



BBR. Brazilian Business Review

ISSN: 1808-2386

Fucape Business School

Júlio, Ana Carolina; Tureta, César  
"Turning garbage into luxury": the materiality in practices of the carnival production  
BBR. Brazilian Business Review, vol. 15, no. 5, 2018, September-October, pp. 427-443  
Fucape Business School

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15728/bbr.2018.15.5.2>

Available in: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=123057435002>

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## “Turning garbage into luxury”: the materiality in practices of the carnival production

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the organization of the carnival production of a samba school. Specifically, we investigate the effort to balance the demand for luxury and the scarcity of resources. To understand these phenomena, we use Schatzki's epistemology of practice. This is a qualitative research that resorts to participant observation, in-depth interviews and documentary research. The findings revealed that the practice of material reuse is incorporated in the carnival production. We show evidence that the balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources occurs through what we call material understandings, a central element in the creative process. These understandings are produced from the interaction of the actors with a set of material arrangements, through which the creative process takes place. We also emphasize that they can be transformed throughout carnival production, as practitioners seek solutions to emerging problems.

**Keywords:** Practice Based Studies (PBS), Organizing, Materiality, Theodore Schatzki, Samba schools.

### 1. VANGUARD COMMISSION

The parade of a samba school is developed from the presentation of wings and floats in a logical sequence, in a way that it is possible to tell the theme of the school. In a broader sense, carnival does not mean a great party only, but “[...] all its preparation, over which a new theme will gradually become a samba-theme, in allegories and costumes [...]” (CAVALCANTI, 2008, p. 15). For the parade to happen, it is necessary that many people work intensely over the year, and this allows defining their production based on a group of organizational practices (TURETA; ARAÚJO, 2013), which takes shape in the avenue (VERGARA; MORAES; PALMEIRA, 1997).

Nowadays, samba schools live with the spectacularization of the parades, in which there is a great demand for luxury, beauty and theatricality (LUZ, 2013), both from the judges and the audience. This requires carnival professionals to be specialized (BLASS, 2007; DUARTE, 2013), capable of complying with the parade's rules and of meeting expectations of those who watch the spectacle as the ones who evaluate it. It is common that these schools face financial restrictions and problems related to the time available to elaborate their parades

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Received: 05/31/2017.

Revised: 09/21/2017.

Accepted: 11/30/2017.

Published Online: 07/05/2018.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15728/bbr.2018.15.5.2>



(BLASS, 2007), making it harder for the schools' members to work. Although some studies refer to this phenomena (see GOLDWASSER, 1975; RAPHAEL, 1990; VALENÇA, 1996; AFOLABI, 2001; CAVALCANTI, 2008; ROSA, 2013), little emphasis is given to the matter of materiality and the understandings of the actors around it in the production of the carnival, especially, to its creative potential.

In this regard, this study aligns with the practice movement (SCHATZKI, 2001a; GHERARDI, 2012), mainly to the work by Theodore Schatzki. From this movement, the idea that organizations need to be analyzed as a result of daily social interactions gained space, as an emerging process (CZARNIAWSKA, 2014), composed by a set of practices (SCHATZKI, 2006). Practices are in a constant state of (re)construction (CZARNIAWSKA, 2013) and they are organized, according to Schatzki (SCHATZKI, 2002; 2005; 2012) through rules, understandings and teleoaffectivities, being supported by a series of material arrangements.

This approach allows a better comprehension of the balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources, because, since every practice is composed by the dimensions of activity and organization (SCHATZKI, 2003), the organization's understanding (know-how) of the social practices becomes a relevant aspect so that a certain activity is carried out. In order to deal with the aesthetic aspects demanded in the parades (FARIAS, 2015), based on a limitation of resources, which happens in many samba schools (ARAÚJO, 2009), we assumed that the notion of "understanding" has to cover the material dimension of a practice, possibly causing the actors' creative capacity to emerge. The materiality is present in creative work, that is accomplished through affective, social and material connections (DUFF; SUMARTOJO, 2017); it also has centrality in the creation of something new (ISLAM; ENDRISAT; NOPPENY, 2016). The material aspect of creative processes still needs further studies (JONES, SVEJENOVA, PEDERSEN, TOWNLEY, 2016), as well as its developments in a context of valorization of aesthetic and visual elements of cultural production.

We can learn through Schatzki's theoretical perspective, how material arrangements participate, offer support and are inter-related with a specific practice (SCHATZKI, 2005; 2006), in addition to contributing to adjustments and adaptations that may happen to them (SCHATZKI, 2016), because of unexpected circumstances. This seems to be the case of the search for balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources in the production of school samba parades, since emergency situations are very common in the carnival production (see BLASS, 2007; CAVALCANTI, 2008; TURETA; ALCADIPANI, 2011) and it has direct implications for the practitioner's work. Therefore, our goal is to analyze the carnival production organization of a samba school, regarding the search for balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources.

This article presents two main contributions. The first one refers to the balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources. We evidenced in this study that a greater aesthetic valorization in cultural productions (see FARIAS, 2015) causes some organizations/artists to face difficulties to access resources (see ARAÚJO, 2009) capable of meeting their audience expectations. This demonstrates that the search for balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources becomes even more important, which demands a set of understandings of the activities that are being executed. The second contribution is an extension of the first one and it refers to what we call material understandings. Knowing how (know-how) to do something also requires interaction with the materiality constructed in a certain practice. Our study highlights the material aspects in organizational practices (ORLIKOWSKI; SCOTT, 2015), as they are composed by a series of material arrangements (SCHATZKI, 2005). We demonstrated in the research how the materiality in the carnival production process promotes the development of creative practices to solve organizational problems.

