evaluation of reality found, and translates itself in a strong ambivalence in the valuation of *Bumba-meu-boi*.

Perhaps this is the reason why the *Bumba* is at the same time odd, and unique, exemplary, and complex. As if the ox dances made also explicit a non-satisfied existential requirement. This way, through the text, the very process of rhapsodic composition that so fascinated Mario de Andrade acquires a negative sign in his considerations on the actual (1934-1944) and future state of the *Boi*. The “integral nucleus” of the *Boi*, “having as its only drama the death and resurrection of the great servile beast, surrounded by its traditional human characters” would persist only “in some *Bois-bumbás*” in Amazonas (*Idem*, p. 54). The characteristic juxtaposition of the themes, seen in other moments as original and even exemplary, emerges also as a symptom of loss and deterioration of the pristine integrity, that Mario de Andrade knows, however confusingly, never existed. This notwithstanding, the idea remains active enough. In the very process of conformation by aggregation and juxtaposition of themes, the nuclear theme would become schematic tradition and the fixed parts would gradually lose meaning. In their struggle against civilization, dramatic dances would be “in full, very fast decadence. *Reisados* from many parts have already disappeared”. Only in the North and Northeast they kept their fierce struggle. It is a sad and tragic Mario de Andrade who foretells: “As things go by, it is a death sentence” (*Idem*, p. 70).

Some conclusion

The combination of exemplarity and oddity points to Mario de Andrade’s extreme ambivalence with regard to *Bumba-meu-boi*. The very thing that fascinated him so much seldom seems to have met his expectations of aesthetical integrity and synthesis. Tie undone as it was found. That so meaningful “*from now on or since its origins*” in the passage mentioned above on the evolution of *reisados* expresses also an ambivalence that, though with irony, leads to the text’s pessimistic solution and this final solution has had an enormous impact on the subsequent view of various researchers.

In relation to the latter aspect, I recall Mello e Souza’s conclusion that, recovering Mario de Andrade’s own pessimist indication, saw *Macuníma* as an “ambivalent and indeterminate” work, “being rather an open and cloudy field for debate than a definitive mark of certainty” (1979, p. 97). I believe that, inadvertently, Mario de Andrade’s formulations in DD cast a way of seeing the Ox festivities that, with enlightening perceptions, also threw on it a vast mist. Besides the more evident thematic of deterioration and cultural loss, especially influential, and particularly nebulous, there is

the idea of a nucleus of meaning understood in fixed form presiding over the unity of the merriment.⁴⁸ This idea, associated to a racialist perspective on culture, seems to be at the basis of reifying and extremely disseminated views of the symbolizing processes present in popular culture expressions. In relation to the argumentation of the text itself, the outcome of such ambivalence is a death decree of tragic tone. The Ox merriment as “Brazil-symptom”, as sought “Brazilianess”, would be, it too, fated to failure. *Bumba-meu-boi* effectively emerges as an operator of passages in Mario de Andrade’s thought. Gilda Mello e Souza (1979, p. 16) stressed Andrade’s suggestion of the existence of structural affinities between the novel *Macuníma* and the popular dance that, in his opinion, best represented nationality. In this direction, she pointed, as a presage of the novel’s tragic denouement, to the utilization of a long section of the ox merriment that ends up with the death of the ox character in the chapter “Uraricoera” that precedes the anti-hero’s death, with the transfiguration of Macunaíma as a star of useless brightness. In this episode, the shadow that pursues the anti-hero mistakes him with an ox “named Espaço and coming from Piauí (a northeastern state)” (Andrade, 1978, pp. 200-203). And kills him as if by evil magic: the shadow swallows his food. The Ox gets green of hunger, dies and begins to rot. Vultures circle him and, singing and dancing, divide among themselves his rotten parts. From this degraded ritual meal emerges the “famous feast of the *bumba-meu-boi*, known also as *boi-bumbá*”. Mario de Andrade projected on the ox merriment not only his nationalistic and creative aspirations but also the search for integration of his own subjectivity.

