Conveying Passions in 18th-century character dances: *Arlecchino Appassionato*

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The present paper aims to unveil the rhetoric connections between dance and music in eighteenth-century character dances in the light of aesthetics, the 'Theory of the Passions of the Soul' and the oratory precepts. While doing so, it will underline the portraying of a *Commedia dell'Arte* character in a foreigner culture during the transition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The analysis will focus on the original choreography notated in Feuillet-Beauchamps system, *Chaconne d'Arlequin*, by an anonymous choreographer and over music by Jean-Baptiste Lully. By means of a cross-referencing analysis comparing musical and choreographic elements one can enumerate a vocabulary of movement intimately and intrinsically related to musical figures and, most importantly, to the Oratory structure and rhetorical figures, which were inherent to the creative process during the Baroque era. The investigation provides evidence that, despite the somewhat improvisational ethos of their model form *Commedia dell'Arte*, the *Chaconne d'Arlequin* belongs to a highly systematised sub-genre of theatrical choreographies based on the Oratory structure. Such a formalising process underlines the changes and adaptations that Italian *Commedia* was subject to in order to conform to the artistic aesthetics of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century French culture, and also denote the depiction of Italian *Commedia* as a stereotyped character by those nations.

The extreme popularity that Italian *Commedia* actors enjoyed in France during the second half of the seventeenth century led to their permanent settlement in Paris, more precisely in 1653, establishing themselves in the Petit-Bourbon theatre, which they shared with the troupe of Spanish comedians. However, thanks to their increasing recognition, and the royal approval,

they were relocated in 1660 to the Palais-Royal, sharing accommodation with Molière's company. The close links between the Italian troupe and the playwright most certainly played an important role when Molière wrote *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* in 1670. One can cogitate that he would at least study the Italians' performing skills when given the task of writing a whole scene featuring *Commedia dell'Arte* characters in the *Ballet des Nations*. A similar scenario can be applied to Lully's acquaintanceship with the troupe: considering the fact that the composer was of Italian origin, and taking into account his artistic partnership with the playwright (which probably involved visits to *chez* Molière or to the Palais-Royal), one can consider a degree of proximity between Lully and the troupe of Italian comedians, and therefore Lully's familiarity with the *Commedia* genre.

Giuseppe-Domenico Biancolelli, a Bolognese actor, (1636-1688) dominated the French stages performing the role of Harlequin from 1671 until his death in 1688. According to Bruce Griffiths, Biancolelli was responsible for transforming Harlequin 'from being and idiotic second *zanni* to the cunning and protean leading *zanni* familiar to us now'.[1] Concordantly, Luigi Riccoboni's description of the Harlequin tradition in his *Histoire du Theatre Italien* (Paris, 1728), as quoted by Maurice Sand, provides a glimpse of how the 'old' Harlequin (prior to its character transmutation) was perceived by eighteenth-century eyes:

> 'Harlequin's performance down to the seventeenth century […] consisted of just a series of extravagant capers, of violent movements and of outrageous blackguardisms. He was at once insolent, mocking, clownish and, above all, obscene. I think that with all this he mingled an agility of body which made him appear to be always in the air, and I might add with assurance that he was an acrobat.' [2]

After Biancolelli's death in 1688, the role of Harlequin was momentarily taken over by Angelo Constantini (1654-1729), for he used to be Biancolelli's understudy. Nevertheless, the

[1] Bruce Griffiths, 'Sunset: from *commedia dell'arte* to *comédie italienne*', in *Studies in the Commedia dell'Arte*, ed. David J. George and Christopher J. Gossip (Cardiff, 1993), p. 98.

[2] Maurice Sand, *The History of the Harlequinade*, vol. I (London, 1915), p. 63.

public's response to Constantitni's impersonation of Harlequin was not positive enough to maintain him in this role. As a result, Harlequin's colourful patterned costume, the mask and baton, were passed on to Evaristo Gherardi, who between 1694 and 1741 published his significant collection *Le Théatre Italien de Ghérardi*, which provides a vivid image of the Italian actors living and working in Paris at the end of the seventeenth century.[3] Constantini, parallel to his continuing impersonation of *Mezzetin*, would be called upon to act as Gherardi's second-study Harlequin. Unfortunately for the Italian troupe, the fate of the company would be sealed during one of Constantini's such stand-in performances.