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This study resorted to the triangulation of participant observation, in-depth interviews and documentary research. The research occurred between October 2014 and March 2015. In order to be able to analyze the carnival parade production process, one of the authors followed the routine of one samba school in Vitória/ES.

In order to accomplish the proposed discussion, we organized this article in three sections, in addition to this introduction: in the next topic, we present the theoretical framework, discussing Schatzki's epistemology of practice. Then, we present the research methods. Finally, we present the practices employed in the production of allegoric floats, the discussion of the results we found and the references used.

## 2. OPENING FLOAT

### 2.1. HOW PRACTICES ARE ORGANIZED

Social practices may be understood as the key constitutive element of social life, being the starting point to any investigation or to the understanding of human relationships (NICOLINI, 2013; SCHATZKI, 2003, 2005, 2012). The author defines the term social practice beyond the mere description of human action, referring to a group of corporal actions of doings and sayings (SCHATZKI, 2001b). There are no strict boundaries separating the practices, as they are in constant change, being opened and better understood for their dynamism and movement (SCHATZKI, 2003).

When analyzing practices as the key constitutive element of social life, Schatzki developed a specific perception of human action, affirming that people do what makes sense to them (SCHATZKI, 2002). The author named this human condition intelligibility of action, with his concept of practical intelligibility arising from it (NICOLINI, 2013). It is intelligibility that gives sense and meaning to the performance of the practitioners and to the practice itself. Human activity is guided by this intelligibility, since individuals do what makes sense (or has purpose, aim) to them (SCHATZKI, 2002).

In this context, the organization of practices happens around three elements: rules, understandings and teleoaffectivities (SCHATZKI, 2002, 2005, 2012). These are the elements that cause certain actions of doing and saying to be gathered under the same human activity, i.e., around the same social practice (SANTOS; SILVEIRA, 2015; SCHATZKI, 2001b). The rules concern the instructions and norms formulated and prescribed (more or less explicitly), being commonly linked to power and authority mechanisms, as well as to sanctions (SCHATZKI, 2002). It is important to emphasize that the rules are not necessarily the evidence of an understanding. They would be better comprehended as a form of codification of past action regularities, which may have normative strength and influence the course of future actions, pointing to how and which actions should be executed (SANTOS; SILVEIRA, 2015). The rules guide individuals' actions, since they take them into account to judge what makes sense, or not, to do, what is convenient or acceptable to do (SCHATZKI, 2002). In this regard, one can relate the assessment categories that guide the evaluation of the carnival parade by the judges (vanguard commission, drum's section, the flag bearer and her escort, for example) to the formal and explicit rules that organize the carnival production practices (ROSA, 2013, JÚLIO, 2016).

The understandings, on the other hand, refer to the know-how, the ability of a practitioner to perform activities that compose a certain practice, as well as the capacity of this practitioner to understand this practice – which is provided with meaning and purpose (SCHATZKI, 2002). For Schatzki (2002, p. 77) “[...] *three such abilities are germane to practices: knowing how to X, knowing how to identify X-ings, and knowing how to prompt as well as respond to X-ings*”. The understanding of social practice is shared among the practitioners, who agree, at least tacitly, in regards to what makes sense for them to do (SCHATZKI, 2002). Regarding the carnival, it is important to highlight that not all the

parade's elements are included in the assessment categories of the judges, that is, by the explicit rules that organize the carnival production. For instance, the wings of the *baianas* and the children, as well as the queens of the drums section, are not part of any formal category (CAVALCANTI, 2008). However, there is no samba school on the avenue without its *baianas* and mulattas. After all, there is a tacit understanding about the importance of these elements to the carnival parade (JÚLIO, 2016).

Teleoaffectivity refers to the sense of purpose (ends and means to reach this aim), a complex combination of purposes, humors, feelings and affections of the individuals. Teleoaffectivity is learned and embodied by the individuals during their socialization process, being reinforced by the repetition of the rehearsals' performance (NICOLINI, 2013; SCHATZKI, 2002). Thus, what makes sense to a person depends on the ends they aim and the affections they feel when engaging in a practice (SCHATZKI, 2001b). Affectivity may also guide what people do, independently from their sense of purpose (SCHATZKI, 2002). In the carnival production, the teleoaffective structure may be evinced by the fact that at every carnival cycle or parade people get emotional and even suffer, living a moment in a very intense and unique way (TURETA; ALCADIPANI, 2011; JÚLIO, 2016).

Social practice implies certain ways of understanding the world, of wishing for something, of knowing what to do and how to do it (RECKWITZ, 2002). That way, the practice of doing carnival does not involve parading, dancing samba or playing the drums only. It is tangled in a group of material arrangements that contribute directly to the constitution and development of those actions.

## 2.2. MATERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

The term social practice goes beyond the mere description of human action and the reproduction of an action pattern (RECKWITZ, 2002), referring to organized human activities that are constituted by material elements (SCHATZKI, 2001a, 2002). The set of sayings and doings that compose any practice (SCHATZKI, 2016) is tied to material arrangements that involve artifacts, people and things with their own meaning and identity (SCHATZKI, 2003). Practices cover the most diverse interconnected material arrangements (SCHATZKI, 2005), which help forming an organization because they involve human activities and they are used with different purposes (SCHATZKI, 2006). Practices and arrangements are inter-related, for the latter in many forms compose the formers, as well as the arrangements constituting practices and they are (re)created within them (SCHATZKI, 2003; 2005). We may say, for example, that the production of a carnival parade is an accomplishment that occurs through the performance of actions and practices executed through material arrangements that support its activities.