In a suggestive article, Nicole Belmont (1986) pointed to the ambivalence of French ethnology with regard to folklore. In an evaluation that may be transposed to contemporary Brazilian anthropology, the author notes the existing difficulty even when it is the case of acknowledging folklore as a historical stage in the study of European societies and cultures. Folklore studies would have lost credit as classic ethnology entered France, and this process would have become irreversible around 1950. However, as “folkloric facts” – beliefs, practices and popular rituals – are endowed by a great ability to persist and a great seducing power, these materials come back surreptitiously in contemporary analyses. Folklore would thus be condemned to a kind of “return of the repressed”.⁴⁹ For, when reinserting these facts in contemporary analysis, we would be seduced by the illusion of archaism, by the idea of the good old times of yore, when popular productions did not lack continuity, were coherent and easily amenable to interpretation. Folkloric materials, the author suggests, arrive to us, contemporary students, loaded of archaisms. Belmont then suggests the examination of the archaisms inhering in these materials as symptoms, in the psychoanalytical sense of the term.

Jumping over the abyss that separates representations of individual psychology from those of collective psychology, the author draws our attention to Freud's observation according to which neurotic symptoms do not emerge from a distant past, but are formed at the moment of evocation. In the universe of popular culture, archaism would take the features of a myth, in the structuralist sense of that concept.⁵⁰ However, when made common currency in the views on popular culture in intellectual and erudite circles, archaism would take on the form of an illusion. This illusion is the basis of the mist effect that I identify in andradian formulations on the *Bumba-meu-boi* that made of the festivity the involving symbol of ancestral character, universality and Brazilian originality.

But in Mario de Andrade's own thought, the Ox assumes also a symptomatic character, it operates connections of meaning among the expression of his subjectivity, the ideological and aesthetical search for brazilianess and the effort for the existential and intellectual knowledge of popular culture. The Ox merriment brings to his thought's processes, at the same time, the difference, the ancestral character and mainly an insinuating disorder that continually undoes ordering and satisfaction attempts. It incites and exhausts intellectual curiosity, simultaneously provoking, as the infantile remembrances, neurotic symptoms and dreams mentioned by Belmont: "oddity, lack of understanding, discomfort and seduction" (1986, p. 266). The Ox merriments are exemplary: they are the oddest and most original of all dances.

Notes

¹ Gomes (1998) suggests that the feeling of sharing is illusory: what we access in a text, even if of a confessional nature, is always the elaboration of a representation of himself on the author's part.

² As Carlos Sandroni aptly said (1992, p. 83), "when we meet over these themes [folklore and popular culture] we are somehow sitting at the table of that banquet where he [Mario de Andrade] perpetuated himself – and, no doubt, we feel in our mouths, with a larger or lesser intensity, a taste of Mario de Andrade".

³ By the way, in June 1st, 1927, Mario de Andrade was in Parintins (Amazonas), where the two Ox groups that nowadays confront each other in Parintins Ox Festival already existed (they were both created in 1912/1913), but he did not see them and does not mention them. He arrived in the afternoon in a brief stop in his trip. In May 29, he was "in full Amazon", at the firth of the river Tapajós, having stopped in the village or Itamarati the following day. After this, the group stepped down in Parintins, where they met a "well spoken mayor". Our author offers his readers the "prayer's apostolate", whose rules, found in the visit to the local church, significantly established that its followers: "1 – totally relinquish dances; 2 – relinquish masks and fancy dresses; 3 – do not participate in private feasts, etc. [...]". The group followed to the village or Itacoatiara in their way

to the state capital, Manaus. In their way back, in July 23, the diary registers “Parintins at daybreak, seen in dreams” (Andrade, 1976, p. 76).

⁴ Through this point, I join Geiger’s suggestion approximating and acknowledging the affinities of anthropology as a discipline and the “romantic” moment of Brazilian modernism. According to this author, failing to acknowledge this implies in forsaking to exert [...] the qualitative cognitive drive of the twenties” (1999, p. 121). By the way, the idea that anthropology impoverishes itself when it forces its difference with regards to certain previous studies is at the basis of research on the development of folklore studies in Brazil. See Cavalcanti *et al.* (1992), Cavalcanti and Vilhena (1990) and especially Vilhena (1997). This point will be retaken at this work’s conclusion.

⁵ My argument, of an “anti-romantic” tone, situates the Parintins Ox festival – with all its high technology, tourism, media and commercialization – as a ritual variant integrating and actualizing a recurring pattern of the ox merriments. Fragmentation and flexibility are understood as positive constitutive characteristics of the performances. In this aspect, the proposed interpretation distances itself critically from the ideas of deterioration and relentless loss of popular traditions, recurring in so many students of popular facts, Mario de Andrade among them. On the Parintins Ox festival, see also Cavalcanti (2002).

⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss’ formulations are central references for the contemporary understanding of the notion of myth (1964, 1970, 1971). For the notion of myth with which Mario de Andrade operated, the major references are Frazer, Tylor and Lévy-Bruhl.

