

MAKING MEANING: MATERIAL CULTURE IN NEW ORLEANS' CARNIVAL

by

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To Cristina, Dan, Jamie, Jenn, María, Marie-Claire, Marlene, Muffin, Ricky, Roberto,  
and Susannah. Thank you for sharing your stories and passion for carnival and Mardi  
Gras with me.

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## **ABSTRACT**

New Orleans' carnival is a rich and complex celebration that people participate in across the city in many different ways. Notably, carnival is characterized by a spectacular display of material culture, which refers to the material things that fill our worlds, such as the stunning, whimsical costumes that people wear. This thesis addresses a gap in the literature by examining material culture in the context of the alternative, walking parades that roll in downtown New Orleans, which are distinct from the better-known large mainstream float parades that roll uptown. These new-wave carnival krewes typically feature elaborate handmade costumes, throws (small items paraders give out to spectators), floats, and other items used to put on krewes' parades, such as puppets or signs. I argue that this subset of material culture and the processes of making it have important meanings for both the makers and the people engaging with them during carnival parades and other events. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork during carnival, digital ethnography, and semi-structured interviews with new-wave krewe members, I focus on three key findings of my research: the meanings of (making) material culture, the social relations involved in its creation and the interactions it frames, and the broader role of the objects themselves. In this way, this thesis explores the significance of object relations to people's social worlds and contributes insights on the role and value of handmaking material culture.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis aims to further anthropologists' understanding of material culture—the objects comprising our material worlds and the resulting system of relationships among people and objects—in the context of New Orleans' carnival, which is a celebration characterized by a sensational material landscape. I explore the meanings of the things created for this celebration and the practices of making them for members of new-wave carnival krewes, who put on the downtown walking parades that typically feature handmade costumes and other items. My research is guided by the following question: *What meanings are produced through the making of material culture by new-wave krewe members for New Orleans' carnival?*

To complete this research, I conducted just under three weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in New Orleans during carnival in 2020, followed by digital ethnography and ten semi-structured, qualitative, object-based, online interviews with eleven new-wave krewe members between June 2020 and January 2021. My findings contribute new insights to two main bodies of literature. I add to scholarship on contemporary carnival practices in New Orleans by offering new understandings of the celebration's material things and the processes of their creation, which has been a less explored topic thus far. I also add to material culture literature by exploring the meanings and importance of the objects people create for carnival and what relations they engender. My research speaks to the value a material culture perspective offers for understanding the relationships between people and objects and how they matter, as well as the role that objects can play in constituting identities. Because social anthropologists strive to expand our understandings of social interactions, relations, and people's ways of being, my project

demonstrates why social anthropologists should pay greater attention to the role of material culture in shaping, expressing, and framing social relations and shaping persons.

This thesis begins with a short chapter describing my research site, New Orleans' carnival, and new-wave carnival krewes. The next chapter outlines the literature that framed my research, Miller's (2010) dialectical theory of material culture and Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell's (2007) approach of "thinking through things," and I state my research question and the three sub-questions that I used to answer it. I discuss my research methods and means of analysis, my participants and their krewes, ethical considerations, and the limitations of my research in chapter four. The following three thematic chapters detail my findings and analysis of the meanings of material culture new-wave krewe members craft and the processes of its creation. First, I investigate how they express and communicate meaningful aspects of their identity through the objects they make for carnival, drawing on Miller's (2010) dialectical theory of material culture. I consider how handmaking their items allows individuals to engage with these parts of themselves in any way they choose.

In the second findings chapter, my research addresses objects' roles in building social ties by exploring the collaborative and social process of making material culture for carnival within new-wave krewes, whose members frequently shared ideas, materials, and crafting knowledge and skills. I also examine how material culture facilitated social interactions between individuals, including strangers, by serving as the interaction's frame. I focus on a particular kind of interaction that carnival's material culture framed called "micro-moments of connection," which are fleeting moments of social encounters that are meaningful and valuable to one or all individuals involved. Finally, I use Henare,

Holbraad, and Wastell's (2007) method of "thinking through things" to consider how new-wave krewe members help create carnival and shape audiences' experiences by making the material culture that frames both their and their krewe's contribution to the celebration. This chapter also explores how objects serve as "vessels of meaning" (Craig 2011) and "technologies of memory" (Layne 2003) that shape and are shaped by the social and cultural scene of carnival that they are involved in. I conclude with a summary of my analysis and research contributions, and I suggest directions for future research.

## Chapter 2: Introducing Carnival and New-Wave Krewes in New Orleans' Public Culture

Mardi Gras [in New Orleans] is like this huge, bright experience that there's just nothing like it anywhere else that I've ever been. (Jenn)

Carnival is a massive celebration in New Orleans, Louisiana. It has a rich and complicated history, dating back to the 1700s, and is characterized by diverse social and cultural practices (Gill 1997). Taking place from January 6<sup>th</sup> until Mardi Gras day, which falls 47 days before Easter, carnival features elaborate parades, costumes, balls, music, food, events, and more. Carnival attracts millions of tourists to New Orleans every year, making it essential to the city's economy, but it is not simply a celebration for tourists. Carnival is woven into the social life of the city for the people of New Orleans; for example, it gets brought up in everyday conversations, shapes the activities and hobbies that people engage in, influences children's play, and sneaks into their classrooms, as making parade floats out of shoeboxes became a school activity. People celebrate and engage with carnival in different ways across the city, creating the many layers that characterize the celebration.

Many carnival activities, including the countless parades put on throughout the season, are hosted by social organizations called krewes. The origin of the word "krewe" dates back to the formation of the first carnival krewe in 1857, the Mistick Krewe of Comus (Gill 1997, 48). While the group was preparing for their first Mardi Gras, one of the founders, John Pope, suggested they name themselves after "Comus and his crew," which was the title of the list of names at the start of John Milton's 1634 poem *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*. Pope played with the spelling of the words, and "krewe" caught on so strongly that it became the generic spelling for carnival organizations (48).

Krewes are responsible for planning, making, and sourcing their group's annual parade and throws—which are small items given out to spectators at parades—as well as organizing other carnival-related activities during the season and throughout the year. The four oldest krewes that emerged from elite men's business interests back in the 1800s are known as old-line krewes (Gill 1997). While two of the old-line krewes no longer parade, the Krewe of Rex maintains its symbolic position as the “king” of carnival and rolls on Mardi Gras day. Since then, many other types of krewes have formed, including massive superkrewes such as the Krewe of Endymion in 1967 and the Krewe of Bacchus in 1968, which parade with more floats and riders than other krewes, and a large and increasing number of krewes that reflect what might be called a “new wave” of carnival practices.

The earliest new-wave krewes date back to the 1960s and 1970s, when they emerged with the countercultural artistic movements of the time. They have been proliferating especially in post-Katrina New Orleans, since 2005. These are typically smaller walking krewes, whereas mainstream krewes will parade riding on floats that they rent or hire designers and float-builders to make. New-wave krewes tend to have much lower dues than mainstream krewes, and they typically parade in downtown New Orleans (which is to say, downriver from the Central Business District) while most mainstream krewes parade uptown (upriver along St. Charles Avenue, an elegant tree-lined street with a wide “neutral ground” (or median) where the streetcar runs). Most new-wave krewe members design and make the objects, throws, and costumes they need for carnival by hand, whereas mainstream krewes will typically have their costumes made for them and will purchase the majority of their throws, with the exception of some

krewe-specific signature throws that might be handmade. New-wave krewe members often start preparing for their parade months in advance of the season, putting in countless hours of work throughout the fall and even earlier to make their throws, costumes, and complete any other necessary tasks, and many people are thinking about what they might do for carnival well before this, too. I use the term “new-wave krewe (members)” to describe this subset of carnival krewes following Martha Radice’s recent and ongoing work with these groups (see Radice 2021).