The material elements may play important roles in the relationships people establish in specific social spaces. The objects, therefore, are indispensable for any practice (TURETA; ALCADIPANI, 2009), because its development frequently demands the use of certain types of materials associated with social elements. For Schatzki (2003), material elements must be included in a phenomenon analysis, because they compose the process through which a given phenomenon develops. According to this author, social life may be understood as a continuous flow of activities, of performances that coexist and overlap each other in an entanglement of practices around which the practitioners are socialized and supported by material arrangements (SCHATZKI, 2012), representing the domain of which the phenomena belong to (SCHATZKI, 2005).

The absence of certain arrangements may turn unfeasible the development of a practice (SCHATZKI, 2010) or hinder its functioning, because the actors' action occurs from material entities (SCHATZKI, 2003). These circumstances produce an adaptation necessity in the activities developed, since the material elements "*induce, channel, prefigure, and are*

*essential to practices*” (SCHATZKI, 2016, p. 26). This is something common in the carnival production. In a samba school parade the aesthetic dimension is a central element and depends on the choice that the carnival designer makes regarding, which visual resources will be used (ROSA, 2013), something that is not always accessible to small schools. This causes them to experience “a feeling of aesthetic insufficiency” (ARAÚJO, 2009, p.55) and to seek creative solutions to produce a competitive parade. Tureta and Alcadipani (2011) show, for example, how the members of a samba school adapt their actions from a routine behavior to the use of improvisation and creativity in order to solve emergency problems when facing unexpected situations. The (creative) adaptations the actors perform in different circumstances occur through material arrangements directly linked to the practice involved (SCHATZKI, 2016).

Creativity, such a remarkable element in carnival productions (see MAGALHÃES, 1997; BLASS, 2007; CAVALCANTI, 2008), may be explored in terms of the materiality that composes it (see JONES et. al., 2016; ISLAM; ENDRISSAT; NOPPENY, 2016; DUFF; SUMARTOJO, 2017). As highlighted by Duff and Sumartojo (2017) “*creativity ought to be understood as an emergent property of the social, affective and material conjoining of heterogeneous forces*” (DUFF; SUMARTOJO, 2017, p. 13). Such understanding assumes that the materiality is inherent to social phenomena (SCHATZKI, 2010), and its introduction to a certain space may cause the emergence/change of a practice (SCHATZKI, 2013). Farias (2013, p. 166) illustrates this idea when discussing the socio-communicative stylization of Rio de Janeiro’s samba schools parade:

Instead of using artificial battery-powered lights on the head of the participants of the schools, hidden under their clothes, making it hard for them to move, “they were taught” to use a mirror to attract light and produce brightness, as it was already done by *candomble* and *reisado*. They introduced plastics, varnish, glitters, lace, among other raw materials used in theatrical productions as well as on TV.

In spite of being introduced or being already present in a practice, the material arrangements have meanings and they are intelligible to the actors that are a part of it (SCHATZKI, 2010; 2012). These ones must have knowledge (know-how) to deal with those in order to transform them and give them new forms; “*they also need to know what can be done with what, and what will happen to objects under various conditions*” (SCHATZKI, 2013, p. 33). Without this understanding of materiality, it would be hard for a samba school member to exercise their creativity to the benefit of the carnival production. For instance, the samba school parades are evaluated by judges that master the assessment categories, which demands from the actors responsible for the carnival production an understanding of aesthetics, visual communication and the necessary techniques (ROSA, 2013), so that the material elements of the parade meet, in a creative way, the rigor of the evaluation.

Therefore, it would be interesting to direct more attention to the material elements that support creative practices (DUFF; SUMARTOJO, 2017), since they enable the creation of new symbolic forms and allow us to better understand the role played by creative actors (JONES, et. al., 2016) in the organizational practices, especially in the search for balance between the demand for luxury and the scarcity of resources in cultural productions.

### 3. DRUMS’ SECTION

Studying social complexity demands methodological and pluralistic collection tools, as the proper coverage of social events requires a variety of data. Thus, considering the complementary and mutually enriching character of the different data collection tools, this

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qualitative study resorts to the triangulation (STAKE, 1994) of non-participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews and documents.

We performed data collection using Schatzki's observations (2006) as reference, who considers that the organizations are social phenomena that happen, resulting from an emerging process (organizing), that is in constant state of (re)constitution (CZARNIAWSKA, 2013; SCHATZKI, 2006).

Therefore, the researcher has to experience its event while it unravels. The research unfolded between October 2014 and March 2015. Field access occurred in the end of October, but the systematic observation started on December.

The observation was performed in different organizational contexts: in the shed (where the allegoric floats were produced), at the school headquarters (where the meetings took place), at the samba hall (where the rehearsals took place), in the neighborhood streets of the school (where the street rehearsal took place), at the *Sambão do Povo* (location of the technical rehearsal and the parade) and at a club's sports gym (where the scores were summed).