Following an incident in which Constantini ridiculed Madame de Maintenon (the King's morganatic wife) during a performance, the Italian troupe was dramatically expelled from Paris in 1697, thus putting and end to the extended cohabitation between the Italian comedians and Molière's company at the Palais-Royal. It was not before 1715 when another Italian troupe was accepted back to Paris. Following the death of Louis XIV, the Duke of Orleans invited Riccoboni's company to the French capital, where one year later they were officially re-established in the Hotel de Bourgogne by Louis XV.

Meanwhile, in 1700 Raoul-Auger Feuillet published a system of choreographic notation, originally devised by Pierre Beauchamps.[4] The system was hugely successful in its time and adopted into the artistic and daily courtly life, initiating the publication of numerous theatrical and court dances. Amongst the 330 or so surviving original choreographies notated in the Feuillet-Beauchamps system, we find three choreographies that were written for a solo male

[3] Evaristo Gherardi, *Le Théatre Italien de Ghérardi, ou le Recueil Général de toutes les Comédies et Scènes Françoises jouée par les Comédiens italiens du Roy, pendant tout le temps qu'ils ont été au service*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1700).

[4] Feuillet, Raoul-Auger, *Chorégraphie, ou l'Art de Décrire la Dance, par caractères, figures et signes demonstratifs* (Paris, 1700; repr. New York, 1968)

dancer in the role of Harlequin. Two of these are French dances created over the music for the *Chaconne des Scaramouches, Trivelins et Arlequin*, commonly know as *chaconne d'Arlequin*, in Lully's and Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.[5] Given the fact that the original score suggest at least five dancers on stage, there are a few conjectures surrounding the performance of these dances. Firstly, the later version for a solo male may have been reformulated for one of the many revivals of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* in the 1700s; secondly, they may possibly convey Harlequin's solo part amongst his companions onstage; thirdly, they may have been composed for a court entertainment. In any case, the portrayal of Harlequin may have been strongly influenced by Biancolelli's, Contantini's, and Gherardi's antics onstage.

In order to understand the portrayal of harlequin as a *Commedia dell'Arte* character in the unnatural form of a choreographed dance, it is imperative to take into account the circumstances in which Italian actors, accustomed to improvising on pre-established plots or *scenarios*, would have created and performed their works so as to be integrated and absorbed into a foreigner cultural fabric. Although great part of the educated French courtier audience could understand Italian, an increasing demand for *comédies* performed in French pushed the Italian troupe to sometimes unsustainable limits. Griffiths points out that the popularity of the French texts was such that Gherardi was compelled to publish a selection of these in the 1694 and 1695 editions of his *Le Théatre Italien*.[6] Griffiths also emphasizes that Italian actors could not improvise in French, a fact that imposed not only strict conditions of work on them, but ultimately ruined the essence of Italian *commedia*.

It is equally important to consider how and why a French author such as Molière would

[5] Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1670), manuscript copy by André Danican Philidor (*c.* 1690), MS Rés.F.578, Bibliothèque nationale de France, FRBnF39748654, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1056975>, pp. 168–71.

[6] Griffiths, ' Sunset', p. 92.

integrate diverging trends in his dramatic output. According to John Trethewey, Molière learned his trade 'not only by experience and trial-and-error, but also from the Italians and from traditional French farce', even though Classicism was 'the other great formative influence on Molière'.[7] In addition to contributing in the forming of Molière's idiosyncratic perspicuity, such opposing forces had to be conciliated and amalgamated in a peculiar form of expression that would be atypical to Italian *farceurs* and French classicists alike. In view of the rise of such a stylised genre, one can understand the emerging of the choreographies for Harlequin as a direct result of the mutual adaptation between French audience and Italian artists, and the assimilation of distinctive elements that characterise each of their traditions. In this sense, the extant dances for Harlequin in Feuillet-Beauchamp notation reflect the high degree of intellectuality and structural formality necessary to cater for an audience enlightened by classicism. Choreographers attempted to unite Italian farce and French classical verisimilitude by adapting the highly improvisational *arlequinades* to conform to a meticulously notated choreography, while underlining the depiction of Harlequin as an easily recognisable stereotype. However, if on the one hand the Italian actors were compelled to compromise and adapt to the French models – coming to the extreme of performing in French – on the other hand they retaliated by providing a number of parodies of well-known French operas and plays of the period, true to the original spirit of touring *Commedia* troupes, which was to satirise local people, their affairs and their culture.

