The expressive capacities of decay in Cabo Verde's *Carnaval Soncent.* A case study of the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car

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Abstract

Carnaval Soncent is a festival held on the island of São Vicente in Cabo Verde, located approximately five hundred kilometers off the west coast of Africa. Central to Carnaval Soncent are the allegorical cars (referred to as parade floats outside of Cabo Verde) that come into being through informal craft processes. Significantly, the designers and makers embrace, even welcome, the material demise of these larger-than-life artefacts that they so painstakingly construct. This paper considers how this embrace of the material vulnerability of the artefact – its decay – forms an essential part of its expressive capacity. Using the notions of 'conceptual compression' (Fauconnier, Turner 2003) and 'performance characteristics' (Skibo, Schiffer 2008) I analyse the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car, from the 2017 edition of Carnaval Soncent, to illustrate how it functions as a visualised memory. The analysis suggests that, during its composition, the allegorical car's conceptual content becomes entangled with its materiality, creating a meaningful tension that facilitates the eventual de-composition, or release, of its emotionally charged content. This release detangles the content and materials to, once again, make them available for the re-making of shared experiences, memories, and the community.

Keywords: decay, carnival, Cabo Verde, artefact as process, collective effort, circular economy, conceptual compression

We can watch a rotting leaf on the ground and speak of decay.
But from the macro perspective of the rainforest where
the rotting leaf is located, it is part of the process
of the forest's regeneration. (Hage 2021: 6.)

Introduction

Decay, often seen an unfavourable phenomenon, gains significance when considered within the broader processes of which it is part. It's to this end that Ghassan Hage points out that the rotting leaf de-composes not for itself but rather to regenerate, or re-compose, the forest to which it belongs. This shift in perspective, a shift in scale, that moves from the decaying object to its effects on an environment, is what Hage states as crucial to understanding decay beyond just "a downhill process of disintegration" (2021: 5). This suggests, in short, that the value of decay is revealed when considered across a trajectory of de-composition (of an object) and re-composition (of its environment).

I use this trajectory as a framework to illustrate how the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car (photo 1), from the 2017 edition of *Carnaval Soncent*, leverages the expressive capacities of its decay as a means to both recollect and release shared memories on behalf of the community from and for which it emerged. In this case, it is the allegorical car, as the object, that de-composes to regenerate, or re-compose, the Cabo Verdean community, as the environment, from which it came. Allesandro Falassi describes this regenerative capacity as the ability of festivals to renew, through the renouncing and announcing of culture, "the life stream of a community" (Riggio 2004: 4).

The 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car tells the story of how Cabo Verdeans were displaced to other parts of Africa due to a number of sustained periods of severe drought-famine. The emotionally charged content of this allegorical car provides an ideal example of how a material artefact, across its processes of construction, display, and decay, can facilitate the 'renewing of a life stream' as an act of creative remembering. The artefact comes into being through the collective effort of a group of individuals who materialises shared memories and in doing so provides an opportunity for the community to come face-to-face with the events and stories that shaped them. As Roger Abrahams explains: "Carnival and similar *Creole* festivals in the New World are infused with historical memory, as 'serious play' that incorporates revelry along with the replaying of formative events and foundational stories" (Baron, Cara 2011: 17). It is through the allegorical car that the community encounters and replays formative events in order to publicly negotiate and also, by means of the artefact's inevitable demise, detach these visualised memories

Photo 1. The 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car during the 2017 Carnaval Soncent Parade. *Courtesy of Joao Brito.*

by displacing or undoing them[1] (Küchler 2002: 190 in Hoskins 2006: 77–78). In this case, regeneration takes the form of Cabo Verdeans coming together to remember, celebrate, and potentially release the burden of memory – a dynamic that hints at the original function of carnival[2] as a pre-lent celebration – *a farewell to flesh* – aimed at depleting excesses in preparation for the abstinence of lent: a time of repentance and mourning.

To contextualise the allegorical car along this extended expressive trajectory that includes its coming into and out of being, I use James Skibo and Michael Schiffer's 'behavioural approach to material culture' (2008). To account for how the allegorical car constructs and releases memories along this expressive trajectory, I use the notion of vital relation compression from Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's 'conceptual blending' (2003). Together, these two models provide the conceptual vocabulary to describe how the allegorical car uses decay as an essential expressive capacity.

In the sections that follow, I briefly contextualise Carnaval Soncent and its allegorical cars, emphasising the reliance on thematic choices, collective

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1   Alfred Gell and Susanne Küchler's work on the *malanggan* from Papa New Guinea, shaped my understanding of how the communal making and display of artefacts can be viewed as visualised memories that are publicly transacted for the sake of being detached (Hoskins 2006: 77–88).