People can be members of multiple krewes simultaneously or change krewes from year to year. New-wave carnival krewes are often organized in a nested way: an overarching krewe (such as *krewe delusion* or *Krewe Bohème*) gives the name of the parade and organizes logistics like police permits and after-parties, but the parade itself is made up of multiple smaller groups called subkrewes, which are distinct groups that have their own name, theme, and membership (examples include *Krewe de Mayahuel* in *krewe delusion* or *Krewe of Full Bush* in *Bohème*). While subkrewes are independent and add to carnival in their own ways, they do not host their own formal parades during carnival. They do, however, have their own organizational structure, host their own events throughout the year, and decide on their own theme and activities. A handful of new-wave krewes, such as the *Krewe of ‘tit Rəx*, organize their own parade for their krewe alone.

A few studies of New Orleans’ new-wave carnival have been published. For example, Islam, Zyphur, and Boje (2008, 1566) draw on ethnographic research from an organizational studies perspective to see whether carnival has become more of a spectacle as opposed to carnival in its traditional sense of Mikhail Bakhtin’s “carnavalesque,”

which can be described as social commentary on the mainstream through satire and parody. Spectacles reinforce dominant institutions to maintain social order, whereas carnival is intended to challenge the dominant institutions through comedic displays that poke at reality through satire and parody. The authors suggest that a lot of New Orleans' carnival—specifically, the larger mainstream parades—has become more like a spectacle; yet they look at how the activities of a new-wave krewe, the Mystic Krewe of Spermes, revive elements of traditional carnival by engaging in political commentary through the krewe's provocative carnival practices (Islam, Zyphur, and Boje 2008). Wade (2015) investigates how newcomers to New Orleans participate in carnival through cultural exchange with existing practices. He analyzes how white female artists have engaged in cultural borrowing from the North Side Skull and Bones Gang, a traditionally male African American carnival practice, to establish an all-female skull and bones walking krewe called *Skinz n Bonez*. While the women's interpretation of the skeleton in their throws, costumes, and, in the case of the krewe's founder, Claudia "Mardi Claw" Gehrke, the artwork she creates as a professional artist might be seen as celebrating the traditional skull and bones gangs' practices, Wade raises questions about whether this cultural exchange is truly "good-natured borrowing" or cultural theft or appropriation (52). He suggests that their work may "complement and reaffirm" the skull and bones gangs' practices and traditions in ways that respect, celebrate, and pay tribute to them and their deep history rather than displacing, diminishing, or flattening them (53). He also considers how carnival practices are being transformed in order to carve out spaces for new participants and practices that pay homage to their sources while articulating their own political goals.



Carnival practices and operations overall have always been a site of contestation in New Orleans. Both Roach's (1993) and Gill's (1997) texts outline aspects of the complex racial history in Louisiana in which carnival is entangled. Roach (1993) highlights how, rather than being outside of the law as it is often imagined, carnival has been integrated into the law since colonial times. This integrated relationship stems in part from the slavery-regulation act of 1724, the Code Noir, as well as the legislation that built on it over the years. Parts of these laws aimed to regulate the leisure and festive activities of Black people, such as banning slaves from gathering in large groups and from dancing during the night (the Black Codes were later revised in 1855 to permit very restricted, "acceptable" forms of gathering and recreation). Roach points out that the laws made "Afrocentric public culture something for slaves to get away with, a transgressive and even subversive act" (55). Evidence from these times indicates that the French and Spanish regimes could be relatively lax in their enforcement of these laws, partly due to the growing performance culture of the city that centered around carnival festivities. A more recent example of carnival's involvement with the law is the ordinance passed in 1991 by the New Orleans City Council, which aimed to ban discrimination in the oldest parading krewes and desegregate these traditionally white, male, elite organizations. The ordinance was subject to strong debate, and while it was unanimously passed, three of the four old-line krewes discontinued their parading traditions at the time (one began parading again a few years later) rather than subjecting their organizations to the new law (Gill 1997; Roach 1993). These examples demonstrate that carnival is not separate from its social and historical contexts in the city; rather, the practices and meanings that constitute the celebration are woven into the complicated and stratified experiences of

New Orleans and its people.

Moreover, carnival and New Orleans culture overall is filled with an exuberant and distinctive material culture. Wilkie's (2014) archeological study of Mardi Gras beads explores one example of New Orleans' material culture. She explains how objects' meanings both shape and are shaped by a group's practices and values through her discussion of krewe-specific beads and social identity. She explains that people express identity within a particular group through the process of identification, and this is often done through material culture. By throwing beads with a krewe-specific component or symbol on them, krewes can communicate their identity—and particular desired elements of their identity, such as the Krewe of Rex's use of a crown that is purple, green, and gold, which they chose as carnival's official colours in 1872, as a symbol that focuses on their heritage—to the public. Therefore, the act of throwing krewe-specific beads allows krewes to use certain symbols to share desired aspects of their identity with the public. The public's interaction with these throws reaffirms the meanings communicated through the objects as elements of the krewe's identity (Wilkie 2014). Doubloons are another common throw that have been around for decades and typically display krewe-specific information, like the krewe's name, the year, and an image related to the krewe and/or their theme. While doubloons have traditionally been stamped aluminum coins, new-wave krewes often throw printed or engraved wooden nickels, sometimes hand decorated, which align with the recent push for a more environmentally conscious carnival. In this way, the meanings of these objects as a piece of identity can influence the form of the throws that krewe members distribute at parades.

In addition to carnival's elaborate material landscape, remarkable examples of

material culture can be found peppered throughout other seasons and traditions in New Orleans. For example, second line parades are an African American cultural, social, and political practice organized and sponsored by Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, which help to build community in the city's African American neighbourhoods (Regis 1999; Regis 2001; Dinerstein 2009; Lewis, Breunlin, and Regis 2009; Sakakeeny and Birch 2013; Breunlin and Regis 2006). A Club's members lead their annual parade with a hired brass band that plays music for the members to dance to and for the second line, who are the people parading behind the Club. The band serves as "the engine of the second line," and the music they make drives the parade and its participants (Dinerstein 2009, 618). The members of the Club that is hosting the parade embellish themselves in distinctive colours and regalia to match that year's theme. They bear intricate material objects such as banners, fans, umbrellas, and sashes to present themselves and the organization with prestige to the public (Lewis, Breunlin, and Regis 2009). Second lines serve as a powerful tradition for African American communities where participants can visit with one another, dance, celebrate, assert their presence in the city, and build strong community bonds through collective participation (Grams 2013). While the material culture of the Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs is arguably a relatively minor aspect of the second line parade tradition, compared to their music and their claims to the street (Sakakeeny and Birch 2013; Regis 1999), clubs often put great care and attention into their outfits, such as the kind of fabric and colours they choose (Barnes and Breunlin 2014; Nine Times Social and Pleasure Club 2007). Fred Johnson, Jr., a co-founder of the Black Men of Labor Social Aid and Pleasure Club, explains that he is "always concerned about the pageantry of it, and what stands out in the pageantry is color. It all starts with

the fabric. The stronger the fabric is, the stronger the message is because it is the foundation of the parade. Once I get a piece of fabric, I can tell you what that parade is going to look like” (Barnes and Breunlin 2014, 70). Moreover, for their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, he travelled to Ghana to purchase hand-sewn Kente cloth for members’ outfits to help that year “rise above” a normal year. Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs’ material culture is distinctive, and it speaks to material culture as a striking and widespread element of New Orleans public culture.