⁷ See also Cavalcanti *et al.* (1992) and Peixoto (2002).

⁸ Margarida de Souza Neves and Ilmar Mattos coordinate, at PUC/RJ a research project on “Modern discoverers of Brazil”. On Mario de Andrade, see Neves (1998).

⁹ “Improviso do mal da América” (February, 1929), Andrade (1993, p. 265).

¹⁰ See, for instance, Fernandes (1989). Sergio Miceli (1998), in a review of Luis Rodolfo Vilhena’s book (1997), called folklore studies “a discipline of love”.

¹¹ Both Travassos (1997, pp. 202-203) and Moraes (1999, p. 31) found this philosophical dimension of romanticism in Mario de Andrade’s modernism.

¹² The feeling is expressed by many folklorists. See, for instance, the strong “pessimism with regard to this day” that, according to Abreu (2001), pervades Cecilia Meireles’ relationship to folklore. The actions and policies of the Brazilian Folkloric Movement and of the Brazilian Campaign in Folklore’s Defense (Cavalcanti *et al.*, 1992, and Vilhena, 1997) were rooted in the urge for “folklore’s protection”, in an attempt to avoid the imminent disappearance of the people’s traditional practices. That vision was the basis of public cultural policies until the 1980s.

¹³ Edmund Leach (1980) mentions the myth of the Golden Age and of Paradise’s expulsion as mythic explanations of civilization’s horror. Examining primitivism in Antiquity, Lovejoy (1965) distinguishes two senses in that notion. First, a chronological primitivism that, lining up past, present, and future, attributes to the past the best human life condition. Second, cultural primitivism that expresses in another way the civilization’s discontent, believing that other human groups’ lives taken as more simple and less sophisticated are, under all aspects, a more desirable life.

¹⁴ This is the poem *Eu sou trezentos ...* [“I am three hundred ...”] (6/7, 1929) from the book *Remate dos Males* [“Finish of the Evils”] (Andrade, 1993, p. 211). In a shrewd way, Rosenfeld points to the covering, in Mario de Andrade, of the search for national identity (in the plane of the idiom itself) by the search for his own personal identity. Involved in this, the suggestive theme of “sincerity” and “charlatanry”, which discusses and takes on again Mario de Andrade’s own examination of these questions [1939] (2002a).

¹⁵ The title of Lopez’s pioneering work is very suggestive – *Mario de Andrade: paths and ways*. The extraordinary task of organizing his complete works, including important posthumous editions where works by Alvarenga and Lopez stand out, the edition of his letters and the existence of IEB/USP offering excellent conditions for consultation to its files, not only meet these appeals as they widen them.

¹⁶ The role played by the ox dance in the novel's creation process would be complemented by the *variation* principle, found in the improvisations of the northeastern *cantador*, "where it takes on a very peculiar form" (1979, p. 12).

¹⁷ The same point, by the way, is the basis of Moraes' (1999) argument.

¹⁸ It is worth noting the coincidence with the view adopted by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade in his film that stresses Macunaíma's character as a vital hero, lacking consciousness. The "modern" aspects would appear in the search for this conscious elaboration, undertaken by the novel, or by the film (Buarque de Holanda, 1978, pp. 125-126).

¹⁹ Verses from the poem *Danças* [1924] (Andrade, 1993, pp. 215-223).

²⁰ See Lopez (1972, pp. 77-90).

²¹ The bird is the *Carão*, a kind of bird found in Central and South America and in all of the Brazilian territory.

²² This column was also published in the appendix to "The apprentice tourist", pp. 335-336. The editor observes that other sections from this trip still figure as chronicles.

²³ Mario de Andrade emphasizes the beauty of bird's death coral lament, which reveals a coincidence with Scandinavian popular chants that "bewilder" him: "because the original melodic elements are true ethnic syntheses and it seems inconceivable that the Caçaras native-like people were able to conceive some sound movements that are European Nordic national norms" (1976, p. 336).

²⁴ In this respect, see Andrade (2000), Byington (2000) and Gico (2002).

²⁵ Cecília Mendonça (2002) examined, in the three volumes of DD, the writings that attend the collection, organized around five major dances: *Pastoril*, *Chegança*, *Bumba-meu-boi*, *Maracatu* and *Caboclinhos*. As Lopez informs, besides the interest in the "dramatic dances", other interests would derive from the same trip: ox melodies, witchcraft music, and popular religiosity and poetry (1972, p. 21).