2   The word 'carnival', from *carne-levare*, popularly shortened to *carne-vale*, is believed to be a compound of the Latin words *carne*: meat/flesh, and *levare*/vale: to remove/farewell. Together: 'a removal of meat', or 'a farewell to flesh'.

effort, and the re-use of materials. I then provide an overview of the data that informed my analysis, before contextualising and analysing the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car. I conclude by considering how, from the vantage point of decay, the allegorical car facilitates creative remembering as a communal process of encountering and releasing collective memories.

A note on the choice and use of terminology

Because various forms of island-specific Cabo Verdean Creole, Portuguese, and, at times, English are used in Cabo Verde, it is useful to clarify certain terms. *Soncent* is the *Creole* word for the island of São Vicente (Portuguese) which is also referred to, in English, as St. Vincent. The Portuguese form, São Vicente, is used more commonly across Cabo Verde as a general reference, where the *Creole* form, *Soncent*, is more common in Mindelo where I conducted fieldwork. The same proliferation of names also extends to the naming of *Carnaval Soncent* which is also, mainly on tourist websites, referred to as 'The Mindelo Carnival'. While local publications favour the use of *Carnaval Soncent*, residents of Mindelo simply speak of *Carnaval*. For this reason, I use *Carnaval* or *Carnaval Soncent* to refer to the specific carnival in Mindelo and I use the English spelling, 'carnival', to refer to the universal type. Further, Mindelo residents and, more importantly, *Carnaval* makers and designers use the direct English translation of *carro alegórico*: 'allegorical car' to refer to what is known, outside of Cabo Verde, as parade floats. Interestingly, in Cabo Verde, the English 'parade float' appears neither in conversations nor in publications. I follow this local preference by using 'allegorical car' throughout. Finally, I use Cabo Verde, instead of the English variation Cape Verde, following an official request by Cabo Verde, in 2013, to the United Nations, "for the country to be called Cabo Verde in all languages" (SAHO).

Carnaval Soncent and its allegorical cars

European carnival traditions were brought to Cabo Verde in the 18th century as part of the Portuguese pre-lent – *entrudo*[3] – celebrations (Daun e Lorena 2018; Dax 2024). Over time, and as Cabo Verde gained independence in 1975, these celebrations took on various island-specific forms of which *Carnaval Soncent*, held in the city of Mindelo (figure 1), is described, by Cabo Verdeans, as the biggest and most impressive of the local carnival variants (Fontes 2022). What sets *Carnaval Soncent* apart, from what is described as less formal and more spontaneous celebrations on neighbouring islands, is

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3   *Entrudo* is the Portuguese word for Shrovetide, and, from its religious origins, refers to the pre-lent time of excess in preparation for fasting during lent.
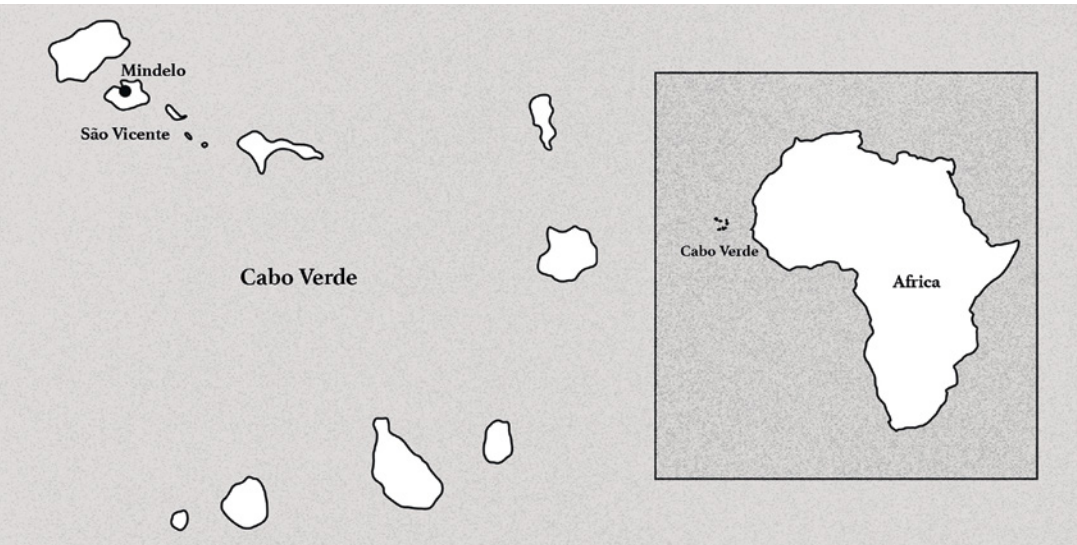
Figure 1. The location of Mindelo on São Vicente in Cabo Verde. *Map by Lodewyk Barkhuizen.*

its progressive adoption of competitive components[4] from its Brazilian counterpart, the Rio Carnival (Brito 2022a; Brito 2022c; Daun e Lorena 2023). It is primarily from this influence that *Carnaval Soncent* places considerable emphasis on the design and construction of allegorical cars – *carro alegórico* – that form both the physical and conceptual centre-pieces around which other carnival performances radiate.