My research focuses on the significance of carnival’s material culture by exploring the meanings of the objects and their creation that new-wave krewe members make for the celebration. Next, I will outline the material culture perspective that I used to frame this research.

### **Chapter 3: Exploring Material Culture Studies**

This chapter explains the theoretical literature I used to frame my research on the material culture of new-wave carnival krewes. I begin by describing what material culture is, outlining three key takeaways from my review of the literature that informed my approach to this project. I provide an overview of two prominent perspectives regarding the “things” that structure our material worlds: Daniel Miller’s (2008; 2010) dialectical theory of material culture, which provides important insights into understanding people and object relations, and Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell’s (2007) methodological approach of “thinking through things,” which is a means of rethinking anthropological analysis to access new understandings of informants’ worlds through the things encountered in ethnographic settings. While I discuss aspects of these ideas in more detail in the substantive chapters that draw on them, here I combine these perspectives to frame my research and understandings of material culture, arguing that “things” are both a method for eliciting understandings and perspectives that are closely aligned with informants’ realities and a theoretical lens where things serve as the frame for social and cultural relations. I discuss examples that relate to the main themes of the three thematic chapters I present in this thesis, and I conclude by restating the research questions that guided my project. In addition to illustrating why “things” matter, this chapter highlights the value that a material culture perspective offers social anthropologists as a tool for getting at a deeper understanding of human social worlds.

#### **What is material culture?**

Material culture is a dynamic term that can be used in different ways; it can loosely be

described as the object world around us, but scholars have differing views on how to understand and study it (Wilkie 2014). For instance, one arguably more well-known and recognized approach is to follow single “things” as commodities in their journeys around the world from production to consumption. Through this lens, Meneley (2011) analyzes the production and circulation of Palestinian olive oil, highlighting how the experiences of the producers become entangled with the oil and its international circulation.

Consumers purchase the oil partly because it embodies the struggles of the Palestinian farmers and they aim to express solidarity, but they maintain expectations of a high-quality product. This makes it even more difficult for the farmers to produce the oil.

Similarly, Appadurai (1986, 2006) proposes a renewed perspective on commodity circulation in which he argues that commodities, like all things, have social lives.

Commodities are thus not specific kinds of things “but one phase in the life of some things” (1986, 17). They are “things in a certain situation” within the trajectory of their social lives where their “socially relevant feature” is their exchangeability (13).

Appadurai explains that the phases of things are not permanent or static; things can move in and out of the commodity state as well as taking diversions along the paths of their social lives.

Although the commodity lens is a useful avenue for exploring the role of things in modern capitalism, other ways of thinking about material culture help explore the spheres of social ties and cultural meanings rather than economic exchange. Three key themes in the literature have guided my understandings of what material culture is and how the material culture perspective applies to my research.

First, material culture refers to the “object world created by humanity” (Miller

2010, 2)—that is, the things that humans have created to structure our lived environments. This is often discussed as our things, objects, items, or stuff—all of which I use as synonyms in this project. Additionally, material culture is used to think about the system of relations between people and objects. Interacting with the object world is a necessary part of an individual’s everyday life. Because lives are entangled with the object world, material culture studies takes this system of relations as a matter of scholarly concern. Therefore, material culture is also a perspective for thinking about how people and object relations matter and play a role in shaping our relations with others and with ourselves through our interactions with the object world (Miller 2008; 2010). Finally, material culture is a method that involves “thinking through” the objects that constitute participants’ everyday lives in order to consider what meanings and relations get expressed through the objects (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007; Lewis 2018). Overall, objects are a significant part of our daily interactions, and a material culture approach explores how these relations are experienced and have meaning.

### **Miller’s theoretical approach**

Daniel Miller is an anthropologist initially trained in archeology who is responsible for developing one of the key approaches to thinking about material culture. He rejects the semiotic idea that objects are merely representations or symbols of people, relations, and meanings, which he thinks oversimplifies the relationship between persons and things (Miller 2010). Instead, Miller (2010) describes his approach to constructing a theory of things as a dialectical theory of material culture.

Miller’s (2010) theory of material culture draws on Goffman’s frame analysis: frames inform people of what is and is not appropriate behaviour for a particular context.

Miller explains that material culture is the frame through which people actively learn culture and develop their relations—often without really being aware of it. He refers to this quality of objects as the “humility of things”—the objects that are framing our environments seem so familiar to us that they are often taken for granted and go unnoticed. Miller’s theory also draws/depends on Bourdieu’s theory of practice, which argues that people are made characteristic of their societies through their interactions. Individuals learn their habitus, or their subconscious ways of being and doing that are informed by culture, through their interactions, and this includes their interactions with objects. That said, Miller (2010, 53) argues that material culture is the setting in which people “learn how to act appropriately.” In other words, the system of things that people interact with serves as the frame through which they learn their habitus; this, in turn, works to construct people and their ways of being.

Miller’s (2010) theory is dialectical in that people and objects are not distinct but actually work to constitute each other. At the most abstract level, this theory builds on philosopher Fredrich Hegel’s ideas of objectification and self-alienation. Objectification is the process by which the mind objectifies its ideas and reasoning into the external world; these ideas are then manifested as the things that make up our lived environments—anything from cultures to cities to mundane everyday objects. Objectification can be positive since “having more things might provide us with resources that enhance our capacity and experience and understanding” (61). However, the things humans create through objectification can also oppress us. Miller provides an example through his discussion of cars and roads. They have allowed humanity to enhance our experiences, but through the creation of cars and roads we have also created



negative consequences such as pollution and injury or death from car accidents.

We experience and learn from the external world through our interactions with it, which informs and shapes our ways of being. To elaborate, Miller (2010) explains that Simmel drew on Hegel's ideas of objectification to construct a theory of culture. Both culture and material culture, which is a subset of culture, help humans to construct our ways of being by building on existing practices and ideas and creating new ones; this is done when we learn from and experience our cultural and social settings through our interactions with the external world. These interactions can both nurture and harm us, however, which highlights the potential for objects to shape us in different, even divergent ways. Because we typically do not recognize that we have objectified the mind into the external world, humans tend to think of objects as separate from us, and we forget that they are created from ourselves. This self-alienation leads us to believe that subjects and objects are separate, when in fact Hegel's ideas suggest that objects work to create us just as we create them. This reciprocal process, where people create the exterior world through objectification and then are shaped and constructed themselves through their interactions with the external world, is why Miller (2010) refers to his theory as dialectical.