²⁶ Lopez transcribes, carefully, Mario de Andrade's reading notes that indicate his interesting disagreements with Lévy-Bruhl (1972, p. 99). She also emphasizes the impact of the frazerian idea of a pristine vegetal cult through the *bumba*, inscribed on the margins of Frazer's text (*Idem*, p. 127).

²⁷ This material is today, thanks to the IEB's work, more complete and accessible than at the time when Alvarenga edited the three-volume work. So it is that in January, 2003, in addition to the four versions counted by Alvarenga, I found at IEB the first of the text's versions, whose existence was ignored, in spite of the researcher's effort (Andrade, 1982, last paragraph, p. 18, and first paragraph, p. 19). In the first of the three carton boxes that shelter these documents, in addition to the mentioned six page text, "*Origens das DD bras. Excerpto*", there is a text of 27 dactylographed pages in blue paper, whose cover – a blue sheet bearing the title "*Danças dramáticas, introdução e primeira versão*" [Dramatic dances, introduction and first version] written in pencil – was misplaced (then MA – MMA 38, 157/158) in the back of a written page, probably re-utilized by the author. I indicated this fact to Telê Porto Ancona Lopez. It is also worth observing that, as pointed to by Alvarenga in her "*Explicação*" in the second volume of the series, these versions are well ordered, "they have the same expositive order, they grow chronologically in data, they have a clear indication of progressive substitutions from each other and are finished by a version printed in 1944, identical to the last dactylographed version" (DDB, vol. II, p. 12). The finding of this first version only confirms these observations. In the bibliography, I indicate the first 27-page version as 1934a, and its 36 page revision as 1934b.

²⁸ In the published version's final section, before the fateful phrase, comes this: "The dramatic dances' decadence is stimulated by the chiefs, and their impoverishment is "protected" by the rich. They are now in a very poor situation, similar to that of the Iberic theatre in its origins: "Sin mas hato que un pellico/un laud y una vihuela/una barba de zamarro/sin mas oro ni mas seda" (Andrade, 1982, p. 70). In this final text's first version (Andrade, 1934b, p. 36), instead of the passage above

mentioned, before the same final sentence, we read: “But these melancholies of mine do not want to be laws. In addition of the stupidity of many, we must confess that civilization itself forces the people to a pace that does not leave time any more for the great patience that dramatic dances require. This is also true: for a new time, a new psychology. But it is also true that psychology has unmovable bases, and happiness lives in their actualization. An enlightened orientation would allow for the survival of dramatic dances!” Perceptibly, in 1934 Mario de Andrade has more fair play and more hope.

²⁹ Lopez (1972, p. 54) stresses Keyserling’s influence in the author’s thought. Wisnik (1979, p. 64) points also to the association dance/drama/music.

³⁰ In his last book, Moraes (1999) intends to show the conceptual framework of Mario de Andrade’s aesthetic thought, taking as a point of departure the conference “The artist and the artisan”, pronounced by the end of the thirties, at the *Universidade do Distrito Federal*. Moraes sheds light on Mario de Andrade’s reflection on the relation of the individual artist and the creation of his art, stressing the internality of the andradian view that looks for art’s social dimension within the individual artistic endeavors. The discussion is on erudite art; the “folkloric thing” enters, in this sense, in the service of an erudite circuit of artistic creation. Put in another way, Moraes’ reflection focuses, lucidly, on questions raised in andradian thought by the transposition of popular forms into a new and longed for erudite art. But “folklore” exists, so to say, “out there” and by itself, in real life, and Mario de Andrade did not want to utilize it solely as a source of solutions to new erudite forms of art proposed and experimented by himself. He seems to have perceived in folkloric expressions a difference in some way irreducible and not necessarily suitable of “being made national”.

³¹ In addition to the notion of “participation”, Mario de Andrade’s taste for Lévy-Bruhl’s “pre-logical mentality” derives precisely from the perception of an intelligence form “not fixedly conceptual and given to abstractions as that of the learned intellectual” where you think with all your being (Mario de Andrade, *apud* Lopez, 1972, p. 99). In this way, the importance of dance in andradian reflection deserves deepening. In his essays on the “rural samba” and on the “witchcraft music”, the same kinesthetic qualities of that music-that-is-dance seem to have attracted the author’s aesthetic and intellectual interest.