Theme, effort, and 'falling apart'
The allegorical cars are constructed according to group-specific themes that range from Cabo Verdean history to popular culture, current events, and beyond. The annual set of themes, chosen independently by each of the four to five São Vicente based competitive groups,[5] offer a glimpse into the topics that occupy the Cabo Verdean popular imagination during a specific period of time. As an example, in 2023, the winning themes[6]

4   The competitive components of *Carnaval Soncent*: Best Carnival (Melhor Carnavalesco), Queen (*Rainha*), King (*Rei*), Flag Bearer (*Porta-Bandeira*), Master Room (*Mestre-Sala*), Queen of Drums (*Rainha da Bateria*), Best Allegorical Car (*Carro Alegórico*), and Best Music (*Melhor Música*).

5   The competitive groups of *Carnaval Soncent* include *Estrela do Mar, Flores do Mindelo, Monte Sossego, Cruzeiros do Norte,* and *Vindos do Oriente.* These groups originate mainly from the city of Mindelo but also from other parts of São Vicente.

6   I summarized the winning themes based on each group's parade guide. These documents are prepared and submitted to *Liga Independente dos Grupos Oficiais do Carnaval* (LIGOC São Vicente) as part of the official competition proceedings. Available on ligoc.cv.

were: (1) *Monte Sossego's* 'Reflection on a poem by Cabo Verdean poet and politician: Onésimo Silveira', (2) *Cruzeiros do Norte's* 'Reflection on the post-pandemic situation in Cabo Verde', and (3) *Flores do Mindelo's* 'Reflection on how Cabo Verde, like the Phoenix, overcomes its burdens' (LIGOC São Vicente).

The themes are essential because they not only represent each group's *Carnaval* 'message' for the year, and thus define *Carnaval* as a cultural expression, but they also, importantly, act as the primary organising mechanism around which groups of individuals come together to focus their collective creative efforts. Where the theme provides a conceptual focus for these efforts, the allegorical car provides a specific creative activity – the process of constructing the allegorical car – through which these efforts can materialise into a visible expression. In this way, the theme, the allegorical car, and the effort of making form an interdependent expressive dynamic where each component is essentially reliant on the other.

In the small and isolated community of São Vicente, where makers, performers, and the eventual audience overlap to a considerable extent, the collective effort that goes into the making of *Carnaval* is well known. Mic Dax, a *Carnaval* enthusiast and resident of Mindelo explains that the community "do the carnival first for them, then for others" (2024). This creates a dynamic where the majority of the intended audience is aware of the people and the processes that bring *Carnaval Soncent* and its the allegorical cars into being – placing the group of makers, the effort they make, and the community from which they emerge, and thus reveal (Noyes 2003), in close and intimate proximity. In this way, the effort is not something hidden from the end result but rather an essential part of how the allegorical car is experienced and made sense of.

As much as there is an awareness of the effort it requires to make an allegorical car there is also an awareness that the allegorical car will 'fall apart'. The temporary nature of these larger-than-life, fragile artefacts, which start falling apart as soon as they are pushed into the road on *Carnaval* day, are openly embraced and even welcomed by *Carnaval* designers and makers. Added to this, once the parade is over, the allegorical cars are left on the side of the road to be picked apart before certain structural elements are stored in a salvage yard for re-use in later Carnaval productions (photo 2).

To summarise, the allegorical car is defined by the theme that guides its making, the collective effort that materialises it, and the inevitable decay that returns it to its community.

Photo 2. A decaying carnival artefact at *Quintal das Artes* in Mindelo. *Photo by Lodewyk Barkhuizen.*

Data

This article is based on data collected in Cabo Verde during two weeks of fieldwork in February and March of 2022. The conversations that were initiated during this time, especially with Carnaval designers, continued online for a number of months, mainly to clarify details. While in Cabo Verde, I visited the National Archives of Cabo Verde (*Arquivo Nacional de Cabo Verde*), the Cultural Heritage Institute (*Instituto do Património Cultural*), and the Mindelo Cultural Centre (*Centro Cultural do Mindelo*) to gain an overview of Cabo Verdean carnival traditions. Throughout my visit I also had a number of conversations and discussions with residents of Mindelo which provided insight into the general sentiments of the community towards *Carnaval Soncent*. It was, however, a series of semi-structured interviews[7] with key members of the *Carnaval* group *Monte Sossego* (photo 3 and 4) that provided a more specific and detailed understanding of how *Carnaval Soncent* and its allegorical cars come into and out of being.