In short, subjects and objects are not distinct but mutually constitutive; they work to create each other. Through objectification, we create culture by externalizing our consciousness into the world. This process leads to self-alienation, where our externalized consciousness is perceived to be separate from subjects. We experience and learn from the external world through our interactions with it, which in turn informs and shapes our ways of being. However, the products of objectification do not have an

inherently good or bad quality about them. The things we create comprise a subset of culture known as material culture. Indeed, Miller (2010, 60) considers “objectification as a process by which we create ourselves.”

To take a New Orleanian example, the late Ronald W. Lewis (Lewis, Breunlin, and Regis 2009) explains how he became a part of the Mardi Gras Indian culture, which is an African American cultural practice that involves making and wearing elaborate, hand-sewn beaded and feathered suits during carnival and on other important holidays, like St. Joseph’s Day. R. Lewis explains that he began by helping others to sew their suits. He writes, “From sewing, you learn how to decorate, you learn how to design, and after a while you become an integral part of the society” (75). In other words, interacting with the object world to create suits with other Mardi Gras Indians became the frame through which R. Lewis learned the Mardi Gras Indian culture. His relations with the material culture of Mardi Gras Indians informed his habitus, helping R. Lewis to integrate himself into the society. In turn, these object relations played a role in shaping him as an individual, following Miller’s (2010) ideas about the mutual constitution of people and objects.

Some scholars have raised critiques of material culture studies that warrant attention. While Miller (2010) explains how material culture is created through processes of objectification that result in the mutual constitution of persons and things, Ingold (2013) critiques material culture studies’ focus on the completed object as it ignores the creative processes that go into making things. Likewise, Hallam and Ingold (2007) explain that ideas are not “isolated” creations in one’s mind (8), but they are grown, shared, and shaped from flowing through a person’s web of relationships. The authors

argue that creativity should be judged by the “improvisations that went into the processes of producing” its results and not the “innovativeness” of the final product (10).

Creativity, which is entangled with the social, cultural, and material world, is therefore “better approached as socially embedded and culturally diffuse than as a clearly defined act or bounded product” (20). As such, Ingold (2013) stresses that the actual process of creating things is fluid and does not simply begin with a concept in the mind that is manifested into the external world, but it is a back-and-forth process that occurs through responses between the external world and ourselves. He calls this process “correspondence,” and it is this relation to the social, cultural, and material world around us and the ways we respond to it that produces both us and the things we create. I combine this idea with Miller’s (2010) dialectical theory of material culture in my findings to better understand the meanings and relations of both the objects new-wave krewe members make and the processes involved in their creation.

### **Methodological perspectives: “Thinking through things”**

Another approach to how scholars have thought about “things” rejects the notion that we can have a theory of things; instead, some scholars argue that things can serve as a valuable methodology. In fact, Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (2007) explicitly set out to consider “things” rather than “material culture.” They ask: “What would an artefact-oriented anthropology look like if it were not about material culture? And could such a project develop...as a means of reconfiguring anthropology’s analytic methods more generally?” (2). Here, I will outline what these authors mean by “thinking through things.” These ideas stem from the ontological turn in anthropology. Anthropological analysis has typically started from the assumption that there is one “world” and multiple

worldviews; however, an ontological lens suggests that we should be critical of this assumption and that these multiple worldviews are indeed different “worlds” (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007).

Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (2007) propose “thinking through things” as a method that seeks to challenge the separation of things and meanings. In other words, they question the traditional anthropological assumption that “meanings attach to things, impose themselves on things, may even be inscribed or embodied in certain things,” but ultimately that meanings are distinct from things (3). Drawing on Marilyn Strathern’s work, Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell explain that this distinction is grounded in an epistemological lens. Within an epistemological frame, anthropologists aim to put things into their social, historical, and cultural contexts by applying our theories and concepts onto other people’s lives and ideas in order to “interpret” their worldview. However, since our concepts reflect our way of knowing, ontology suggests we cannot simply transfer our theories to other perspectives of “the” world: “While [epistemology] seeks to find ways to apply concepts that are already known to unfamiliar instances, [ontology] treats the unfamiliarity of those instances as an occasion to transform concepts, so as to give rise to new ones” (18).

As such, this method requires anthropologists to take things as they emerge in ethnographic encounters seriously. Instead of reworking theoretical perspectives so that “our” sets of knowledge fits informants’ representations of reality, “thinking through things” employs a heuristic, ontological focus where things have meanings before theory and analysis is applied, allowing understandings to emerge from the ethnographic encounter. In other words, analysis of ethnographic experiences is not a matter of

applying theory to data, but allowing things “to dictate the terms of their own analysis” as indications of potentially new theoretical possibilities (4). This is not to say that current theories and concepts are irrelevant; it is to recognize that they may not be sufficient as representations of alternative realities or “worlds.” Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (2007) elaborate: “The point is not that anthropologists might be wrong (or indeed unique) in their predilection for structuring the world according to proverbial ‘binary oppositions,’ but simply that such notions are not universally shared (even within ‘the West’), and therefore may not be particularly useful as a lens through which to view other peoples’ lives and ideas” (4).

To “think through things” requires anthropologists to combine their existing knowledge with the things they encounter during fieldwork in order to see what new understandings may be regarded. As such, “thinking through things” unsettles assumptions about what things are and clears the path for new understandings to emerge.

### **Material culture in practice**

How does a material culture approach play out in practice and why should social anthropologists concern themselves with it? Based on the literature I explored for this project, I argue that there is significant overlap in how scholars have approached material culture that can best be constituted by both theoretical and methodological approaches. That is, when thinking about “things,” it is useful to see them as a method for eliciting understandings and perspectives more closely aligned with informants’ representations of reality in conjunction with a theoretical lens where things serve as the frame through which social and cultural relations take place.

Previous scholars have used material culture as a perspective to explore the

centrality of objects to aspects of people's everyday lives. For example, C. Lewis (2018, 309) draws on Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell's (2007) approach and "follow[ed] the 'things'" to explore how community is made among a group of older women in an East Manchester working-class neighbourhood. She examines how the women sustain social ties and provide support through the exchange of small material items, like money, gifts, and cards. By attending to the important role that material objects had in building the women's social networks, C. Lewis's work highlights how objects served as the frame through which the women could draw on and build their social ties to cope with the precarity of working-class life in a place where community is said to be fragmenting.

Craig's (2011) case study similarly examines how objects serve as meanings that both shape and are shaped by the practices and values of a group's social and cultural dynamics. She describes poetry chapbooks—short booklets of poetry that are either self-published or printed by small presses and typically distributed hand-to-hand—not as distinct from their meanings but *as* meanings that are communicated through the different roles they play in social interactions. Chapbooks contribute to the constitution of poetry communities by generating certain social practices, such as purchasing a handmade chapbook to support the community. This results in chapbooks being "key players" in poetry communities' identity formation. Craig's (2011) work gives further insights on poetry communities while showing how focusing on the object allows us to see the meanings and narratives that it articulates and we would not otherwise see.

Like most aspects of human social and cultural worlds, material culture does not consist of singular, agreed-upon, obvious meanings. Rather, it means many things to many people, who engage with it in many ways, and therefore its meanings can be

contested. For example, Dawkins (2011) explains in her ethnography of crafters and craft markets that the narratives expressed through the city's crafters and their work label Detroit as a "blank canvas" for the "creative class" to remake and transform the city—from a "Motor City" to a "Maker City" (279). However, this creative class consists of predominantly white, middle-class crafters; constructing Detroit as a blank canvas ignores the history of the city and the large African American population that make their lives there. Moreover, at craft markets, white crafters were the unmarked category, whereas "ethnic" crafters' work stood out. White crafters were positioned as individuals, and racialized crafters were positioned as representing some vague group. The idea of an emerging "handmade" Detroit transformed through a predominantly white creative class and creative production constructs boundaries that signal who does and does not belong in the city. Dawkins' work highlights that the things people make and the context in which they produce them are often bound up in a larger web of meanings. As such, she demonstrates how studies of material culture are enmeshed in a similar array of social complexities as studies of other fields of human endeavour.