³² As Lopez (in Andrade, 1976) informs, the text was published by the *Diário Nacional* in March 29, 1929. The documentation of this dance, a *Caboclinho* from João Pessoa (the capital of the state of Paraíba) that contains the episode of “Matroa’s death dance”, was published in the second volume of DDB (Andrade, 1982, vol. II, pp. 198-199).

³³ In this respect, see Moraes (1999) and Travassos. For a discussion of form as an aesthetical element indispensable of the acting of the work of art on the audience, see Andrade (2002).

³⁴ “Instead of the description that is a more complex and complete intellectual mechanism, taking the theme for a thousand sides, the people prefer to create in dialogue form, of which they have an easy sample in the daily mechanism of its communication. Dialogue avoids psychological analysis, it avoids gesture and environment descriptions, enhances the synthesis of accounts [...]” (Andrade, 1982, p. 47). One of the indications of decadence is, thus, the loss of dramatic character of the main episode.

³⁵ Meyer (1991), Pereira de Queiroz (1967), Borba Filho (1966) are among the many authors that use this definition as a point of departure for their works.

³⁶ There is a fourth category listed by him, *Ranchos* and *Ternos*. I exclude it, for Mario de Andrade says that *reisado* is the “work of art”, while *ranchos* and *ternos* were only names given to groups of individuals that represent “a *reisado* or any other of the dramatic dances” (1982, p. 46). For the first three categories, he is based on Sílvia Romero’s distinction (*Idem*, pp. 35-36) according to which *reisados* include “very varied folkloric merriments”, always presenting at the end of various chants and performing the ox dances.

³⁷ For Mario de Andrade, the principle of opposition of good and evil would be easily approximated to that of death and resurrection. As to the latter, there is a wide symbolic set, leading both to very old pagan beliefs and to the central mystery of Christianity. Mario de Andrade believes it is “a primitive mystic notion to be found in the rites of animal and plant cults of the year’s seasons, and that culminates, sublimely spiritualized, in that of the death and resurrection of the Christian’s god” (1982, p. 25). Many researchers follow him, among them Borba Filho that limits himself to the Christian context: “indisputably, *Bumba-meu-boi* was, in its beginning, a hieratic play, a conclusive *Reisado* on the ox at the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Little by little, other *Reisados* joined, each time’s marks adding to the presentations. The ox, as quasi-sacred animal, was also becoming one with that of the pastoral region, the profane invading the merriment. Identical phenomenon to that which occurred in the medieval liturgical theater [...]” (1996, p. 19-20).

³⁸ This intellectual resource is very frequent among folklorists. See, for instance, the valuable entry on *bumba-meu-boi* in Câmara Cascudo (1984). It is interesting to note, as did Travassos (1997), that Mario de Andrade also takes into account the influence of learned and urban poets in the dances’ formation, what disgusts and displeases him, for it contradicts the suppositions of popular authenticity. See the fourth note of DD (1982, p. 71). Seen from another angle, this eagerness of the search for remote origins reveals the permanence of some cultural forms along time.

³⁹ See in this respect Abreu (1998).

⁴⁰ This important point is mentioned in a note (Andrade, 1982, pp. 71-75).

⁴¹ Mario de Andrade listed in this vast set of influences semi-popular Iberian religious theater, adjusted by Jesuits to the interests of catechesis in Brazil. It is interesting to note, however (above all if it is put side by side with his emphasis in dramatization) that Mario de Andrade “has the feeling” that this theatre is an aside phenomenon, which was developed at the same time, but without a direct influence on the dramatic dances (1982, p. 30).

⁴² Oneida Alvarenga helps him at this point of the argument, adding in a note a section of “*Reisados and romances*”. In Mario de Andrade’s view, she says, *reisados* would be a case of great importance for the study of folklore. “They are the most extraordinary phenomenon of popular utilization and form conversion that narrated poetry, be it in romances, ballads, gestic, or whatever, ever suffered in any country (Andrade, 1982, p. 50).

⁴³ As, for instance, “that of *Ze do Vale*, making use of a Brazilian romance of the hinterlands’ cycle” (Andrade, 1982, p. 51). In some of the text’s passages, that is even the defining idea of the *reisados*, which result from the “dramatic and choreographic adaptation of a theme originated in medieval romances arrived here with colonization and popular chants” (*Idem, ibidem*).

⁴⁴ See also in pages 25-26 the theme of death and resurrection that imposes itself “in a great number of our dramatic dances”, not in those of a clear European origin, as in the *Cheganças*. That theme emerged above all in the dances closest to primitive cultures, as in the *Congos*, of black origin, the *Caboclinhos*, of American Indian inspiration, and the *Reisados* and *cordões de bichos* seen as survivals of animal cults”.