We tried to observe and record in field diaries the routine behavior of the members of the school. Such record covered opinions, comments and words of the locals, as our intent was to comprehend the point of view, the world perspective of the people researched (MALINOWSKI, 1978), the contextual logic that guided the life of the studied group (BOAS, 2004). In total, we conducted 85 hours of observation, with approximately 53,000 words densely recorded in field diaries. The last observation happened on February 10, 2015, the day when the scores of Vitória/ES parade were summed.

The interviews were another source of data. Between the months of October 2014 and March 2015 we conducted 24 interviews, with nine of them being exploratory, from informal conversations, and 15 of them were in-depth semi-structured. We carried out more than one interview with some of the members: one exploratory and another in-depth. In total 18 people were interviewed, and each interview lasted 1 hour and 40 minutes on average. For the data analysis to occur, we audio recorded the in-depth interviews and transcribed it afterwards. We did not audio record the exploratory interviews, but logged them in field diaries and transcribed it later.

We selected the subjects after insertion into the field. Our criterion for choosing them was their time as a member of the school. We prioritized those members who were in the samba school for at least five years. The exceptions were the carnival designer and the couple of choreographers of the vanguard commission, as the annual turnover in these positions is common. Such actors are directly responsible for three of the ten assessment categories (costumes, allegory and vanguard commission), therefore their importance to the parade production.

The documents analyzed were: the carnival regulation; the parade's sectors; the parade's script; and the final result of the evaluation. We selected them because they contribute to the understanding of how the carnival production, the carnival doing, is formally organized in the samba school.

In order to preserve the identity of the research subjects and the organization, we omitted the names of the samba school, the city they honored in the theme and the interviewees, according to Table 1.

Regarding the analysis and interpretation of data, we used a procedure of thematic content analysis *a posteriori* (SONPAR; GOLDEN-BIDDLE, 2008), following the spiral procedure of data analysis proposed by Creswell (2012).

We sought to identify what were the most remarkable practices in the production of the allegoric floats, considering the material matters inherent to this phenomenon. Four central categories emerged from the data: Turning into carnival a Slot Machine Theme; Playing



**Table 1.** Interviews.

Interviewee	Position at the school	Interview	Type of Interview	Duration of the Interview
1	Carnival deputy director	1	Exploratory	2 h
		2	Semi-structured	2 h 34 min
2	Carnival director	3	Exploratory	30 min
		4	Semi-structured	1 h 49 min
3	Carnival designer	5	Exploratory	1 h
		6	Semi-structured	2 h 40 min
4	Parade's highlight and stylist 1	7	Exploratory	1 h
		8	Semi-structured	2 h 13 min
5	Supplier	9	Exploratory	2 h 30 min
6	Parade's highlight and stylist 2	10	Exploratory	1 h 15 min
		11	Semi-structured	1 h 37 min
7	Vanguard commission choreographers	12	Exploratory	50 min
		13	Semi-structured	1 h 35 min
8	Old school member	14	Exploratory	40 min
9	Stylist and former carnival designer	15	Exploratory	1 h 20 min
10	Carnival deputy director	16	Semi-structured	2 h 55 min
11	Harmony deputy director	17	Semi-structured	1 h 5 min
12	Conductor of the drums' section	18	Semi-structured	2 h 12 min
13	Wings coordinator	19	Semi-structured	1 h 20 min
14	Stylist and wing coordinator	20	Semi-structured	1 h e 41 min
15	Plot writer	21	Semi-structured	2 h 7 min
16	Songwriter	22	Semi-structured	2 h
17	Sculptor	23	Semi-structured	1 h 56 min
18	Stylist	24	Semi-structured	51 min

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

the Rules of the Game; (Re)reading the Plot; Turning Garbage into Luxury. The categories refer to the practices that compose the carnival production, the carnival doing, the samba school.

In the following topic, we present the results of the research, which we organized according to the categories identified in the data analysis.

## 4. EVOLUTION OF THE SCHOOL

### 4.1. TURNING INTO CARNIVAL A SLOT MACHINE THEME

The theme of the 2015 parade was a tribute to one of the oldest cities in Espírito Santo, which is 200 years old. One of the plot writers suggested the theme and it was welcomed by the presidency of the school in the beginning of the carnival cycle of 2014/2015.

Besides this sponsorship, the samba schools of the metropolitan area of Vitória receive financial support from the state government and the city hall. However, this amount is paid right before or even after the parade. In order to mitigate this situation, the government provides letters of credit that may be used only to buy part of the necessary materials of the parade, because they are just accepted in a few stores located in Rio de Janeiro.

In addition, governmental support is not enough to cover all the costs of a parade, as it is an expensive party after all. The aesthetic and luxurious standard required by the



schools demands high investments in costumes, allegories and the hiring of specialized professionals. For example, one single pheasant feather (considered the most luxurious plume of the carnival) may cost up to 89 BRL. The costume of a flag bearer, or a central parade's highlight of an allegoric float, is composed by approximately one thousand feathers, costing at least ninety thousand *reais* (BRL). Therefore, in the *capixaba's* carnival, a samba school of the special group spends at least 500,000 BRL to produce its parade, which includes allegoric floats and costumes.

The perception that the carnival is an expensive party and the scenario of financial difficulties led the school to choose a sponsored theme, justifying the need for a slot machine theme. That way, honoring cities or public figures is a tactic found by many samba schools to obtain sponsorship.