Social anthropologists are generally interested in thinking about the social relationships that characterize societies; they investigate how people in a society relate to one another and how these relations inform people's ways of being in their given surroundings. Given Miller's (2010) theory of material culture, material culture becomes an important area of concern for anthropologists because social relations can be enacted and expressed through objects, which serve as frames for our social worlds. This does not mean object relations take precedence over other types of relationships. Rather, material culture is a significant component of a person's network of relationships; as the examples

above demonstrate, material culture is therefore a useful approach for learning more about a given social setting.

### **Applying the material culture lens: Research questions**

This chapter explained how a material culture approach in social anthropology aims to understand the system of relations between people and objects. Because objects comprise a significant portion of our daily interactions and engagement with the world, an underlying notion in material culture studies is that objects matter and are worthy of scholarly attention. Another common thread that emerges from the literature is that identities and social relations are partially constituted from people's interactions with and through material culture, which serves as the frame for our social and cultural worlds (Jarman 1998; Miller 2008; Miller 2010; Wilkie 2014). By "thinking through" the objects that constitute informants' everyday lives, social scientists can use material culture as a tool for getting at a deeper understanding of their realities (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007; Lewis 2018; Craig 2011). My research adds to this literature by exploring the meanings of making material culture and the items themselves in relation to New Orleans' carnival, a research site overflowing with a rich and elaborate material culture. My main research question is: *What meanings are produced through the making of material culture by new-wave krewe members for New Orleans' carnival?* I investigated this question through three sub-questions, each corresponding to one of the three thematic chapters that speak to some of the diverse yet overlapping themes of objects' roles in people's lives:

- How are individual krewe members shaped by their relationship to making material culture and the things they create?



- What kinds of social bonds are forged through the making of material culture by new-wave krewe members for New Orleans' carnival?
- What meanings or stories are expressed through the material culture made by new-wave krewe members for carnival?

Before exploring these questions, I will provide an overview of the methods that I used to conduct my research, and I introduce the krewe members who generously shared their things for me to think through and gave their own accounts of their meanings.

## **Chapter 4: Methods**

I used a qualitative approach to address my core research question: *What meanings are produced through the making of material culture by new-wave krewe members for New Orleans' carnival?* My project shifted significantly following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing me to adapt my initial plans. I visited New Orleans in February 2020 to get a sense of the city and experience carnival, and I had originally planned to return that summer to conduct ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with a potential follow-up visit during carnival 2021. I shifted to online, remote fieldwork and interviews to accommodate travel restrictions and prioritize the safety of New Orleanians and myself during the global pandemic. Although I had to adjust my methods, I was still able to collect large amounts of data with the cooperation and generosity of my participants. The following sections describe the methods that guided my project and the methodology behind them, my participants and their krewes, my approach to data analysis, and important ethical considerations and limitations of my research.

### **Semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and digital ethnography**

My research is based on data collected from preliminary fieldwork conducted during carnival in February 2020 and semi-structured, object-based, online qualitative interviews conducted between August 2020 and January 2021. I used Skype to meet with my interviewees, and I recorded high-quality audio using a podcast recording software called Audio Hijack. Interviews are an extremely useful method for getting at participants' experiences of and perspectives on the aspects of the world that the researcher is interested in (Kirby and McKenna 1989; Berg and Lune 2012). Interviews provide participants with the opportunity to identify the issues and elements that are important to

them (Bouma, Ling, and Wilkinson 2016). In the context of my research, interviews allowed me to ask participants questions that get at their perspectives on the meanings of material culture and its creation. Comparing responses across interviews enabled me to search for underlying patterns and themes in the data about the ways that material culture plays a role in participants' lives (see appendix I for my semi-structured interview guide). I asked interviewees a range of questions, including questions about their first Mardi Gras experiences, their krewe, specific items they created, and their attitudes towards and experiences of making things for carnival. I quickly found that interviewees had much to say about their passion for carnival, leading to long stories and responses to questions that sometimes proved challenging, as I had to skip over some questions to prevent interviews from going on for too long. My interviews ranged from one hour and forty minutes/100 minutes to nearly three hours, with the average time being just under two hours. This provided me with an abundance of rich data; I analyzed 768 double-spaced pages of interview transcripts.

I incorporated techniques of object-based interviewing, a method that has been used in material culture research. Miller (2008) used object-based interviewing in his study of objects' roles in people's relationships and self-expression by visiting participants and asking about the different items in their households. I asked respondents to have a couple of items that they made for carnival with them during the interview, which I used like prompts. Woodward (2016) explains that "object interviews tend to elicit people's own accounts of their things" since the interviewee can both touch and see the object. By asking interviewees to "tell me about the item" while they interacted with it, I was able to access narratives and meanings that might not be readily available by

only asking questions. Woodward (2016) refers to this as accessing “anchor narratives,” as memories and relationships can be materialized into a specific object and interacting with the object is a way of reaching that information.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to go to New Orleans in February 2020 to conduct preliminary fieldwork and participant observation during carnival. This allowed me to experience the city and see what carnival and Mardi Gras are like, which was crucial for being able to understand what interviewees told me and ask better informed questions. I participated in several aspects of the celebration, including watching over a dozen parades and catching tons of throws, trying new foods, and creating some initial contacts in the city. I also engaged in several hands-on carnival practices—I immersed myself into the realm of costume making for the first time, and I managed to create three different costumes (see figures 1, 2, and 3). One costume was for joining the crowds in and around the Marigny and French Quarter celebrating together in the streets on Mardi Gras day. The other two costumes were made to wear during the two parades that I walked in—a jacket with hundreds of beans hot-glued to it for the Krewe of Red Beans parade and a headpiece shaped like a pair of buttocks with a face glued onto it to join a group costume for the Box of Wine parade, which Martha Radice was involved in and invited me to join. By attending various events and activities and participating in some of the many layers of carnival and Mardi Gras, I was able to see how enmeshed carnival is into the fabric of city life; I felt the energy and excitement that the season brings for over a million people each year. And, importantly, I glimpsed the diversity of material culture that adorns the city and its people throughout the season.



Figure 1, 2, and 3: My three costumes that I made for Mardi Gras Day (top left, with Dr. Martha Radice), the Box of Wine parade (top right), and the Krewe of Red Beans' parade (bottom, with Sarah Latham (left) and Maddie Fussell (centre). Maddie crafted the hat I am wearing). Figures 1 and 2 from author. Figure 3 by Ryan Hodgson-Rigsbee.

