

Masked on scene: drollery, walking and festivities in the Encontro dos Bois in São Luís do Maranhão

Mascarados em cena: comicidade, caminhada e festa no Encontro de Bois em São Luís do Maranhão

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ABSTRACT

The research discusses questions related to the phenomenon of drollery and creation present in the cultural manifestation of *Bumba Meu Boi* from Maranhão. In this context, our objective is comprehending how the *brincante* (interpreter) of *Pai Francisco* (Father Francisco), who performs while wearing a mask, creates comic possibilities during the São Marçal festivity. The text also proposes to investigate the expressive and laughable possibilities that the mask promotes in the festive context, as well as the interactions created by its wearing.

Keywords: Mask. Drollery. Player.

RESUMO

A pesquisa discute questões relacionadas ao fenômeno da comicidade e criação presentes na manifestação cultural do *Bumba Meu Boi maranhense*. Neste contexto, busca-se compreender como o *brincante* de *Pai Francisco*, que se apresenta mascarado, cria possibilidades cômicas no decorrer da festa de São Marçal. O texto propõe-se também a investigar as possibilidades expressivas e risíveis que a máscara promove no contexto festivo, como também as interações criadas a partir de seu uso.

Palavras-chave: Máscara. Comicidade. Brincante.

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This text seeks to discuss aspects of comedy present in the cultural manifestation of *Bumba Meu Boi* from Maranhão, as well as analyzing this manifestation based on the mask as a visual, scenic and symbolic element. It has as guiding element the *brincante* (interpreter) of Pai Francisco², and as a focus of investigation the forms, strategies and possibilities found in the field of the laughable and its unfoldings in the scope of the art of the scene.

Based on this premise, I tried to understand how the *brincante* of Pai Francisco, who performs while wearing a mask, creates comic and poetic possibilities in the festive space of the street, where the presentations of *Bumba Meu Boi* usually take place. This rich context points out ways to analyze the strategies used by the *brincante* and, above all, his availability, full of games and inventiveness as states that highlight the multiple potentialities of his body. Another point of interest are the processes of creation that sustain what he does, characterized as very unique modes of existence on scene.

The moment chosen for the observation of the masked *brincante* was the feast of São Marçal or Encontro de Bois of João Paulo³, as is also known the feast that happens annually on June 30th, in the neighborhood of João Paulo, in São Luís/MA⁴. In general terms, the feast of São Marçal is a celebration that brings together thousands of people, approximately 200 thousand, who accompany, dance, play and watch the presentation of some groups of *Bumba Meu Boi*. Some aspects and details of the feast of São Marçal will be highlighted throughout the text, considering the existence of complex contact areas that are strongly intertwined involving the day of the feast and the various presences of the *brincantes* and their comic interactions.

As a symbol of Maranhão, the feast of São Marçal⁵ is characterized as a celebration of otherness and constitutes an essential landmark for *Bumba Meu Boi*, as well as for the neighborhood of João Paulo. The feast is reserved for the parade of the groups of *Bumba Meu Boi* with the *matraca* accent. The *matraca* – or the Island's – accent comes from the metropolitan area of São Luís (São Luis, Raposa, São José de Ribamar and Paço do Lumiar). Most of the groups with this accent come from the peripheral neighborhoods and contain a strong presence of *afro-maranhenses*. The *brincantes* dance around the ox, the master, the cowboys, and Mãe Catirina and Pai Francisco. Other characters with this accent include: *caboclo de pena*, *índia*, *burriinha*, *caboclo de cinta*.

This specification regarding those involved is of great relevance, because they are the ones who dynamize and re-elaborate the feast, driven by varied motivations for their

2. O personagem também é conhecido pelos nomes de Nego Chico e Pai Chico.

3. Although the terms *Encontros de Bois* and *Festa de São Marçal* are equivalent, the use of the latter is more usual among the *brincantes* and those who attend the feast.

4. The ethnographies were carried out from 2013 to 2016.

5. The meeting begins in the early hours of June 30th and its end occurs only when the last group of *Bumba boi* ends its participation, which happens around 10pm.

presence at the *Encontro de Bois*. In this festive context, the *brincantes* thank or fulfil vows to São Marçal, being this one of the forms found by the *brincantes*/devotees to honor him (MARTINS, 2007).