7　The interviews were conducted in English, Cabo Verdean *Creole*, and Portuguese. Miriam Monteiro Fortes, a resident of Mindelo, translated the conversations, where necessary, while the interviews were taking place.

During these extended interviews, Joao Brito (director), Valdir Brito (designer), To Cruz (performer), and Hermes Reis (craftsman), elaborated on the stories and ideas that shaped the allegorical cars, described the efforts and resources that go into the processes of making, revealed the transformative power of creatively re-using materials, and discussed the personal and emotional responsibility of making *Carnaval* for the community to which they belong. I highlight some of the key ideas from these conversations below.

Joao Brito stated that the 'Route of the Emigrants' was "the best *Carnaval* theme ever" (Brito 2022a). He explained that it was very emotional to the public and to the people who developed the theme because it showed the hardships and dangers that Cabo Verdeans endured in blindly trying to deliver themselves and their families from misery (Brito 2022a). Three allegorical cars were designed and constructed for this theme: 'Whale Hunting' (*Pesca de Balela*), 'Hired to Farm' (*Contratados P'Roças*), and 'Victorious Return' (*Vitorioso Regresso*). Valdir Brito, the designer of these allegorical cars, reflecting on the processes of choosing and realising the theme, explains that "there's a magic emotion that comes with it, because the intention and the challenge to wow the public, it's a responsibility but also very emotional to one that is born here in Mindelo" (Brito 2022c).

This responsibility and the emotion that goes with it is rooted in the group members emerging from a community who has known and seen and been part of *Carnaval* their whole lives. Valdir explains: that "you kind of gravitate

Photo 3. Valdir Brito, To Cruz, and Joao Brito at *Quintal das Artes*. Photo *by Lodewyk Barkhuizen*.

towards your role in *Carnaval*; it happens over time, from a young age" (Brito 2022c). In this way, individuals gradually shift, or transform, from audience to performers and makers. There is no formal training for your *Carnaval* role, explains Hermes Reis (photo 4), adding, that you learn as you go. Hermes is under the opinion that a formal *Carnaval* school would be both unnecessary and hinder the creative resourcefulness required to make *Carnaval*. He explains that the allegorical cars, as with most *Carnaval* artefacts, come into being through a combination of production techniques and is realised using a mix of raw (metal, wire, plaster) and recycled materials. Describing how he and his team collected thousands of plastic bottles to turn them into 'crystals', Hermes, a veteran craftsman, points out that constructing the allegorical cars require inventiveness and a willingness to work with the materials at hand (Reis 2022). As a further example, he shows me a feather he made from recycled materials. He explains that because of the strong Samba influence from Brazil, the costumes require a lot of feathers. "Some will spend lots of money to buy feathers" but mostly, he says, they make these feathers from paper and what is available. It is evident that he prefers the recycled feathers over the 'real' ones.

Photo 5. A decaying carnival artefact in *Monte Sossego's* salvage yard. *Photo by Lodewyk Barkhuizen.*

Talking to Hermes revealed the essential transformative quality at the heart of making *Carnaval*: it's about working with what you have, whether it is your innate abilities, materials, or ideas, and then, through inventiveness and creativity, transforming these available 'materials' into something else, something more, and something meaningful. "It's about creating something bigger than yourself", explains Valdir (Brito 2022c).

Interestingly, even though there is a recognition of the immense amount of effort that goes into making *Carnaval*, there is a clear awareness and acceptance of the material vulnerability of the allegorical cars. "Some of it falls apart as soon as we push it into the road", says Valdir, while some of it is picked apart by the public for materials that are

Photo 4. Hermes Reis at *Quintal das Artes*. *Photo by Lodewyk Barkhuizen.*

practical to be re-used, and "some parts, like the bodies and heads" (photo 5) are stored in the salvage yard "so we can re-use these parts" (Brito 2022b).

Together, these conversations reveal the trajectory of how *Carnaval* and its allegorical cars come into and out of being from the perspective of those who make *Carnaval*. The key ideas being: the preference for emotional themes, a sense of responsibility to the community, an inventiveness of working with and transforming recycled materials, and the inevitable demise of artefacts that are 'returned' to the community.