The constrained interpretation of the otherwise self-governing *Commedia dell'Arte* can be equally identified in the orderly structure of the corresponding musical composition. Above all, both the musical source and the extant choreographies for the *Chaconne d'Arlequin* comply to a highly systemised framework provided by Oratory, in which every part of the

[7] John Trethewey, 'Stage and audience in the *commedia dell'arte* and in Molière's early plays', in *Studies in the Commedia dell'Arte*, ed. David J. George and Christopher J. Gossip (Cardiff, 1993), p. 76.

'speech' has a well-defined function, underlined by varying tension and emphasis. In brief, oratory and its subdivisions are an element of the *Dispositio*, the second canon of rhetoric. In order to assist in the delivery of a speech orators must firstly be attentive to the oratory structure, and secondly they must wisely use rhetoric figures in order to successfully promote persuasion, while observing the appropriateness (*Decorum*) in a given style (*Elocutio*). An accomplished orator would succeed persuading the listeners by stirring their emotions, moving they Passions.

Classical oratory dictates that a typical speech should be divided into four or five parts. In the particular cases of Lully's *chaconne d'Arlequin* and the corresponding choreography *Entrée d'Arlequin*[8] by an anonymous author (which will serve as basis for the ensuing chorological analysis) one can clearly identify four sub-sections. According to Bernard Lamy (1640-1715) – a French Augustinian theologian, philosopher and mathematician whose writings on rhetoric and oratory were widely used in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France – such sub-sections may have the following specific functions:[9]

1 ***Exordium*** – a short introduction where the orator addresses his audience, a particular person or a character;
2 ***Narratio*** – following the initial address the orator slightly increases the tension in his speech and states the matter to be discussed;
3 ***Confutatio*** – at this point the orator reaches the climax of his declamation. He makes use of dramatic figures of speech and appeals to the listener's emotional vulnerabilities in order to ban every single argument one may raise against his initial statement.

[8] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. Fr. 14884, pp. 13–18. Catalogued by Little and Marsh as LMC 2760 - Meredith Little and Carol Marsh, *La danse noble: An inventory of dances and sources* (Williamstown, 1992).

[9] Bernard Lamy, *De l'Art de parler avec un discours dans lequel on donne une idée de l'Art de persuader*, 3rd edn (Paris, 1678), pp. 279–91

4 ***Conclutio*** – the orator diminishes the emotional charge in his speech and reinstates his original proposition.

The chorological and musical analysis show a clear definition of the oratory subdivisions in the piece, comprising Proposition (section A), Intrigue (section B), and Denouement (section C) [table 1]. We can further break up this subdivision according to the 'phrases' in the speech:

Section	A				B			C			
	A1	A2	A3	A4	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2 (A2)	C3 (A3)	C4 (A4)
Bars	1 – 11.i	11.ii -15.i	15.ii -19.i	19.ii -23.i	23.ii -27.i	27.ii -32.i	32.ii -37.i	37.ii -44.i	44.ii -48.i	48.ii -52.i	52.ii -56

Table 1 – Linear chart of the sub-divisions in the *Chaconne des Scaramouches, trivelins et arlequin*, with their corresponding bar lines and oratorical sub-sections.

Generally, the choreography shows a simple yet well-balanced structure, just as suggested by its musical counterpart. The boundaries of sections and phrases are well-delineated with a recurring *assemblé* being employed as punctuation. The choreography accommodates the portrayal of Harlequin's characteristics outlined by Jean-François Marmontel in 1776 and quoted by Maurice Sand:

> The model Harlequin is all suppleness and agility, with the grace of a young cat, yet equipped with a superficial coarseness that renders his performance more amusing; the role is that of a lackey, patient, faithful, credulous, gluttonous, always in love, always in difficulties either on his master's account or on his own, afflicting himself and consoling himself again with the readiness of a child, one whose sorrows are as amusing as his joys. Such a part demands a great deal of naturalness and of wit, and a great deal of physical grace and suppleness. [10]