The relationships that are created from the devotion to São Marçal are composed of situations that need a closer look, due to a curious and sometimes conflicting situation, concerning the fact that São Marçal, despite the name, is not considered a saint, a very different position from the rest of the saints, such as São Antônio, São João and São Pedro. It is interesting to understand that the relation of São Marçal with the practices of the *brincantes* completely subverts any type of officialization or canonical presuppositions followed by the Catholic Church to attribute sanctity to someone. Consequently, the mention of São Marçal as a saint respects the will of the *brincantes* in reverencing him as their chosen praton deity.



Figure 1.
Sculpture of São Marçal
in the neighborhood of
João Paulo, created by the
artist Eduardo Sereno.
Feast of SãoMarçal, São
Luís, 2013.

The situations shared by those participating in the feast are occasions that highlight a set of ways of being that, in a way, characterize the feast as a space laden with aesthetic and symbolic trajectories that are intensified during the course of the meeting. For having such rich symbolic possibilities, I consider the feast of São Marçal a kind of celebration that, given the expressive potentiality of festive experiences, does not seem to fit into a single date. The feast creates the perception of an extended temporality due to the imaginative, interactive and festive profusion experienced in the neighborhood of João Paulo.

The repertoires observed, which will be described in this article, contain a rich scenic material referring to Pai Francisco, which can be assumed and reinvented at every possibility of playing, resulting in modes of action available to the *brincante* when he transits into a singular state of creation, which indicates inventive possibilities for the scene within the universe of the two oxen from Maranhão.

Scenic repertoires of Pai Francisco: drollery, masks and Bumba Meu Boi

Bumba Meu Boi is a highly expected manifestation in the June period in Maranhão⁶ receives this generic name because it contains an ox as its main element. As material and meanings production, the play elaborates various forms of celebration, creating particularities and adaptations according to their place of occurrence.

For a better understanding of the character Pai Francisco, the next lines will discuss issues related to his history, repertoire, function, typology, comedy from some narratives in the *Bumba Meu Boi* from Maranhão, in order to understand the changes to the Pai Francisco from contemporaneity, also revealing the dynamism and the multiple typologies of masks, as well as the constructions of expressive repertoires of each *brincante*.

In the narratives of the *Bumba Meu Boi* from Maranhão, among some that are known, one stands out in particular, for describing the saga of Pai Francisco who is involved in a story that goes from the abduction of the ox to the miraculous cure of the animal and “concerns mainly the story of the conflict related to Catirina’s wish, as she wants to eat the tongue of his boss’ favorite ox.” (VASCONCELOS, 2007, p. 20). In the story, Pai Francisco is regarded as one of the central elements, along with the ox and Catirina, due to the wish-stealing-tongue triangulation.

Pai Francisco’s mask can be initially described as being made of a light cloth, black in color. In some cases, *brincantes* “usually use grotesque masks in cardboard shaped with paper and glue, or in rawhide (fur of animal with hairs).” (BORRALHO, 2011, p 177). He is seen, in some situations, wearing a jacket, and carries with him a huge machete made of cardboard or wood.

The issue of comedy and the mask addressed in this text is related to a very specific and recurrent ambience in spectacular contexts. It concerns the modes of creation produced from built knowledges and which reinvent themselves

6. The *Boi* is played in the following Brazilian states, in which it is known by different names: Pará and Amazonas, *Boi Bumbá*; Maranhão and Pernambuco, *Bumba Meu Boi*; Pernambuco, *Cavalo Marinho*; Rio Grande do Norte, *Boi Calemba*; Espírito Santo, *Boi de Reis*; Ceará, *Boi de Reis*, *Boi Surubim* or *Boi Zumbi*; Minas Gerais, *Folgado do Boi*; Bahia, *Boi Janeiro* or *Boi Estrela-do-mar*.

within a cultural dynamic particular to a social group. In this way, the context in which *Bumba Meu Boi* from Maranhão is inserted is conceived as a sum of multiple contacts, frictions, and that dialogues constantly with tense and negotiable situations in its daily life.