Following the fieldwork period, I had conversations with Carmo Daun e Lorena, a researcher at the Center for Research in Anthropology at the NOVA University of Lisbon, who conducted extensive research on *Carnaval Soncent* (Daun e Lorena 2018). She clarified many of the broader social dynamics related to the competitive groups, pointing out that *Grupo Monte Sossego's* approach to making Carnaval is only one of many expressive strategies. With this in mind I turn to the analysis of the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car.

Photo 6. 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car. *Courtesy of Joao Brito.*

This tells the cacao story, lots of people enjoyed it.
Joao Brito (2022)

Analysis: the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car

Thematic context

The 'Hired to Farm' (*Contratados P'Roças*) allegorical car (photo 6) tells the story of how Cabo Verdeans were displaced to other parts of Africa during a number of drought-famines. The most severe and sustained of these drought-famines took place between 1940 and 1942, in 1947 and 1948, and from 1956 to 1958. The dire conditions during these times caused thousands of deaths and forced a lot of Cabo Verdeans to emigrate by accepting contract-labour on cocoa farms in São Tomé & Príncipe and Guinea Bissau (Keese 2012: 49–50). These displacements are part of the reason why there are nearly double the amount of Cabo Verdeans in the diaspora than in the country itself.

Compositional logic

Scrolling through images on his tablet, Joao Brito points to various visual aspects of the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car: "This is a bag of cacao… this is what it looks like when the peel is removed… this part with the water represents the treaty with the paper being the contract across the distance of ocean

between us and Guinea Bissau… and here the drought and the animals, very skinny… and the man with his utensils" (Brito 2022b). Looking at the composition (orientation as in photo 6), on the right, which is the front of the car, is a barren landscape with tree stumps, empty cooking pots, and the skull of an animal. On the left, the back of the car, are two Cabo Verdean farmers, a man and a woman, sitting on a cacao harvesting bag. In front of the couple is a cup with a man's face formed in the coffee and behind them is a winnowing basket (not visible in the photo). In-between these two scenes is a narrow body of water covered by two rolled documents: the contracts of labour.

Visually and conceptually the allegorical car juxtaposes a drought-famine landscape with Cabo Verdeans on a cacao farm, with the strip of water representing the distance of ocean (Brito 2022b) that both separates and holds these two scenes, or situations, together. Overall, the composition tells a fairly straightforward cause-and-effect story of how harsh natural conditions led to displacement.

In the next section, I cast the composition into the conceptual vocabulary of Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending theory to reveal the multiple layers of meaning that is compressed into the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car.

Conceptual compression and meaning potential

Fauconnier and Turner's 'conceptual blending' (2003) accounts for how different ideas, whether images, words, or sounds, are cognitively blended together to create novel forms of meaning. Their model relies on identifying and describing how *vital relations* such as *cause-effect, time, space, and identity* are conceptually compressed into meaningful compositions. The compression of *vital relations* creates the potential for meaning to emerge as the audience cognitively 'unpacks' the compressions through processes that Fauconnier and Turner call *completion* and *elaboration* (Fauconnier, Turner 2003; Oakley, Pascal 2017). Where *completion* relies on recognising the conceptual links between the elements in a composition, in other words, realising and making associations, *elaboration* refers to how those associations inform new, often more personal, understandings that reach beyond the composition. Overall, conceptual blending provides a very precise way to account for the multiple strands of meaning that co-exist in a composition. In particular, it is the notion of 'compression' that is useful to later conceptualise its counter-action: 'release'. I use *italics* to indicate the conceptual blending terms as defined by Fauconnier and Turner.

Looking at the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car, the scene in front is representative of drought-famine as the cause of displacement. This scene merges a number of historic drought-famine periods into a single visual landscape,

creating, what Fauconnier and Turner would call, a *time* compression in which various periods of time conceptually co-exist within a single composition. Further, the scene consists of an animal skull which is a *part-whole* compression: the skull, the part, being representative of both the entire animal, a whole, and quantities of animals, another whole. In this way, a single element acts as a conceptual reference point to the multiple wholes of which it is a part. Put another way, according to Fauconnier and Turner, the skull conceptually contains these associative wholes. The skull, in context of a drought-famine landscape, is also a *cause-effect* compression: drought and famine *causing* the death of the compressed *part-whole* animals. In other words, one skull becomes representative of many animals that existed at multiple periods of time, all dying because of the same general reason: drought-famine. These multiple conceptual compressions come to co-exist in the skull, and in doing so, 'charges' this visual element with meaning potential. In other words, the skull contains the potential for these multiple compressions to be realised (by an audience) and then cognitively *completed* and *elaborated* into meaningful expressions. The tree stumps and empty cooking pots follow the same logic: combining *part-whole* and *cause-effect* compressions. Together, all of these compressions are further compressed into a single *space* that represents the entire geographic Cabo Verde. In this way, the various related elements, each with their own set of compressions, come to co-exist in a single scene to create the conditions for meaning to emerge as an audience cognitively fills in the gaps towards a consolidated understanding.