Exordium

Occupying one single page of choreographic notation, the *Exordium* perfectly matches sub-section A1 of the musical analysis. In accordance with the stimulus generated by the exclamation in the opening bar of music, the three initial bars of the choreography are filled

[10] Sand, *The History of the Harlequinade*, I, p. 64.

up with consecutive *pieds-en-l'air*, which denotes a high degree of excitement most appropriate to the childlike personality of the character. Following a punctuation of a recurring *assemblé*, Harlequin proceeds to salute the audience. From this point on, musical phrases are generally anticipated by *levares*,[11] while dance steps are performed on the following downbeat. The resulting effect is that of steps responding to inducing music elements. In agreement with the *Exordium*'s function of purely introducing the personage to the audience, the explicit indication of arm position and gestures represent an interesting and elucidating element of the notation, guiding the dancer on how to perform his salutation [figure 1].

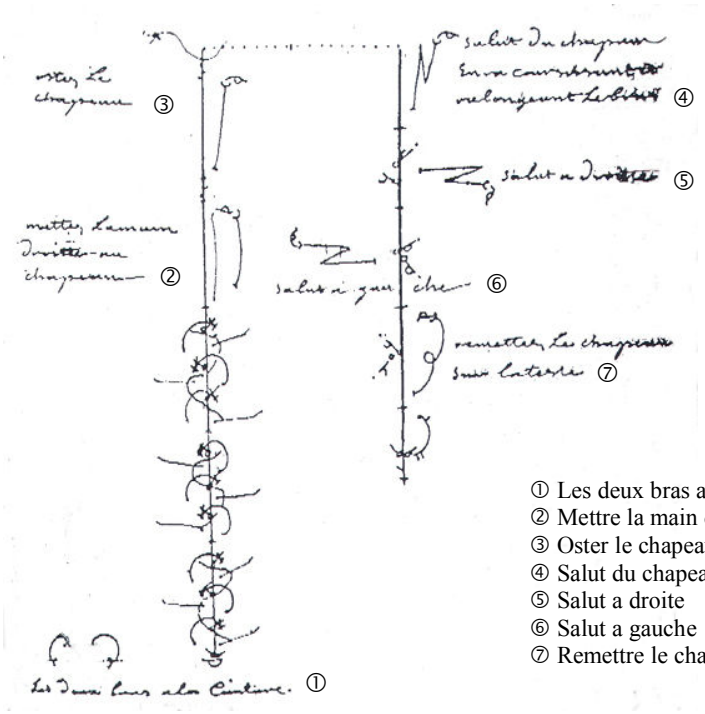

Figure 1 – Extract of the first page of choreographic notation for the *Entrée d'Arlequin* (LMC 2760; Ms. Fr. 14884), featuring indications for specific gestures of salutation.

Narratio

After the relatively static opening *Exordium*, which does not offer spatial locomotion, Harlequin launches himself in a sequence of hurried steps, following a large circular floor pattern [figure 2]. The repetitive nature of the light and fluid steps conforms to the persistent

[11] In this case, three consecutive pick-up quavers leading into the next downbeat.

motif in the treble part in music, contributing to the portrayal of the frivolous and inconstant traits in Harlequin's persona. While the treble music part is developed through rhythmic diminutions in the following sections A3 and A4, Harlequin goes on to present his *arlequinades*, which are a jokingly light-hearted depiction of his self-perception as childlike, naïve, and good-humoured [figure 3]. Quoting Marmontel (1776) one more time, Sand indicates that 'his [Harlequin's] character presents a mixture of ignorance, naïveté, stupidity and grace. He is like a mere sketch of a man, a great child visited by flashes of reason and intelligence'.[12]