Based on this dynamicity, the issues that revolve around the aspects of the mask will be discussed for enunciating forms of elaborations and cultural exchanges that occur cumulatively following the flow of contemporaneity. This means investigating how the spectacular phenomena, especially *Bumba Meu Boi*, relate within the inventive dynamics, especially with regard to the scene and its unfolding in the field of masks.

In discussing how Pai Francisco's *brincantes* experience the process of creation and execution of the scene, a broader understanding of how the mask operates in this process is proposed. Thus, the mask is thought of as an object that brings performer and audience closer together, among other possible interactions and resources. To understand the mask and the comedy within the festive context of São Marçal means expanding the capacities to address the functions and scenic repertoires of Pai Francisco.

The role of Pai Francisco is presented as a role of great responsibility, which few can access. In this way, the role of Pai Francisco is not occupied by any person, because he is considered a prominent element in leading the story that gives meaning to the manifestation. According to the anthropologist Luciana Carvalho, Pai Francisco's *brincantes*:

are relatively rare men and therefore rigorously selected among other *brincantes* of the group. In general, they are considered as funny people by nature, able to amuse others even not intentionally. They are owners of a comic vocation that identifies them [...] [in addition to] agile thinking for knowing how to improvise when performing and demonstrating the necessary body control to move themselves (CARVALHO, 2011, p. 121).

This quotation collaborates to the understanding that amplifies the expressive dimension of Pai Francisco, in the sense that he is *brincado* (interpreted) by various bodies, guaranteeing unique expressive modes and typologies for performing. Thus, the specificity of each *brincante* and their compositional process also extend to the making and using of the mask. The various, maybe even infinite, forms of interpreting reinforce the many and valuable existences that may exist throughout the state, revealing a very dense field of paths that give access to multiple sayings, narra-

tives, as well as point to the possibilities yet to be explored in Maranhão.

Pai Francisco's vest: materials, manufacturing and uses

From now on my intent is discussing in more detail the aspects related to the making of the mask from its specific scenic context that gives meaning to its existence: the *Bumba Meu Boi* from Maranhão. I think it is important to consider the ways of making the mask, the use of different materials and the expressive possibilities attributed to it. Over time, changes occurred, masks of various formats and various models of manufacturing having been created, that allowed new expressiveness to the body, as already highlighted in this article. Increasingly, Pai Francisco's masks are composed of new materials that add to the character's rather singular visuality a valuable and powerful expression.

Pai Francisco's mask is simple to make because of the material used, which is fabric, without the need for a mold or base for making it, as with masks made of leather and papier-mâché. It is important to consider that the creation of the mask is a very particular part of the process, being governed by the *brincante's* access to the materials and to the ways of manufacturing it.

With regard to the materials used to make the mask, usually the *brincante* uses a very light fabric or knit, and depends a lot on the financial resources intended for their manufacturing. About the material used, there are some minimal precautions to take, as described by Cláudia Contin when referring to the "criteria of 'dressability' and adaptability of the mask not only to the actor's face but also to the movements of the rest of his body." (CONTIN, 2011, p. 65). The "dressability" of the mask demonstrates how the lightness of the cloth is an essential item to be taken into account. If disregarded, it can result in a mask without movement, giving the face the impression of immobility, with little expressiveness.

The preference for a lightweight fabric also reveals the *brincante's* concern about using materials that facilitate perspiration and that do not weigh on his face. This care is taken so that the mask does not hinder his movements, since lightness, although the mask visually has many ornaments, is something that is sought by the *brincante*.

Pai Francisco's mask usually has a pointed red and elongated nose. Some masks include a wig made of knitting lines with varied colors or of patchwork, which are sewn into the mask itself. Other *brincantes* prefer to wear a hat instead of

hair. And there are situations in which the *brincante* makes use of the hat and the wig.

The inventiveness in the production of the mask – and also the availability of materials – for some *brincantes* is the basic principle for its creation. Proof of this was the mask seen at the Feast of São Marçal in 2014. The *brincante* of Boi do Maiobão's Pai Francisco⁷ was wearing a mask that moved away from the more common typologies used by his colleagues. Usually the black colored mask, as already stated, is considered the standard model for the *brincantes* of Pai Francisco. The novelty brought by Boi do Maiobão's *brincante* consisted in the use of a cloth with an animal print to compose the mask. For being a novelty, from the point of view of the material used, the mask attracted attention due to its appearance.