In a similar manner, the cacao farming scene, at the back, is representative of the displacement *effect* of drought-famine. This scene merges a number of cacao farms, dispersed over both São Tomé & Príncipe and Guinea Bissau, into a single visual landscape to create a *space* compression. This visual landscape contains a number of *part-whole* compressions: the coffee cup, the bag of cacao, the tools, and the basket, the *parts*, all representative of cacao farming in general, the *whole*. This scene is completed by the Cabo Verdean couple as a combination of *part-whole* and *identity* compressions: the couple, the *parts*, representing, through shared *identity*, the displaced Cabo Verdeans as the *whole*.

Between these two scenes both *time* – different periods of displacement – and *space* – an ocean as a sliver of water – are visually compressed as a condensed body of water that reveal the essential *cause-effect* compression of drought-famines resulting in Cabo Verdeans being displaced to other parts of Africa. The thin strip of water, representative of and thus conceptually containing the vastness of the ocean, is an excellent example of how compression concentrates meaning into a single compact element. As the audience
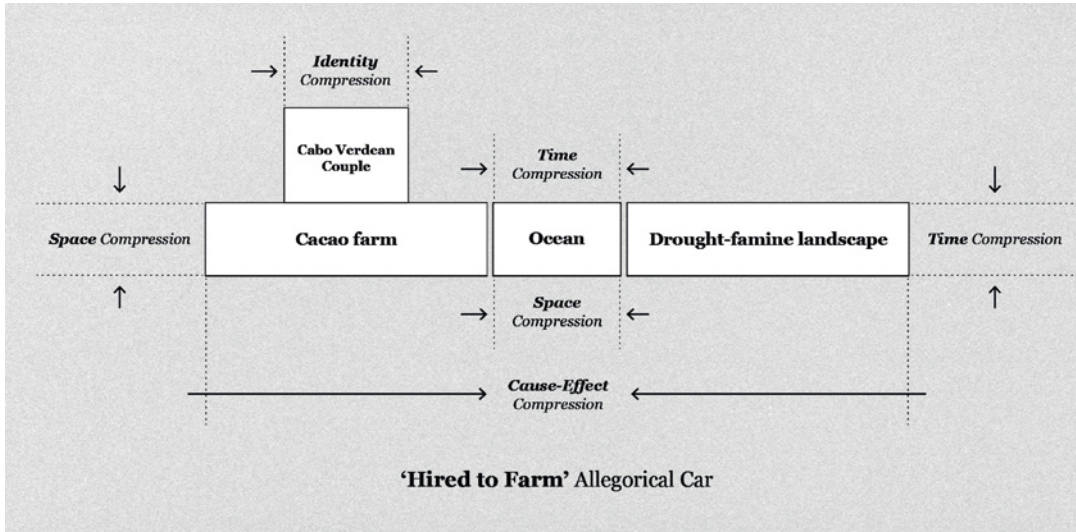
Figure 2. Vital relation compressions in the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car.
Figure by Lodewyk Barkhuizen.

realise the water is the ocean, the distance between the drought-famine and cacao-farming scenes are cognitively expanded. This expansion creates a dissonance between what is seen to be close but known to be far apart. It is this dissonance, held in place by the sliver of water, that creates the essential conceptual tension in the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car. This tension is reliant on all the conceptual compressions contained in the overall composition. Finally, it could be said that it is only the inevitable falling apart of the allegorical car that, in a very material sense, more conclusively releases this tension.

The above describes, through the particular vocabulary of conceptual blending, the presence of multiple conceptual compressions that co-exist in the completed composition and accounts for the thematically-related meaning potential that is contained in the allegorical car as a material artefact. Figure 2 summarises the main compressions relative to the compositional structure of the allegorical car. In terms of blending theory, the material composition of the allegorical car – its physical presence – acts as a *material anchor*: an object in the real world, present in the situation of communication, that is used as a stable reference from which these compressions can be cognitively *completed* – by filling in missing details – and *elaborated* – through personal understandings and interpretations (Oakley, Pascal 2017).