Unfortunately, the global health crisis forced me to cancel my subsequent fieldwork stints where I planned to conduct additional participant observation in the

summer months of 2020 and for the 2021 carnival season in January and February. I incorporated elements of digital ethnography into my project to continue with my research, which Góralaska (2020, 47) describes as “a method used to study societies and cultures in the digital space.” This method allowed me to access my geographically distant study population over social media and explore carnival through what has been put online. Specifically, I used online platforms like Facebook and Instagram to gather information and learn about the krewes that I reached out to, as well as to visualize the groups through their photographs and other content shared online. Dalsgaard (2016) explains that because social media is now integrated into people’s everyday lives, blurring the distinction between participants’ online and offline worlds, Facebook is an important component of anthropologists’ ethnographic work. While my research would have been strengthened through additional fieldwork, digital ethnography served as a useful approach to compensate for this unexpected gap in data collection.

### **Participants and recruitment**

My study population consisted of members of new-wave carnival krewes. As outlined in my discussion of carnival, new-wave krewes often make items for carnival by hand, including costumes, throws, and floats. They thus constitute an ideal population for considering the meanings that material culture and the making of it produces.

Because I did not return to New Orleans to conduct interviews in the summer of 2020 as was originally planned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I made use of krewes’ digital presence to recruit participants online. I searched for new-wave krewes that did not overlap with ones my supervisor, Martha Radice, was involved with, had a younger membership (mid-late twenties and early thirties), featured costumes or creations that

stood out to me, or I found online while conducting digital fieldwork that began in June 2020. I explored new-wave krewes by looking at their social media (Facebook and Instagram), their websites, and reading any online newspaper, magazine, or blog articles I could find about them. I then contacted the krewes over their Facebook pages with an invitation to participate. I also used a snowballing technique to search for individuals in line with my sampling criteria. Bouma, Ling, and Wilkinson (2016) explain that this strategy is useful when the researcher has limited access to their population. Because my access to participants was limited to online platforms, a snowball technique supplemented my online recruitment strategy by serving as a means of accessing participants' existing networks in New Orleans. It was challenging to contact potential interviewees online as some krewes either did not respond or declined due to lack of time to participate. By combining the above recruitment strategies and using a couple of Martha Radice's existing connections in krewes, I conducted ten interviews with eleven participants from five different new-wave krewes (see the list of participant introductions at the end of this chapter on page 44). Interviewees ranged in age from 27 to 55 (three interviewees did not report their age, but I would estimate that they are in their late forties or early fifties), and gender was divided at four men and seven women. Using participants' own categories, three participants are of Mexican origin and one identified himself as "Caucasian Jewish." In the US context, three would probably be racialized as Latinx while eight would be taken as white. Two interviewees are from New Orleans, three are originally from Mexico, and the rest moved to the city from elsewhere in the United States. I reached out to thirteen different krewes online and interviewed members of five: Krewe de Mayahuel, InterrobangP, Krewe of Full Bush, the Intergalactic Krewe of

Chewbacchus, and two interviewees were members of both a Chewbacchus subkrewe and the Krewe of Oak.

### **Introducing the krewes**

Krewe de Mayahuel celebrates Mexican culture and aims to both counter negative stereotypes about Mexican people and educate the public about Mexico and Mexican culture. They formed in 2017 and are named after the Aztec goddess of the agave plant, which is used to make tequila. Mayahuel hosts and participates in a variety of events throughout the year that are typically focused on Mexican traditions and culture. In addition to parading with krewedelusion and the Krewe of Red Beans during carnival, the krewe also organizes a large parade for Day of the Dead on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Mayahuel built three large puppets to feature in their parades: a monarch butterfly, which is a symbol used to represent free migration, the goddess of agave named Mayahuel, and La Catrina, a famous skeleton character originally designed for political satire and critique during the Mexican Revolution (see figure 4).





Figure 4: Krewe de Mayahuel during their 2020 parade, featuring two of their three puppets (monarch butterfly and the goddess Mayahuel). Photo courtesy of Cristina Sanchez.

Interrobang?, founded in 2014, describes themselves on their website as “a wide-eyed question, answered with surprise and delight.” The krewe builds massive, breathtaking floats to roll through the streets like moving art installations. The first float Interrobang debuted during the Chewbacchus parade in 2015 and then on Mardi Gras day in 2016 was named Gilliam the Cloud Whale (see figure 5). Other floats they have created include a spectacular coral reef and Maurice the Galactopus, a giant sea creature with puppetable tentacles (see Interrobang’s website for more information and images of their floats: <https://interrobangnola.org/our-creations/>). Interrobang rolled in the Krewe Bohème parade in its inaugural year, 2019, and in 2020. The krewe also throws elaborate parties and events throughout the year that typically feature music and interactive, immersive art installations.



Figure 5: Gilliam the Cloud Whale. Photo courtesy of Ricky Ostry, copyright Billy Metcalf Photography 2014.

Krewe of Full Bush began as a small friend group with an inside joke; the group would frequently watch their friends' band, Sexual Thunder, perform shows, and they began labelling themselves as their opening act called Full Bush. They decided to form a krewe in the winter of 2016 and first rolled in Chewbacchus. They are now an organized krewe with roughly 50 members. They began parading in 2017 and paraded with Krewe Bohème in 2019 and 2020. As their name indicates, they are themed around celebrating body hair and pubic hair in particular, and their parade themes, costumes, throws, and events are organized around this premise. A band called the Yeastie Boys, who rewrite popular song lyrics to be about pubic hair, has paraded with them each year. One interviewee, Susannah, describes the krewe as “grow-choice” and stated that the krewe stands for body positivity, inclusion, and community. Marie-Claire adds that the krewe

aims “to create a joyful, queer-friendly, progressive, caring, responsible, but—I’m going to repeat the word joyful—but still joyful space for people in New Orleans.”



Figure 6 and 7: Krewe of Full Bush, 2019. Photos from Krewe of Full Bush’s Facebook page.

Chewbacchus is a science fiction and fantasy krewe but welcomes people embracing fandoms of any kind to parade with them. The krewe's name is a play on Star Wars' Chewbacca and Bacchus, a carnival krewe named after the god of wine. Formed in 2010 and growing exponentially since, Chewbacchus's 2020 parade included over 100 subkrewes and around 2,500 paraders (Olander and Goldstein 2020). Chewbacchus's dues are among the lowest of all carnival krewes, and the parade features handmade throws and what they call contraptions (smaller floats that a person pushes or pulls). While Chewbacchus, like Krewe Bohème and krewedelusion, is a large umbrella krewe with many subkrewes, these participants expressed a stronger identity for themselves and their subkrewes to Chewbacchus as a whole than others typically do to their overarching parade krewe. This is why I focus on Chewbacchus here and I do not write specifically about Krewe Bohème or krewedelusion when talking about the other krewes that I interviewed.



Figure 8 (top): Jenn (right) in her costume for the Jayne Austen Book & Gun Club. Centre is their replica of the statue of Jayne from the show Firefly. Photo courtesy of Jenn Coursey, copyright SiB Photography.

Figure 9 (bottom): Chewbacchus's parade. Photo from Marlene Hester's Facebook page, copyright SiB Photography.