Figure 2.
Pai Francisco's mask
made of printed
fabric. Feast of São
Marçal, São Luís, 2014.
Neighborhood located in
the metropolitan region
of São Luis.

The spectacularity of Boi do Maiobão's *brincante* was a combination of visual and scenic aspects. The mask presented at Encontro dos Bois symbolized the concrete possibility of new experiments, addressed to those passing by or participating in the procession, the audience, the members of the group and the *brincante* of Pai Francisco being included in this relationship. The three components described work as points of contact that, at the moment they meet, offer the opportunity to renovate the mask and, at the same time, are affected by it.

Still about the making of the mask, another aspect that I take into consideration concerns the size of the face and its proportionality. I emphasize, above all, the distance between the eyes, the centrality of the mouth and the right place for sewing the nose as fundamental issues for its elaboration,

since they avoid that problems generated due to the wrong measures of the face disturb the *brincante's* performance. The mask needs to dress the *brincante's* head well, otherwise it can make his performance difficult. For example, if the mask's holes corresponding to the eyes do not fit the mentioned location, covering one eye, moving will require more of the *brincante*. The major concern is directed to "the eye holes – usually large to compensate for the scarce visibility." (CONTIN, 2011, p.85).

On the other hand, in theatrical manifestations, disproportion, tearing and maladjustment are essential elements to motivate laughter, but also catch the eye of those who seek, mentally, to repair the supposed fault. The gaudy visuality of some *brincantes* emerges as an irreverent construction, which leads to laughter and mockery that mingle in the festive crowd.



Figure 3. Pai Francisco's masks. Festa de São Marçal, São Luís, 2016.

The stages of elaboration point to the empirical knowledge of the manufacturing of the mask, for they respect characteristics that are essential for it to nicely fit the face, as well as "the weight, the dimensions, the place in the body in which the masks are 'dressed' or the distance between body and mask itself." (CONTIN, 2011, p. 58). Proportionality, so well highlighted by the citation, takes into account the size of the mask and the height of the *brincante*, in order to guarantee a visuality that enlarges the body, its respective gestures and intentionalities.

The mask of Pai Francisco covers the whole face of the *brincante*, from head to neck, that is, the mask is dressed, having openings for eyes and mouth; so the cloth needs to be flexible, pliable and at the same time made of durable material, to handle the intense June journey. However, it is possible to observe the presence of masks that do not follow this type of basic standardization.



Figure 4.
Pai Francisco's
mask with a black
nose and without
a mouth hole.
Feast of São Marçal,
São Luís, 2013.

Some *brincantes* remain with masks used in previous years, which is not characterized as a problem or neglect. The richness of this reuse, so to speak, consists in building strength from the trail of other festive experiences. That is why you cannot escape the idea that the mask is the invitation to the game itself.

The mask as a scenic and plastic element results from a manual and attentive work of the *brincante*: each detail receives a differentiated care, requires special attention. The mask's style says a lot about the individual's tastes; its aesthetic is based on the materials that are available to him or on the collection of his experiences with other masks already used or seen in other opportunities. Generally, the mask is made by the *brincante* himself or by someone very close to him.

Being the mask made by the *brincante*, a poetic relationship unfolds at the moment of creation. The *brincante* begins to assume, at that moment, the role of craftsman himself in developing the mask that, even unfinished and awaiting the last adjustments, already carries a presence that affects him, calling his body to the scene. And so, the mask plays, invites and attracts its maker.

The *brincante* creates, right there at that moment, his interaction with the mask, still under construction, in a simple, delicate and potentially creative relationship. He sees from the outside that which will dress and transform him, identifying the intimate moment of this poetic construction. Thus, in the words of Ana Maria Amaral, when "wearing a mask or inserting his face in it, if it is the same person who made it, it has already been inside him, because, in building it, the craftsman already inhabits it." (AMARAL, 2004, p. 47).

In this sense, I think that the magic of the production of the mask as a material object consists of moments of creation that are experienced before the manufacturing of the mask. When the *brincante* gathers the necessary materials to make the mask or to make adjustments in its structure,

an inventive relationship is being built, which enables the *brincante* to experience the initial moments of game and its experimentation. As has been previously stated, the scene and body coexist in all stages of the relationship of the *brincante* with the mask.