The nuances of conceptual blending aside, what the description of the multiple vital relation compressions illustrate is the conceptual complexity that underlies the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car as a visualised memory. This

complexity accounts for the meaning potential, or meaningful tension, contained in the composition of the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car. To slightly jump ahead, this composition comes into being through the effort of a group of designers and makers who transform the allegorical car from an idea into an artefact. During this process of transformation, the conceptual content becomes entangled with the materiality of the artefact. In other words, both the conceptual content and the material that holds it in place are essential for the allegorical car to function as an expressive device. It is this entanglement that gives the allegorical car meaning by 'charging' the artefact with meaning potential. The interdependence of the conceptual content and the materiality of the artefact is important when considering the role of decay, especially in its expressive capacity. In this case, decay is an essential part of 'releasing' the meaning potential of the allegorical car through the detangling, or decomposition, of concept and material.

Next, I will contextualise the composition of the allegorical car, as discussed above, in terms of the processes that bring it into and out of being.

Behavioural chain, performance characteristics, and decay

Skibo and Schiffer explain that cultural meaning is found both in artefacts and the activities that produce them (2008: 12) and that the social, symbolic, and utilitarian functions of an object are defined by its performances in the activities all along its behavioural chain (2008). The behavioural chain refers to the interconnected life stages of a material artefact and the performances to the interactions that the artefact require, inspire, and thus facilitate. As the emphasis of this article is the expressive capacities of decay, I will start plotting the behavioural chain from there.

The allegorical car is expected to fall apart. In other words, 'falling apart', in terms of Skibo and Schiffer's model, is a performance characteristic of the allegorical car. Seeing that decay sets in as soon as the car joins the parade, it suggests that the allegorical car performs its material demise as part of the public display event. This locates decay as a behavioural capacity that is closely related to other display performances such as the allegorical car performing the function of 'a mobile stage' for the Samba dancers, and also performing the function of 'a material anchor' that visualises the theme. In this way, performing 'decay' becomes intricately connected with the more typically recognised expressive functions of the allegorical car while also suggesting that display and decay are, to some extent, expressions of each other.

Looking at the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car during the parade (photo 1), there seems to be a rather peculiar juxtaposition: samba dancers performing in a drought-famine landscape, seemingly celebrating the displacement

of the Cabo Verdean couple. This discrepancy in emotional tone between the sombre composition and the extravagant celebration can, in my opinion, only be reconciled when decay is added as an essential part of the expression: the decay emphasises the impermanence of the thematic composition, and in doing so re-frames the dancing as a celebration not of the displacement but rather of the release, or 'letting go', of the tensions contained in an emotionally charged shared memory. This is somewhat reflected, more generally, in the *mandinga funeral* on the last day of *Carnaval*, during which the *mandingas*[8] lead the crowd in a celebratory burial procession that mourns both the loss of Cabo Verde's African ancestors and the end of *Carnaval* (Kimeria 2019). In both cases, there is a sense that celebration and mourning co-exist as an expressive pair that, via remembering, facilitates a process of release. This is not to say forgetting, but rather, dissipating the tensions associated to the memory of the event. This goes hand-in-hand with the awareness that *Carnaval* returns again and again to facilitate the perpetual remembering and release of various new and historic tensions. Roger Abrahams (2011) allots this as a central feature of festivals: a means for a group to reflect, through processes of serious play, on their shared past, present, and future. In this sense, the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car facilitates an act of collective remembrance through which the tensions associated to a formative event, enabled by the multiple conceptual compressions in its material composition, are released, or de-compressed. As the audience engages with the compositional cues of the allegorical car's composition they cognitively *complete* and *elaborate* the compressions in various personal ways. This releases, or de-compresses, the meaningful tensions contained in the allegorical car's composition, diffusing the visualised memory through multiple simultaneous overlapping narratives that effectively 'returns' the contents of the formative event to the community. As the content of the composition is returned, so are the materials, making them both, once again, available to be re-configured and re-composed into new and alternative configurations. The perpetual re-configuration of expressive forms, where old and new are continually revised and transformed through multiple divergent and, at times, divergent streams of expression, is what Robert Baron and Ana C. Cara (2011) describes as an essential feature of cultural creativity in *Creole* societies.