[...] we also have to understand that today [...] if you don't have external help, it gets hard! Because the carnival of today is a multimillion industry! So, you either accept it, or you fall behind...and with debts! (Carnival designer interview)

The need for a slot machine theme highlights the understanding that a parade is only considered good when the school "brings luxury to the avenue"; that is, it visually impacts who watches it. This is a perspective strongly shared among the directors, the carnival designer and the other members of many schools. Thus, at times, there is the perception that for the school to perform a good presentation, they need a great number of wings, huge allegoric floats with movement, as well as great costumes so that the parade has a visual appeal that impresses, in terms of size, the judges and the audience in general. Therefore, in the beginning of the carnival cycle there was a shared understanding that lots of money was needed to "take luxury to the avenue" and meet the aesthetic expectations oriented to the idea of spectacle in the presentation.

## 4.2. PLAYING THE RULES OF THE GAME

Samba schools parades have become even more competitive over the years. As carnival gains visibility, the event attracts an increasing number of tourists, arousing the interest of companies in the organization of the party and intensifying the rigor of the judges. Consequently, this requires more attention of the school members to the criteria of evaluation defined by the league of samba schools, since the judges are qualified and rigorous in their assessments.

Before this scenario, the carnival director requested a meeting to analyze the scores of each of the ten categories obtained in the previous year parade. They decided that, to pay more attention to some categories, they needed to hire new professionals: carnival designer, choreographers and escort and flag bearer couple. With these new hires, the school could guarantee high scores in four assessment categories, which would make a difference.

We analyzed the scores [from the last parade]. Then we noticed that we can't lose points in essential categories anymore... ...The Commission is a category! The Couple is a category! That is, carnival designer, choreographer and couple are important to the parade. It will be hard to compete the championship, but we can't rank 4<sup>th</sup> [place in the competition] again (field notes)

[...] the school strategically chose the outstanding professionals to add. I think this is going to work. Maybe it won't bring the title because of the lack of money or luck, but we will fight. I even believe that we can be among the three [first schools], unless because of lack of luck, some fatality, but if everything goes as expected [...] (Vanguard commission choreographers interview).

One of the main professionals in the production of a samba school parade is the carnival designer. He is responsible for the planning and the aesthetic of the parade. Regarding the carnival designer of the school studied, the carnival directors reported that they have observed the work of the professional hired for a couple of years, as they always thought he was very talented.

We were impressed! He [the carnival designer] has been managing to do good parades, with quality of costumes and allegories. We saw a bunch of iron and all of a sudden a float would come out [...]. How can this guy [the carnival designer] do it? What stood out was the fact that, even without financial resources and in an access group school, he managed to present well-done costumes and allegories (field notes).

In a conversation, the carnival designer affirmed that:

It's not just money, absolutely not! Money isn't everything! [...] the schools that I've worked for never had money. But then, when I came here, a school that was supposed to have money, didn't have it either. [...] They [the school board] spoke like this: "that's why we hired you, we knew you could make carnival without money" (field notes)

Before committing to the carnival, the carnival designer worked with *quadrilhas juninas* of Grande Vitória and produced costumes to parties. As it occurs in schools of the access group, the *quadrilhas* have little financial resources to produce their presentation. Therefore, the carnival designer hired has developed skills (know-how) to deal with situations of scarcity of resources and has gained enough experience to put his creativity into practice and to use the available material resources at the school.

When you know that a school doesn't have money and even so it can put on a good parade... Where is the key point? A good carnival designer who can manage resources! It doesn't matter about having a lot of money if it is poorly invested. And this investment is the union of resources with the work of the carnival designer in managing those resources (field notes).

Some members of the school had also worked in small schools, with limited budget, developing multiple abilities, not only those necessary to accomplish a specific job. For instance, the members of the vanguard commission also worked making trimmings. According to one of the choreographers, most of the vanguard commission members started in the access group, in 2008. From the access group, they switched to group B and then to the special group. Due to the lack of financial conditions, especially in the access group, the members of the commission learned how to make their own costumes, as well as the allegories that they would use in their choreography.

[...] in the other schools, as there were no resources, we helped. It was part of our own costume, they would give us the material and we would spend the night making it. And then, exactly because of the characteristic of this group, we offered to help, even because of the lack of time, the lack of professionals in the school, we put a team together [...] to come here, help to glue something, cut, those things... (Vanguard commission choreographer's interview).

Other professionals had experience with other popular parties or with the carnival of other states. The sculptors (who were also painters) were from the city of Parintins/AM, they had worked at the *Festa do Boi* for schools from SP and RJ. The team that made trimmings was *carioca* and had worked with the Beija Flor school.

### 4.3. (RE)READING THE PLOT

Up until the eve of the parade, the school had not received the financial support from the state government and the city hall. The promise of sponsorship from the honored city did not come true either. Because of these problems, the board opted for reducing the number of wings and allegoric floats, making a rereading of the plot. There was a great concern in maintaining the interpretation of the plot. After all, the story that was going to be told could not be changed, even though the way of telling it suffered transformations. This concern existed because the school had to send the parade's script in advance to the league, describing its presentation. This material element restricted the range of changes that could be made in the plot and, consequently, in the schools' parade. Such concern with the visual matter was expressed during some of the interviews:

The whole school [...] tells what the storyline is whilst on the avenue. So, I have to be doing whatever they need me to [...] each person symbolizes something [...] For example, the parade's highlights [the main couple] from the last allegory, which is an allegory that talks about the oil and the fauna... the guy's representation focuses more on oil and hers, [...] more on the fauna. She will perform as a butterfly (Feature interview and stylist 2)

[...] as the sectorisation changed, as wings were removed [...] you have to incorporate the whole story [the plot] in the other wings that were left (Harmony deputy director interview)

To the interpretation of the plot being kept, there were some criteria that guided the reduction of floats. The main criterion used to define the cut, observed whether it had already been represented by another element of the parade. That is, in case a float narrated a part of the plot that has already been told by a wing, it could be cut. This was the criterion that guided the cut of a float that represented the beaches of the honored city. Because there was a wing named Sunny Saturday, this allegory was replaced by a tripod allegoric float. This reduced the cost of the school. Besides, the materials used in the production of the floats were replaced by cheaper ones, which, if properly worked on by the carnival designer, sculptors and trimmings makers, were able to produce the same effect on the avenue.