In the initial contact with the mask, Amaral affirms that there is a “difference [...] between putting the mask on the face and putting the face in the mask. To put the face in the mask means to leave the self, to enter the unknown.” (2004, 47). The shape of Pai Francisco’s mask has the *brincante* dressing it, that is, the action of putting the mask on the face is performed. This does not rule out the possibility of the *brincante* experiencing the state described by Amaral.

Wearing the mask does not preclude the participant from engaging in or creating points of contact based on this stranger who, in many cases, due to the prolonged use of the mask, is not that unknown. When saying this, I believe that the author had been referring to the always unique contact, regardless of the time of use, that the mask allows to those who want to use it.

The masking makes the moving body visible, as it shows its varied forms. This image suggests the body as the motor of creation of the performance and happens because the mask produces an expansion, a swelling and an overflow caused by its presence, here and now, allowing the expressive body to stay alert and also in action.

The mask-making structure, which appears to be easy, is the result of many teachings accumulated over the years, pointing to the existence of a set of practices, such as the use of specific materials, aimed at guaranteeing greater durability of the mask so it may withstand the marathon of the June presentations.

To reflect on the senses attributed to the mask of Pai Francisco, it is necessary to return to the festive landscape of João Paulo’s Encontro de Bois, since the senses of the mask in this context are attained more fully and expressively. As a specific moment, the feast shows the diversity of imagery composed by the masks, because its existence is indispensable for all who play Pai Francisco. Therefore, the avenue is visually loaded with many faces and numerous styles, which will be highlighted in the next section, where I shall discuss about the presence of the mask in the feast of São Marçal.

The masked ones in the celebration of São Marçal and their possibilities of existence

The ethnographic observations made in the festive field become the highlight in this text, which has as focus the

brincante of Pai Francisco and his use of the mask during the procession of the oxen. I also kept my attention focused on the public' reactions to the player's contacts, because I was interested in knowing the types of sociabilities practiced and the relations with the spectator's spectacularity.

Each Bumba Meu Boi of Matraca contributes to São Marçal's history and group particularity, which means that each ox establishes its presence in a singular way. At the moment of the procession through the avenue, the group visually dominates the festive landscape; during the way, the *brincantes* draw their walking poetics with their bodies.



Figure 5.
Beginning of the procession. Feast of São Marçal, São Luís, 2014.

The configuration of the feast of São Marçal takes place in the format of a procession. The *brincantes* move through the avenue that measures from 300 to 400 meters and, most of the time, this lasts for approximately 3 or 4 hours, due to the large number of people (*brincantes* and public) taking part in the feast. Similarly, Miguel de Santa Brígida, when researching the parades of the *samba* schools from Rio de Janeiro, observes that:

The narratives that walk, move, pass before our eyes, symbolically manipulating time and space, build singular spectacularities [...]. We cannot forget that street narratives translate into their practices and poetics not only an aesthetic issue, but also one pertaining to ethics, morality and politics, in short, to a way of living in society (BRIGIDA, 2008, p. 41).

In this way, the procession reveals a different way of celebrating. The trajectory, albeit rectilinear, characteristic of João Paulo's festive configuration, has many inventive, poetic and spectacular curves and passages, mobilizing other symbolic instances. The moving condition guarantees practitioners the sharing of experiences, the renovation and effectuation of others. Walking emerges as a field of artistic interactions,

games and possibilities of performances and “reveals itself, then, as a special style of Brazilian popular spectacularity.” (BRÍGIDA, 2008, p. 2). As an analytical, poetic and discursive force, walking, in the studied context, also assumes a spectacular dimension in the feast.

This ongoing experimentation format is extended to the public, who can construct their poetic narratives and flows in ways very similar to those of the *brincantes*. What moves both is a discovery process full of routes, comings and goings, stops and displacements, which offers a glimpse of its fate, regardless of its final destination, in the need to encounter and share with the other.

In the parade of São Marçal, the singularization of the mask becomes visible, revealing masks of types and features that are not repeated in the *brincante*'s body, but which intersect when considering the material and spectacular richness contained in the masks, allowing a kind of harmony in the performance. The expressive amount of *brincantes* of *Pai Francisco* in the feast establishes an ambience laden with diverse body images, above all, as an intense action at the moment in which games are played, by the public or *brincantes*.