Importantly, the de-composition described above requires a material composition. In other words, to de-materialise a shared memory it should first be materialised. This gives rise to a set of related performance characteristics

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8   The *mandingas*, a group of individuals covered in black oil and grease, represent the African heritage of Cabo Verde. The *mandingas* both announce the start and end of *Carnaval* and has become one of the most recognisable elements of *Carnaval Soncent* (Kimeria 2019; Valente 2017)

which include: developing a thematic design, coming together as a group, and constructing the allegorical car. What should be noted here is that the allegorical car is not created and then it happens to fall apart, but rather it is created to fall apart. This is the essential insight that a decay-oriented perspective provides. This insight also suggests that the collective effort of making is aimed at the community and not the artefact. In this way, especially considering that the community is aware of these efforts, the group of makers become embedded in the artefact. Put another way, in the words of conceptual blending, the allegorical car acts as a *material anchor* not only for the conceptual compressions but also for the additional *part-whole*, *cause-effect*, and *identity* compressions that references the group of makers (*parts*) relative to the community (*whole*) to which they belong (*identity*) and on whose behalf they exert these efforts (*cause*) to visualise a shared memory (*effect*).

Described in terms an interplay of functions, the composition phase of the allegorical car's behavioural chain shows how the utilitarian function of materialising the allegorical car gives rise to the social function of bringing a group together to fulfil the symbolic function of making a collective effort to re-make shared formative memories. This extends into the de-composition phase, where the social function of gathering for *Carnaval* day, facilitates the symbolic functions of celebratory remembrance and mourning which results in the utilitarian function of returning the materials which then sets the conditions to re-compose, re-configure and re-make *Carnaval* and thus the community again.

Conclusion

The awareness of the collective effort required to make the allegorical car, the embrace of its material vulnerability, and the awareness of how materials can be 'returned' and 're-used', suggest that the de-materialisation of the allegorical car – its decay – is an essential part of its expression. By considering decay not simply as a material demise, due to a perhaps lacking craft process, but rather as an essential expressive capacity, it becomes possible to re-frame the expressive functions of the allegorical car in terms of a trajectory that moves from construction (composition) to display and decay (decomposition). This more fully accounts for how *Carnaval* is meaningful beyond the display event alone. This extended expressive trajectory also puts the end of one making process in touch with the beginning of another – a 'life stream' – where the artefact decomposes and thus returns its ideas and materials to the community where these ideas and materials can then, once again, be re-used to re-compose new and alternative expressive configurations. It is from this perspective, from the vantage point of an enlarged scale, as Hage (2021) suggests,

that the regenerative function of decay reveals itself and it becomes possible to see how, through the transformative ethos at the heart of *Carnaval*, the making of the allegorical car is always the re-making of shared experiences, memories, and the community.

This illustrates how *Carnaval*, as Richard Schechner (2004; 2013) and Milla Riggio (2004) explains, is a cultural activity that affirms a community. This affirmation, rather than being a fixed expression, is defined by the fluidity and impermanence of memories and materials which can perpetually be re-configured, re-composed, and re-made through the collective efforts of a group. Essential to this re-making, as illustrated by the 'Hired to Farm' allegorical car, is the expressive capacity of decay to facilitate the recall and release of shared experiences and formative events. In this way, decay emphasises the malleability of these forms and highlights the possibility to productively re-shape the past into the present.

Acknowledgements

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Photo by Ülo Valk.

Lagunemise väljendusrikkus Cabo Verde karnevalil. Allegoorilise „Farmitööliste" sõiduki näitel

Resümee

Carnaval Soncent *on karneval, mida tähistatakse Aafrika läänerannikust ligikaudu viiesaja kilomeetri kaugusel asuvate Roheneeme saarte (Cabo Verde) hulka kuuluval São Vicente saarel. Karnevali keskmes on allegoorilised sõidukid, mida valmistavad kohalikud elanikud. Kujundajad ja meistrid võtavad omaks ja isegi tervitavad oma hoolega ehitatud taieste materjalist tingitud vältimatut lagunemist. Artikkel uurib, kuidas taieste hapra materjali ja nende vääramatu lagunemise omaksvõtt moodustab olulise osa teose väljendusvõimest. Kasutades mõisteid „kontseptuaalne kokkusurutus" (Fauconnier, Turner 2003) ja „esitusomadused" (Skibo, Schiffer 2008), analüüsin 2017. aasta* Carnaval Soncent*i „Farmitööliste" allegoorilist sõidukit illustreerimaks selle funktsiooni visualiseeritud mälestusena. Paraadiplatvormi loomise käigus põimub taiese sisuline kontseptsioon materjali omadustega, päädides tähendusrikka pingega, mis hõlmab endas teose vältimatut lagunemist ja selle emotsionaalselt laetud sisu vabanemist. Nii muutuvad teose sisu ja materjalid taas kättesaadavaks, et järgmisel korral taas luua jagatud kogemusi, mälestusi ja kogukonda.*

Võtmesõnad: lagunemine, karneval, Cabo Verde, ese kui protsess, kollektiivne jõupingutus, ringmajandus, kontsreptuaalne kokkusurutus