[...] the floats [...], I need to reduce the cost, so we start thinking like this: '[...] what can I do to reduce costs, without losing quality?' [...] if you were going to wrap it with felt, then wrap it with satin, it's cheaper. Were you going to have five sculptures of three fish and two butterflies? So one fish stays and you put one butterfly, complete with flowers [...] we try to replace materials, but they are going to give the same idea. (Carnival deputy director interview).

[...] we were going to make a coupled float. [...] They are two floats that you join into one. To the judge it counts as one float only [...]. What you gain with a coupled float is size; it is a huge float, that gives more beauty, it impacts the school more on the avenue. This was the very first thing we cut. So the opening float will be a smaller one. [...] we budgeted it at 80 thousand, we thought it was expensive, so [...] we cut some sculptures, we cut some materials and it was down to 60 thousand. But,

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as it took long for the school to get money, it took long to bring the professionals, time was passing by. [...]there were only three weeks left for carnival [...] we had to reduce even more. So we are going to have one or two sculptures [...] and the rest will decorate the float well, it will make the float beautiful, with lots of details [...] we kind of cut the costs a lot [...], to spend less material, less labor force, mostly because of the time (Carnival deputy director interview).

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The carnival commission, led by the carnival designer and the carnival directors, was responsible for this (re)reading of the plot, whose goal was to reduce the production cost of the parade, without changing the story and the visual communication of the theme. According to one of the carnival deputy directors: “we lowered our carnival costs from 650 thousand BRL to 350 thousand BRL. Practically half of the money. We managed to cut half of the costs only with material, cutting wings and replacing material” (field notes).

That way, during the carnival production, the understanding about what would be “to take luxury to the avenue” was changing. With the arrival of the carnival designer, the vanguard commission and the sculptors from Parintins (with know-how of the production of other parties, such as *quadrilhas juninas* and the carnival production of smaller schools) “taking luxury to the avenue” began to have the sense of visually impacting the public and the judges with colorful allegories and costumes, with high quality and that were aesthetically competitive, which involved lots of creativity and not necessarily much money.

It was that way that the previous knowledge of festive events production, where time and money limitations were also present, allowed the carnival commission to start balancing the demand for luxury and the restrictions of resources and time, re(reading) the plot and playing the rules of the game.

#### 4.4. TURNING GARBAGE INTO LUXURY

With less than two weeks left for the parade, the allegoric floats were still without sculptures and trimmings. We noticed fear that there was not going to be enough time to produce all the floats, after all, the initial project estimated four months of work at the shed. As highlighted, there was a great concern in keeping the interpretation of the plot, since the regulation of the 2015 carnival prescribed that the samba schools should send their parade script to the league. According to the document sent, the school committed to parading with four cars. That is, in case the school did not manage to produce all the allegories, the judges would penalize them.

However, until the opening of the shed, the school had only informed the number of floats that would enter the avenue, but it had not specified what each of those allegories would represent. Besides, the quantity of sculptures that compose each float and the size of the floats/sculptures is not information requested by the league. It was this exact interpretation of the regulation, which allowed the carnival designer to adopt the tactic of modifying their initial project, making it feasible in 12 days.

I went to the shed and started looking at what we could use, the structure of the floats and the sculptures of last year’s carnival [carnival cycle 2013/2014]. They [the school board] would give all this; they would give all the sculptures to the others, to the other schools. If they’d done it... We wouldn’t have what to do... (field notes).

Given this scenario, the initial project of the allegoric floats, made by the carnival designer and represented in four styrofoam models, was not rigorously followed; the initial idea remained the same, though. During the two weeks in which the floats were produced, the project was changed many times without doing other models.

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The projects of the allegoric floats has changed four times already [...] The first project was those models, that were up there. Those were allegories to be done in four months, not in four weeks, right. So now we have two weeks to do it. So, we cut a lot of things. The idea is basically the same, of four floats, but we were changing the conception. So it has this flexibility, you know, that the carnival must have. Because, when the carnival begins, you make a projection, but during the process [...] nobody wondered that the governor would cut the budget, nobody wondered that the city hall's budget would take a long time to be released (Carnival deputy director interview).

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The production of the second float illustrates this activity of “turning garbage into luxury” well. For the 2015 carnival, this allegory would represent the main church of the honored city. When observing the routine at the shed, we identified that one of the allegoric floats of 2014 also represented a church. That way, they kept the iron structure of the church and the altars, as well as maintaining great part of the structure. Moreover, that was how they recycled something that initially did not have any use, without jeopardizing the new story being told.

This reuse of materials contributed to reduce the costs of production of the parade a lot. However, such reuse cannot be carried out without some precautions. According to the carnival regulation, a school is not allowed to use sculptures or allegoric floats that have clearly been used in previous parades. Due to this exact reason, when sending the script of the parade to the league, the schools describe what each allegoric float represents in relation to the plot. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to describe the sculptures that will compose the float, neither it is to mention if the structure has been used in past carnivals. This allows the carnival designer and the sculptors to use all their know-how during the process of creation and (re)use those sculptures, making a reinterpretation and using the materials available to create balance between luxury and scarcity of resources.