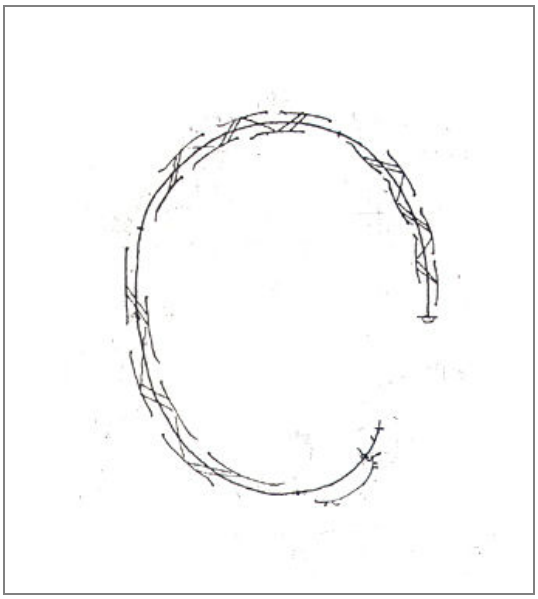

Figure 2 – Extract of the second page of choreographic notation for the *Entrée d'Arlequin*, corresponding to section A2.

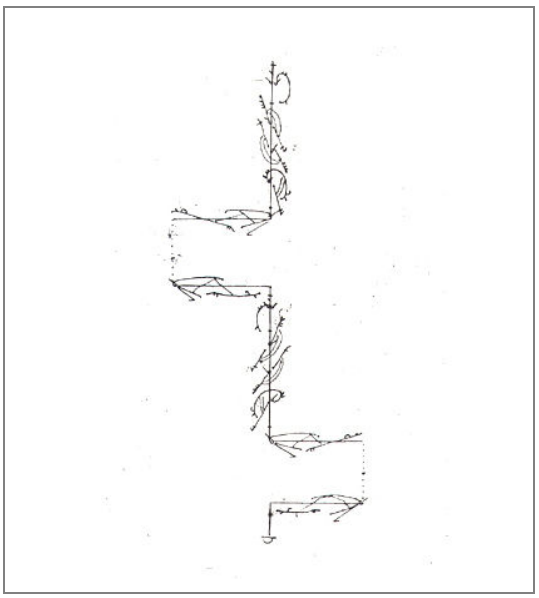

Figure 3 – Extract of the third page of choreographic notation for the *Entrée d'Arlequin*, corresponding to the '*arlequinades*' in sections A3 and A4.

Confutatio

The short *Confutatio* occupies one single page of choreographic notation. The three choreographic phrases perfectly fit their music counterpart. The tension in music, – provided by the sudden ascending octave, dissonances of 7th and the ascending bass line – agrees with the choreographic element and suggest some distress or confusion in B1. This is emphasised

[12] Sand, *The History of the Harlequinade*, vol. I, p. 64.

with the following choreographic sequence, which sees a continuous shift between 'true' (*bonnes*) and 'false' (*fausses*) first positions in B2 [figure 4].

The choreographer makes a clear distinction between the movements required to reach a good position from that to reach a bad position. While using a *tombé* to reach a 'false' first position, making the performer collapse into the suggestively desolate and fragile position, he uses a *jetté* with both feet to make him spruce up to the 'true' position, prompting the dancer to regain an upright upper body. These two distinct demeanours reflect Harlequin's confused state of mind as he displays traces of despondency and hope alternately.

The third and last phrase in the *Confutatio* (B3) presents an unusual and intricate rhythmical grouping of the steps, which form three step motions laid out over four bars of music, creating an effect akin to a phrasal hemiola [figure 5].

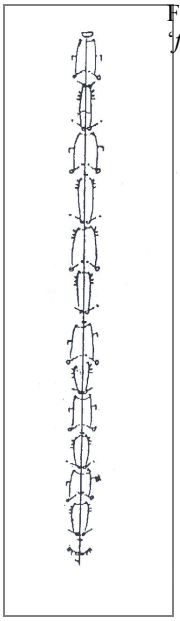

Figure 4 – Mutation between '*bonnes*' and '*fausses*' positions in B2.

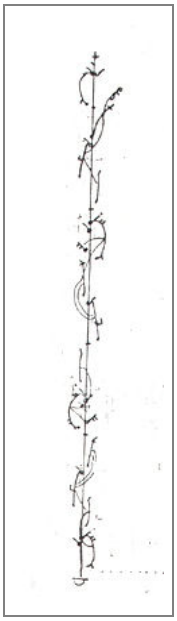

Figure 5 – Phrasal 'hemiola' in B3.