### **Data analysis**

My data consisted of transcripts from my ten recorded interviews, notes taken during and after interviews of my initial observations and thoughts, and fieldnotes from my in-person fieldwork in New Orleans in February 2020. I also explored krewe's social media, a New Orleans costume-making podcast, several documentaries, and online news articles for contextual information about carnival and New Orleans. I transcribed my interviews while staying attuned to initial themes that I wanted to further investigate in my analysis, and then conducted multiple rounds of coding the transcripts (see appendix II for a list of codes). Coding is a means for analyzing qualitative data that essentially sorts, labels, and summarizes data into themes and subthemes. This allowed me to manage and interpret my data by reducing it into labelled chunks that I was able to organize and re-organize into various categories, as well as comparing data to construct and identify the overarching themes and patterns that best spoke to my research questions (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Bouma, Ling, and Wilkinson 2016; Spencer et al. 2014; Galman 2013; McGarry and Mannik 2017). I used an inductive coding approach to my analysis, which Bernard (2011) describes as a form of open and exploratory coding where themes and categories emerge from analysis, as opposed to having a set of prior concepts to apply to the data. That said, I used a couple of concepts that came out of reviewing material culture literature to help make sense of my data as well. I took memos throughout the analysis process to document my observations and thoughts, which helped me to link themes and pieces of data together (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Bernard 2011; Silverman 2011). I organized and kept track of my analysis using Scrivener, a

desktop application for writers that can be creatively adapted into a useful tool for qualitative analysis.

### **Ethical considerations**

I followed ethical research guidelines to respect participants' autonomy and protect their privacy and confidentiality. Because I worked with Dr. Martha Radice on her project, I was able to provide participants with two options regarding their privacy and confidentiality. Dr. Radice has partnered with the T. Harry Williams Centre for Oral History at Louisiana State University to contribute interviews to a public archive on carnival practices. My participants had the option to keep their interviews confidential and have their identifying information removed from my results to protect their privacy, or they could choose to have their interview recording and transcript deposited into the archive (see appendix III for the letter of information and consent forms). This opportunity to contribute to a public archive constitutes a direct benefit for participants, one that is distinct from academic knowledge that is often inaccessible to the public at large. All interviewees chose the public option.

My research was classified as a minimal risk project, meaning that the risks or discomforts associated with participating in the project were unlikely to surpass those incurred in day-to-day life. The harms that participants could have experienced included losing a couple of hours of their personal time and potential discomfort during an interview if sensitive or personal topics arose. That said, I mitigated these harms by informing interviewees through the consent form emailed prior to the interview and verbally before starting the interview that they could choose to stop the interview at any point, pass on any questions that they did not want to answer, and withdraw all of their

interview data up until a specified point. Interviewees had the opportunity to review their completed transcript and retract any information that they wanted to remove from the record.

Moreover, another direct benefit that participating offered to interviewees was the opportunity to discuss a topic that they are passionate about, especially since my study population focuses on people who immerse themselves in carnival as krewe members. My experience in the city and discussions with my supervisor suggested that carnival is widely and happily discussed in everyday life in New Orleans, and participating in an interview would provide another platform for participants to talk about a beloved topic. This proved to be true, especially given the interruptions to carnival that the pandemic caused. Ricky said, “I know that you’re doing it for your project, but it’s a good excuse for me to remember the things I love about carnival. Especially because we’re adrift from it this year.” Many participants thanked me for acknowledging their krewe and were excited to share their stories with me. Indirect benefits also included contributing new knowledge to the literature on material culture and carnival.

Informed consent was an ongoing consideration throughout the research, particularly when writing up the research and determining how to represent my participants and the information they shared with me through my writing.

Anthropologists typically set out to perform their research with few expectations of what they will learn; therefore, considering the potential impacts my writing may have on participants, the krewes they are from, and the wider social context of carnival was essential at all stages of the research (Radice 2018a). Moreover, the cancellation of my fieldwork presented me with additional concerns about how to write about my



interviewees and the information they shared with me. Being an outsider to New Orleans and carnival culture, I had originally planned to spend several months in the city conducting participant observation to build a more in-depth understanding of the social milieus of carnival. Turning to remote research after the onset of the pandemic required me to rethink this approach, and I used digital ethnography in order to supplement my loss of in-person fieldwork and for contextual information about carnival and New Orleans, which included immersing myself in krewes' social media, listening to a podcast by prominent costume and float designers in the city, watching documentaries, and reading online news articles. As McGarry and Mannik (2017, 124) explain, writing up anthropological research “involves an act of translation” of research experiences and interactions into words, and I consistently challenged myself to question and think critically about how I represented interviewees in my writing. It is important to acknowledge that as a white, female, 25-year-old Canadian, I am an outsider to New Orleans and its culture. While I remained interested and eager to learn from my participants and experiences in the city and I am confident that I have been able to convey many of the meanings that participants meant to share in interviews, ultimately the perspectives throughout this thesis are my own interpretations, influenced by my positionality and experiences of fieldwork and remote research.

### **Limitations**

My research contends with three limitations: representativeness, online interviewing, and cancelling some of my in-person fieldwork due to COVID-19. First, as with most qualitative data, my findings are not generalizable to or representative of the wider population of New Orleans' carnival participants or to others who make and produce

material culture overall. However, the purpose of focusing on in-depth qualitative interviews is that they allowed me to explore participants' experiences and perspectives of making material culture for carnival and to better understand the meanings interviewees attribute to it (Berg and Lune 2012). Second, I faced a few challenges associated with online interviewing. While I still experienced the benefits of semi-structured interviewing over Skype, the digital platform made it more challenging to read body language as a source of additional information during interviews. During the interview and when transcribing, I relied more heavily on tone of voice for certain cues, such as whether interviewees were excited about their response or story or fatigued with a topic and ready to move on. Technical difficulties, such as poor internet connection causing frozen video streams or broken sound quality, sometimes interrupted the flow of virtual conversations, leading me to ask for frequent clarifications or for interviewees to repeat themselves. Interviewees were very understanding and happily accommodated these requests. Additionally, not being physically present for the object-based portion of the interview prevented me from collecting my own sensory data from handling the object myself. Nor could I take in how their objects were displayed or stored in their home, as I was limited to what was visible through the Skype window. However, this limitation allowed me to ask interviewees to explain the object's materiality to me in greater detail and follow up with very specific questions.

I anticipated that online interviews would impede my ability to build rapport with participants that an in-person connection may have facilitated. While the connections I had with interviewees were more fleeting than the relations I had hoped to build in the field, I found that my participants quickly warmed up to me on our video call and shared

detailed stories and personal thoughts, and I still experienced the kindness of these individuals as well. Several interviewees invited me to stay with them the next time I visit New Orleans, and one woman even generously mailed me a gift to “send a little Mardi Gras” to me since I had to miss the 2021 carnival season. Although my rapport with interviewees may not be as rooted in a longer-term relationship formed over multiple interactions that sustained ethnographic fieldwork may have provided, I still built valuable connections with the New Orleanians I spoke with.

Like the second, my research’s third limitation results from the changes I was forced to make to my project because of the COVID-19 pandemic. I originally planned to conduct over three months of ethnographic fieldwork in New Orleans during the summer of 2020 and then return for carnival in 2021. Not long after COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020, just two weeks after I had returned from my initial visit to New Orleans, it became clear that I needed to reshape my project and cancel my fieldwork. Because of this, my research lacks the in-depth knowledge of interacting with and observing participants within their everyday contexts that anthropologists gain from spending significant time immersed in the field. Moreover, I was unable to further explore and make sense of what I learned in interviews through participant observation. My study therefore focuses on interviewees’ ideas and attitudes surrounding carnival’s material culture, drawing on their accounts of both their experiences with making material culture for carnival and their interactions around these items. I work closely with interview material in my analysis, paraphrasing and quoting extensively (in quotes, ellipses indicate that I have edited out some words for clarity). However, I use my fieldwork during carnival 2020 in parallel with interview data to

provide on-the-ground context, experience, and examples and to inform and expand upon my interview data.