In what concerns the choreographic plan, the actions of *Pai Francisco*'s *brincante* usually are directed towards *Catirina* and the ox, but sometimes it is possible to see some kind of contact with the other members. For *Tânia Ribeiro*, the *brincante* presents himself “without a sequence of defined steps, moving randomly through the space, in the ‘ring around the ox’. [...] the machete is the link that enables them to dance together.” (2011, p. 139).

Like the mask, the machete has a prominent symbology for *Pai Francisco*. Both are pointed out as predominant objects that are complementary to his spectacularity. In this sense, the mask and the machete materialize fundamental bonds for the *brincante* that manipulates them, contributing to the creation of gestures and situations from their uses.

As an indispensable element, the use of the machete points to states and actions that reveal multiple positions of *Pai Francisco*. The use of the tool may suggest cunning and bravery on the one hand and, on the other, it corresponds to the fear of *Pai Francisco* for having his life at risk due to the theft of the tongue of his boss' beloved ox. In that case, carrying the machete is an act understood as a strategy to ward off possible attacks against his life.

As I have verified through ethnography, the machete represents a very effective field of interaction, capable of mediating particular forms of contact. As the *brincante* approached the audience, the machete, like the mask, was used as

an intermediary element connecting the people who were close to the *brincante*; through this encounter, new meanings are attributed to the object at the time of the procession.



Figure 6.
Pai Francisco and his big machete. Feast of São Marçal, São Luís, 2013.

This places the machete as an important material and symbolic object in the *brincante*'s spectacularity. During observation, the pulsing game expressed in movements and gestures showed how the presence of the machete welcomed the body of the *brincante*, transforming the object into an extension of his own body.

In general, the visuality of Pai Francisco is composed of two pieces of clothing: long-sleeved shirt and pants. His clothing also includes the mask, the machete, shoes, hat and, in some cases, a glove. This description served to locate the *brincante*'s visual composition and the situations generated by the use of this characterization.

Another intermediation practiced at the feast is related to the various forms that mobilize and vectorize the *brincante*'s body, creating gestures, dances, steps and movements that correspond to the varied intentions and attitudes that he experiences. However, what is observed in the procession are two possibilities that emerge as the most visible, among the immense diversity of stimuli. In these practices, we observe that the *brincante*, while taking part in the feast, moves in a constant ambivalence between the devotional experience and the profane enjoyment of the alcoholic beverage (FONSÊCA, 2015). The two dimensions of distinct meanings explain the situations and the way in which the participant occupies the festive scene according to the paths that lead him to express

his faith, as well as to taste a sip of *cachaça*. What is observed is that these two variants alone or in combination contribute, in their own way, to the dynamics of São Marçal.



Figure 7.
Brincante asking for money to drink *cachaça*. Feast of São Marçal, São Luís, 2013

The festive atmosphere of *São Marçal* allows a greater access to and consumption of alcoholic beverages among the *brincantes*. Generally, a highly alcoholic drink, such as *cachaça*, is seen as the preferred one among them – because of its low cost and high ethyl content. In this context, the beverage is considered a powerful point of connection between the *brincante* and the public.

It is important to note that *brincantes* do not deliberately approach people to ask for money. It was possible to notice the existence of established criteria for their choice; notably, they preferred women. In the observed situations, I was able to perceive the presence of womanizer characteristics as typical qualities of Padre Francisco at the moment of their approaching someone.

The possibly drunken bodies of *brincantes*, intoxicated with faith and *cachaça*, produce spectacular scenes that reveal themselves to be privileged places to reflect on how the body propels itself to walk during the feast. It can be said that there are numerous challenging situations for the body, like the slow pace of the procession accompanied by very intense sun exposure. In this context, thirst, hunger and fatigue emerge as facilitators for moments of singular experiences.

It is important to note that devotion is a feeling strongly present in the symbolic structure of the encounter. The manifestation of faith in the feast, as well as in the group itself, are devotional maps in which a diversity of religious practices are found, involving Catholicism, *encantaria*, *tambor de mina* and other beliefs. In this case, Encontro de Bois is manifested as an event that triggers promises, evoking requests, gratitude and acts of respect to São Marçal. These positions evidence how the

religious sentiment of the *brincantes* is conceived in the feast, especially those practiced in secret, intimately, but revealed by the body that renews the devotion and affection for São Marçal.