The idea was trying to excel in the finishing, removing imperfection [of the floats and sculptures], so that people [judges and audience] would see that the float was well-made. There were also the little flags... It also had the mirrors, the stones... anyone who sees it, can tell it was done with care, that it was well-made, that we had patience and time to do it. Actually, we didn't have time we, but we did it! And the judge sees all of that! (Carnival designer interview).

To illustrate, we highlight, once again, the production of the second float, which represented the Church of the honored city. All the sculptures that were in that float were reworked, resulting in the blue angels. In 2014, there was a float with sculptures of the *orixás*. In 2015, the same *orixás* were turned into angels, that is, a reinterpretation of those sculptures was performed. The legs of the *orixás* changed into a skirt, which was decorated with blue fabric. The upper bodies of the *orixás* were fitted on these skirts. The faces of the sculptures were cut, and only the heads were left. New faces were carved and fitted on the heads of the old *orixás*. Finally, some gained wings, swords and were painted; turning into blue angels.

It is evident that those changes in the allegories project (considering time and money restrictions) demanded creativity and a refined aesthetic sense, skills that only professionals with enough understanding of the judges requirements, of the parade regulation and of the carnival production could have. This is translated by the school members as “turning garbage into luxury”: the ability of the actors of using simpler and cheaper materials, or the ones from previous parades (many times seen as “garbage” for being thrown away or

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BBR simply abandoned at the sambadrome after the parade); combining colors and taking care of the finishing; ensuring a visual effect of the sculptures and allegoric floats, impacting the audience and, especially, the judges.

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## 5. THE PARADE'S ASSESSMENT GRADES

In the parade production of the samba analyzed school, we observe that two aspects highlight in the search for balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources: 1- the understandings (know-how) (SCHATZKI, 2002) that practitioners have about the executed practice; 2- the centrality of the material elements in the creative process (DUFF; SUMARTOJO, 2017) of the school members, especially the carnival designer. These aspects showed that, in a cultural production, the actors must not only have understandings about a certain practice, but also about what we named here as material understandings. Material understandings refer to a practitioner's capacity and ability to accomplish their creative potential in a set of activities, from the materiality involved in a practice, as well as the limits and usage possibilities of the material arrangements, considering the expectations (or rules) inherent to that practice.

The notion of material understandings relies on the idea that the materiality *"stabilizes meanings by encoding them into durable form that can be shared and preserved [...] materiality leaves a trail of what meanings are encoded by whom"* (JONES, et. al., 2016, p.761). Considering that there is an increase in the quality of the samba schools presentations and "material changes in the aesthetic aspects" of the parades (DUARTE, 2013, p.179), there is a growing need for the practitioners to be capable of dealing with aesthetic and visual elements of the carnival production, sharing this understanding among them, as the material arrangements have meanings that must be intelligible to the participants of a practice (SCHATZKI, 2012).

Dealing with the spectacle-carnival (FARIAS, 2015) may be an obstacle to the schools with financial restrictions. In our research, we identified that the school sought to "take a theme that's a slot machine and make carnival from it" in search of resources to try solve this problem. In the beginning of the carnival cycle, practitioners perceived that, for the school to be successful at the avenue, they would need many wings, huge allegoric floats with movements, as well as expensive costumes. However, due to delays and unforeseen events in the transferring of resources from governments and the sponsorship, the school faced many difficulties, and the material understanding of its members allowed them to use their creative potential to turn garbage into luxury.

The search for balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources (with the transformation of garbage to luxury) would only have been possible if it happened within the limits of the parade competition rules. The school members had, therefore, to "play the rule of the game", which consisted of: analyzing the scores of the categories assessment, hiring carnival professionals and (re)reading the plot. In order to do that, firstly the school members had to learn the game, understanding in detail what were its regulations. In this case, the rules were the categories of assessment. Through the activity of analyzing the grades of the categories it is noticeable that the rules concern instructions and decision criteria, guiding the individuals actions, that take them into account to judge what makes sense or not. The fact that the carnival board analyzes the categories to, then, make decisions, evinces that the normative effect of the rules is practiced, performed and not pre-determined (SCHATZKI, 2002, 2005). Thus, any creation should be a result of, but not exceeding the limits defined by the rules. The challenge would be to present something that complied with the rules and that was creative at the same time, what happened through the "(re)reading of the plot" using the materials available, since *"materiality is key in creating novel, yet seemingly familiar"* (ISLAM; ENDRISAT; NOPPENY, 2016, p.769).

With the (re)reading of the plot, the carnival designer and the carnival commission were able to reduce the parade production cost, maintaining its interpretation. In this context, attention so that the story being told would not be changed illustrates one more formal rule, since the carnival regulation demanded that the schools to send the script of their parade to the samba schools league, evidencing the normative effect of the rules that organize the practices (SCHATZKI, 2012). The anticipated submission of the script restricts the changing options after the carnival production is initiated. Even so, it is possible to create within these restrictions. In the situations where the practitioners adapt their tasks, an idea or a creative solution may emerge (SCHATZKI, 2016). When incorporating their own version of the rules that organized the carnival production, the carnival commission noticed that it was possible to use creativity to dodge the carnival regulation, without failing to comply with it: (re)using structures, (re)using sculptures, producing smaller floats and sculptures, and changing allegoric floats.