⁴⁵ The famous three “races” – the whites, the blacks and the Indians - already present in the first paragraph of the text of DD in the light modernist irony – “and if it tires me enough, because of its contemporary precariousness, to assert that the Brazilian people is formed by the three currents: Portuguese, African and American Indian, it is always moving to verify that these are the three ethnic bases the people secularly celebrates in its dramatic dances” (Andrade, 1982, p. 23) – come back also, as if “synthesized”, in the Ox merriment. For Lopez, Mario de Andrade would have established, through Frazer, the cult in the folkloric baggage of the colonizer, that in Brazil would get in contact with the “totemic spirit of the Indian and, latter on, “will get equivalent totemic influence from the Black” (1972, p. 130). I believe that Mario de Andrade had really some awareness of the precariousness of these ideas and in fact never dared to systematize them.

⁴⁶ Belmont called attention to the conceptual importance of the notion of survival in the advancement of anthropological studies by the end of the nineteenth century. As it was proposed

by Tylor and his disciples, such notion “theorized with success the double exigency of distance in time and space, required to consider without fear both otherness and oddity in relation to primitive peoples as well as European peasants” (1986, p. 262). Already in the second note to DD, Mario de Andrade refines the idea of a purely mechanical and residual survival, dealing with the problem of “understanding the permanence in the collectivity of certain traditions from extinct realities” (1982, p. 71). His thought widens, and while we know of his reading of Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he never really incorporated it. The symbolic width of some themes would allow for the people’s “permanent exercise of some vital practices”. In today’s world, the ox as a symbol would not represent any more the historically basic animal of national civilization. But it would evoke (in a form dear to “collective representation”) the “difficulties and struggles in the conquest of food, as well as the practices of family and collective life [...] the theme is no longer an idea, but a whole ideology. Its force and vagueness assure its acceptance and permanence [...] (*Idem, ibidem*). Even so, the “creative” stimulus generated by the dramatic dance is explained by the angle of intellectualist evolutionism, making the vital action derive from an inaugural thought.

⁴⁷ In a small note registered in January 9, 1929, at Antonio Bento’s Bom Jardim sugar plant, in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, we read: “I work almost the whole day. At night, the Fontes’ Ox group of players came to dance at the plant. The most perfect dramatic dance I ever saw during the trip. Delightful artists in spontaneity and spirit” (Andrade, 1976, p. 356). In the diary’s chronicle this same day (*Idem*, pp. 271-272), Mario de Andrade describes a plant and sugar production. While another note reveals that the next day, January 10, he spent the day working with the Ox players and artists, there is no elaboration on the ox merriment in the trip’s accounts. Perhaps the theme was some way reserved for latter elaborations. Anyway, it is worth noting that the meeting with the “most perfect dramatic dance of the trip” was immediately followed by another “formidable commotion”, that of his encounter with Chico Antonio, at the night of the same day (*Idem*, p. 273). Even the “divinization” feeling brought by this encounter carries with it the bitterness of loss: “I will have to go to São Paulo and I will have to listen to the lyric season and to the chic dissonances of the modern... Chico Antonio is also ruining himself... a little crooked, with his 27 years exhausted in *cachaça* and whole nights singing... (*Idem*, p. 277). It deserves noting that Chico Antonio had a long life, dying in 1993. See in this respect Eduardo Escorel’s documentary movie *Chico Antonio, um herói com caráter* (1983).

⁴⁸ Luciana Carvalho (2005) raises new questions for the understanding of the nature of the “comedies” and “*matanças*” of the ox merriments of Maranhão.

⁴⁹ The author points to two ways of dealing with the situation. One would be the questioning of the very nature of folklore as a previously autonomous discipline. The other would be the inquiry into the nature of the live fact that remains under the label “folklore” (Belmont, 1986, p. 260). For the approach of the former point in Brazil, see Cavalcanti *et al* (1992), Cavalcanti and Vilhena (1990) and especially Vilhena (1997). As to the latter point, this is precisely the nature of the effort endeavored here. The analysis of *bumba-meu-boi* in Mario de Andrade tries to detach the ox festivities as a live fact from a whole active set of ideological assumptions and illusions.

⁵⁰ The author refers especially to the possibility of reaching the past offered by older informants and to the synchronic dimension of the temporality found in these accounts.

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