Another point observed was that few *brincantes* use the mask all the time during the procession. In fact, it is practically impossible to watch a presentation in which the *brincante* makes use of the mask uninterruptedly. It is possible to perceive that the breaks are constant and taken into account when discussing the issue of the spectator's spectacularity at the feast. However, acting with or without the mask is not understood as a conflicting aspect. In the feast in question, the absence or presence of the mask are possibilities that generate singular expressive qualities capable of creating differentiated states, but complementary to the spectacle of the *brincante* of *Pai Francisco*.

The researcher Isa Trigo calls this situation a “performance interval” (2005, page 53), which is understood as a habitual process for the public and for the *brincantes* themselves. The pause, within the festive context, is then perceived as a vital situation that allows the *brincante* to continue his performance. This, however, does not mean thinking that during the pause there are no creations or feats; quite the contrary, other inventive relationships are established and complement the masked performance.



Figure 8.
The *brincante*
of *Pai Francisco*
without the mask.
Feast of São Marçal,
São Luís, 2014.

The expressive qualities that emerge in the *brincante's* spectacularity when he appears without the mask and with his face in focus create a relationship of complicity when they are made available in a particular and visible way to the public. The main meaning of this action reveals the freedom and creation of the *brincante*, resized independently from the dimension of the disguise, one of the functions of the mask, which resumes being used at the discretion of the *brincante*.

The mask has a symbolic centrality in Pai Francisco's garments. And even though it is not the only dominant element in the constitution of his characterization, its use is understood as an element indispensable to the *brincante*. This helps reflecting on the roles of the mask and its uses as a mechanism that enables new scenic modes, highlighting a poetics that may be called an aesthetic permeated by the alternation between wearing the mask or not.

When lifting the mask, placing it on his forehead and exposing his face, the *brincante* does not only perform an action to mitigate the effects of the heat, since this gesture can reveal a fundamental dimension to the understanding of how the *brincante* relates to his *posto*⁷. Thus, by his showing his face to the public, many issues are put on the table. The deliberate act can be interpreted as a way of establishing a closer contact with the public in order to facilitate the requesting for money or beverages. In addition, I also see this gesture as a form encountered by the *brincante* to become known for his role as Pai Francisco.

Usually, the *brincantes* find in the festive ambiances the gaps necessary to experience positions and events distinct from those experienced in the anonymity of everyday life. In this sense, the festive situation makes possible the suspension of daily invisibility, which changes intensely with the arrival of the June festivities. Researcher Joana Oliveira states the following about this characteristic:

The values of the performance are much different from those found in everyday life. An individual who, within his daily context, is included in the economically poorer stratum of the population can, for example, become the owner of the farm, of the oxen and, in a way, the owner of the workers that exist within it (OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 51).

Despite the ephemeral nature of this expressive condition, the *brincante*'s involvement and availability stand out "in an extraordinary way ... at a certain time of the year." (VASCONCELOS, 2007, p. 91). Despite the temporary condition that performing offers to the *brincante*, the availability for occupying a position in the performance takes into account the valuable and recreational time intended for it.

Final considerations

The mask of the *brincante* in São Marçal was the thought that guided the proposal of this text, especially the aspects that

7.
"Position: popular designation for 'role' in *folguedos* from Maranhão" (BORRALHO, 2012, p. 78).

involve its spectacularness during the feast. The purpose of this article was to present some notes on what was seen at the feast; from this I understood that the *brincante's* spectacularity and the use of the mask gain considerable amplitudes during the festivity. This fact is due to the actions and mobilizations that the *brincante* develops, through years of experimentation, when making use of his performance and participation in the feast.

Year after year, the mask reinvents itself, creating new poetics and re-signifying others. In this regard, I observed how the multiplicity of creative processes developed at the time of the festival reveals a unique and rich cartography of analytical dimensions. The feast of São Marçal was understood as a space in which the *brincante* creates and re-creates himself at all times, performing actions and improvising during the course of his presentation, thus resulting in his own gestural structuring.

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