The (re)reading of the allegories (changing sculptures, so the judges would not notice that those elements had already been used in previous parades, for example) demanded from the people responsible for the allegoric floats production, understanding the material of how the practice of a parade production is organized. This (re)reading did not require the use of sophisticated materials, very expensive or brand new materials, but the ability (know-how) of those actors to use simpler and cheaper arrangements, combining colors and taking care of the finishing. This shows that material elements make the difference in the creative process and they are not just artistic expression tools (DUFF; SUMARTOJO, 2017). We also noticed that, through a mix of colors and a careful finishing, the carnival designer sought to compensate the fact that the school had small sculptures and allegoric floats.

We emphasize the fact that the carnival designer started his artistic career in hall based *quadrilhas juninas events*, having been socialized around the art of producing costumes without much money, but visually impacting the audience and the judges. If, on one hand, the parade production uses a popular language (to satisfy a broader audience), on the other hand, it is still aesthetically sophisticated (ROSA, 2013), which meets the demands of the judges. When developing a material understanding of the elements that organize a cultural production (on carnival or *quadrilhas*), the carnival designer has embodied his own aesthetic assessment, being able to combine colors and using simple and cheap materials, but with a great visual effect.

The activities that constitute a practice are delimited by material arrangements (SCHATZKI, 2012), which go beyond the immediate space of the practitioners acting (SCHATZKI, 2013). Besides, the way of expressing visual artistic aspects depends on the capacity and ability of the actors to use visual techniques (ROSA, 2013). In this regard, the carnival designer's material understanding allowed him to be capable of measuring, for example, the impact that the size of the allegories, costumes, colors and forms would have on the avenue, considering its dimension and the position of the booth of judges. That is said because some part of the parade production is more focused on the judges than the audience, and that can be illustrated by the fact that many aesthetic details, of finishing of the allegoric floats, for example, are imperceptible to the majority of the audience, but it does not go unnoticed by the judges.

It is important to highlight that the work carried out by the carnival designer reveals the importance of the material understanding by cultural production artists, since the materiality is essential in the actors' creative process (see JONES, et. al, 2016) and it may serve as a support to them (ISLAM; ENDRISAT; NOPPENNEY, 2016). Assuming this idea has direct implications to the activities that involve creativity, because we should recognize that the material elements act as facilitators and mediators of creative work (DUFF; SUMARTOJO, 2017). The professionalization and refinement of the visual production (DUARTE, 2013)



of cultural events increasingly demand that carnival artists know not only how to carve sculptures, build allegoric floats or sew costumes. They also have to have understanding of what should be carved, built and/or sewn, as well as which materials can be (re)used to do so in certain situations, in a way that they manage to reach the balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources.

## 6. ASH WEDNESDAY

The aim of this article is to analyze the organization of the carnival production of a samba school, regarding the search for balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources. In order to do so we use the epistemology of practice by Theodore Schatzki.

We evinced that the search for balance between luxury and the scarcity of resources demands a material understanding from the practitioners of carnival production. The capacity and the ability of the artists in using material arrangements, in financially restricted situations, contributes to the creation process of aesthetic and visual elements of the parade that exceed the audience expectations, especially, the rigor of the judges in evaluating the categories. To do so, the practitioners play the rules of the game, that is, even with and from the limitations imposed by the rules of the parade, the creative process is developed with the reuse of materials, with the intent of turning garbage into luxury.

If on one hand the material restriction creates limits to the school members' actions, regarding having to follow the beauty and luxury parameters required by the judges, on the other hand, it stimulates the creative potential of the same actors. This material understanding is shared in the school and it organizes the carnival production. However, it is not rigid and it may change with the interaction among the actors. What would materially represent "luxury" has changed over time. If at the beginning of the carnival cycle there was a perception that the school needed to have a significant number of wings, huge allegoric floats, as well as very elaborated costumes, with the arrival of the carnival designer and the other professionals, "luxury" started meaning visual impact, colorful and well-finished allegories and costumes – even if produced with simpler and cheaper materials –, which involves creativity and not just money.

The organization (around sayings, doings, understandings, rules, teleoaffectivities, material arrangements, etc.) of a certain local practice (the use of simpler materials in the *quadrilhas juninas*) may change the organization of another practice which is interconnected or overlapped to it – the (re)reading of a carnival plot through the "transformation of garbage to luxury", for example.

This work has some limitations. The first one refers to the use of Schatzki's approach to the study of material arrangements. This author assumes that a practice is organized based on understandings, rules and teleoaffectivities. In our research, the main focus was on the idea of understandings, from which we derived the notion of material understandings. Even though we have approached the rules as well, we did not emphasize in the research the aspects related to teleoaffectivities. A future line of investigation could try understanding how practitioners of a cultural production deal with matters of affection and senses of their creative work, considering the purposes and ends towards the spectacularization of the aesthetic dimension of artistic work.

The second limitation concerns the methods. Although we discussed the matter of materiality, we did not use visual resources, such as photos, videos and drawings that may be useful to emphasize the creative process development from material arrangements. Future research may use this technique that still lacks application in organization studies, but can be very useful in investigations that discuss material matters of organizational processes (see HINDMARSH; LLEWELLYN, 2016).

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## 7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This research was financed by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development - CNPq, MCTI / CNPq No. 14/2013 - and by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - CAPES.

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