Conclutio

The initial phrase of the Denouement sees a transition from Harlequin's apparent distress to the jokingly reinstatement of his *arlequinades*. Here, the choreography makes optimum use of musical elements such as the strong ascending intervals and occasional accents on the second beats of bars (C1), by inserting a series of sideways *coupés de deux mouvements à côte* with its incisive accent on the first and second beats.

The final three sub-sections (C2, C3, and C4) display a crescendo of intentions reflected particularly in C2. In this section, Harlequin steps backwards on the first beat of bar 45, remaining static apart from a bold circling movement of the right arm, indicated in the choreography. While remaining still in this standing fourth position throughout bar 46, the right arm continues to circle with three further annotated signs. The persistent movement is cleverly placed over the equally repeating motif of the treble line. As if urged by an uncontrollable frenzy sparked by his frantic arm movements, Harlequin performs three travelling *chassés* backwards, which are punctuated by an *assemblé* [figure 6].

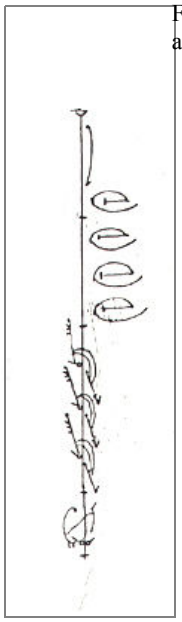

Figure 6 – Indication for circling the right arm, followed by *chassés* in C2.

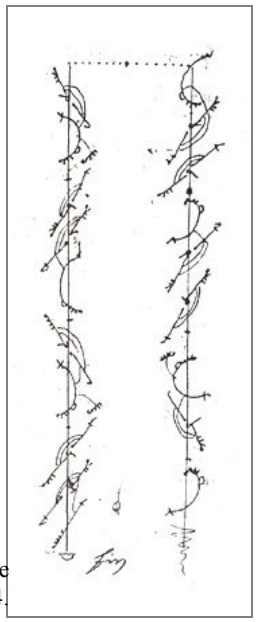

Figure 7 – Development of the *arlequinades* in C3 and C4.

Following the example set in sections A3 and A4, where the choreographic element was repeated as the musical element developed through rhythmic diminutions in the treble part, sections C3 and C4 use the same choreographic element to conclude the choreography. Here, the syncopation firstly introduced in B3 (*Confutatio*) is extensively employed during the reinstatement of an elaborated version of the *arlequinades*, with the choreography forming hemiolas over the musical part [figure 7].

The development of steps, namely of the initial *demi-jetté* into increasingly ornamented *jettées battüs* and *chassés*, occurs concomitantly to the development of elements in the musical score (sections A3 to A4 and C3 to C4). Most regular choreographic semi-phrases of four bars present elements in a proportion of 3:1 (three bars of repeated steps with a punctuated *assemblé* in the fourth bar). This is a reflection of the treatment given to the major sections of the composition (also in the total of three): in both *Propositio* and in the *Conclutio*, the sub-sections are presented in the ratio of 1:3, while the *Confutatio*, despite its reduced size, is predictably divided into three sub-sections. The recurring use of threefold semi-phrases, phrases, periods and even smaller figures in music and dance, particularly in a piece notated in triple time, is exceptionally intriguing. It also transpires that the anonymous choreographer may have been not only very musically minded but also, like the composer Lully, seemed to have at least a very good perception of the oratory functions and knew how to employ them into his creation.

After completing his BMus in Brazil, Brazilian-Portuguese Ricardo Barros undertook postgraduate courses both at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and the Royal Academy of Music in London. He had his début as a harpsichordist performing the complete works for harpsichord by Pancrace Royer, playing the world-famous 1769 Taskin harpsichord at the Russell Collection, during the 1994 Edinburgh Festival. He directs and performs with his innovative ***Mercurius Company*** (www.mercuriuscompany.co.uk), specialising in the reconstruction of baroque theatrical dances, and also appears with ***Trio Spirituoso***. Ricardo has just concluded his thesis 'Dance as a Discourse – The rhetorical expression of the Passions in French Baroque dance', under Professor Graham Sadler and Dr Caroline Wood at the University of Hull. His research interests also include the inheritance of seventeenth-century French and Iberian festivities in the contemporary Brazilian carnival parade.