## Participant Introductions

### **Roberto Carrillo** | Krewe de Mayahuel

Originally from Mexico City, Roberto, now in his 50s, moved to New Orleans in 2005 from Philadelphia with his wife, María. He is a founding member of Mayahuel and is actively involved in the krewe and their many activities, which range from their parades for carnival and Day of the Dead to events that promote, integrate, and educate others about Mexican culture in New Orleans. Roberto and María often host krewe-related gatherings at their home.

### **María Rodríguez-Casillas** | Krewe de Mayahuel

Originally from Mexico City, María, now in her late-40s, moved to New Orleans in 2005 after spending a year in Philadelphia with Roberto and wanting warmer weather. She is also a founding and very active member of Mayahuel. She spearheaded the krewe's puppet-making project and learned how to make sugar skulls from a chef in Mexico, which the krewe decorates and sells to fundraise for the krewe (see figure 10).

### **Marlene Hester** | Chewbacchus (*subkrewes*: Mystic Krewe of P.U.E.W.C.; Chew-Bake-Us; Charitable Sisters of the Wook)

From New Jersey, Marlene (55) moved to New Orleans in 2010 after deciding she wanted a change in her life. She had been visiting about once a year for ten years prior to her move, and she felt drawn to the city for the abundance of outlets it offered to her as a very creative and social person. She attended her first Chewbacchus event in July 2012 (an "alien beach party"), paraded with the krewe during Midsummer Mardi Gras, and then joined as a Redshirt (parade escort) the following carnival. She rolled with her first subkrewe, Chew-Bake-Us, in 2014, and has remained a long-term and active member in the krewe.

### **Cristina Sanchez** | Krewe de Mayahuel; Ritmeaux Krewe

From Tampico, Mexico, Cristina (35) moved to New Orleans in 2015 after spending a summer in the city through an AmeriCorps VISTA program in 2008 and getting "hooked." She joined Mayahuel in the summer of 2019. She has always enjoyed doing creative, artistic, "crafty things," which now includes participating in art markets and decorating paper fans, and much of her artwork gravitates around skeletons, which she is proud to say is a part of who she is (see figure 11).

### **Dan Cardillo** | Interrobang?; Box of Wine (Lemonade Parade)

Originally from Connecticut, Dan (30) moved to New Orleans from New York in 2016

and joined Interrobang during the following build season (when they create their floats) in December or January. As a professional musician, he was drawn to New Orleans for the opportunities it presented him, along with the friendly and experience-focused lifestyle of the city. Dan is heavily involved in organizing Interrobang's huge parties, which focus on creating "incredible experiences," as he puts it, typically featuring interactive elements, entertainment, and beautiful, avant-garde art installations. Dan also marches with a couple of friends in the Box of Wine parade as lemonade fairies who give juice boxes out to kids.

**Jennifer Coursey** | Chewbacchus (*subkrewes*: Jayne Austen Book & Gun Club; Charitable Sisters of the Wook (founder))

From Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Jenn (44) moved to California for ten years at nineteen and then to New Orleans in 2005. She was displaced by Hurricane Katrina and ended up living in Chicago, but she settled back in New Orleans in 2012 so she and her son could be near family. She joined Chewbacchus in 2012 or 2013 as a way to make friends with similar interests. The first event she attended with the krewe was Chewbacchus's annual throw swap, and her throws won first place. Jenn has participated in carnival in several ways over the years, including with the Krewe of Nyx and TAP DAT (who rolled in the Krewe of BOO!), and she and her son frequently go to parades together. She even organized a second line parade for her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. Jenn is a very creative person who loves making things, and she enjoys crafting things to give away to people during the parade.

**Muffin & Jamie Bernstein** | Chewbacchus (*subkrewe*: Royal Order of Metatron); Krewe of Oak

Muffin (44) is a native New Orleanian artist whose family has been involved with carnival for generations, and Jamie, also in his 40s, is from West Virginia and moved to New Orleans in 1996 as a writer and musician. The two have been involved with Chewbacchus since its beginning, and they formed their own subkrewe where they dress as aliens riding on a tricycle. They are proud of giving out their homemade and useful throws, such as pencils. They both have been parading with the Krewe of Oak for decades (Muffin, since she was eighteen), and Jamie works at the bar where the krewe is based. Oak organizes Midsummer Mardi Gras in August and a parade during carnival. The krewe's motto is "ours is a conspiracy of fun."

**Susannah Halbrook** | Krewe of Full Bush

Susannah (27) initially moved to New Orleans from Woodinville, Washington in 2011 to start her bachelor's degree and is now working on her PhD at Tulane University. She typically spends her Mardi Gras mornings at the Sainte Anne's parade. Susannah helped

form Full Bush with her friend group, and she participates in organizing the krewe with the “Inner Bush,” which is the group of people who lead and organize Full Bush.

### **Marie-Claire Serou | Krewe of Full Bush**

Marie-Claire (29) was born in New Orleans and has enjoyed participating in carnival throughout her different stages of living in the city. Her family moved to Austin when she was twelve, but she returned to the city for college. She then lived elsewhere for another two years, but she got involved with Full Bush upon her return to New Orleans in the krewe’s second year. She now helps organize the krewe as an “Inner Bush” member. Marie-Claire speaks highly of the culture and community in New Orleans, and as an avid costumer throughout the year, costuming is a huge part of who she is.

### **Richard Ostry | Interrobang?**

Ricky (31) moved to New Orleans in 2011 from Springfield, New Jersey. He has been a member of Interrobang since its inception, and he has been involved in many other creative elements of carnival as well. He parades with some of the “secret” krewes, and as a musician, Ricky is involved with multiple bands and other musicians who play during carnival parades and events and throughout the year, including BateBunda (an Afro-Brazilian street drumming band) and LSD Clownsystem (an LCD Soundsystem cover band that dresses like clowns) (see figure 12). He was also a member of a band that is now separated called TV Pole Shine.



Figure 10: Sugar skulls made and decorated by Krewe de Mayahuel. Photo courtesy of Cristina Sanchez.



Figure 11: Cristina and her artwork. Photo courtesy of Cristina Sanchez.



Figure 12: LSD Clownsystem. Photo courtesy of Ricky Ostry (centre).



## **Chapter 5: Material Culture as Individual Expression and Communication**

This idea that you can make something and spend a lot of time on it...and that be an expression of yourself and an expression of what you find beautiful in the world and a way to celebrate with your friends. I mean when I was presented with that opportunity, it just seemed like a no-brainer. (Ricky)

When explaining why he joined Interrobang, Ricky touched on a key point that speaks to the central theme of this chapter: new-wave krewe members can express some aspect of their identity through the objects they make for carnival, allowing them to engage with and communicate a part of themselves that they deem to be meaningful. Although not all objects that people create for carnival are forms of individual expression, I found that material culture repeatedly served as a way for krewe members to express chosen aspects of their character. Therefore, this chapter explores multiple different examples of how interviewees have used material culture to interact with and share particular ideas, interests, and parts of their identity. I begin by explaining how this occurs through the process of objectification, drawing on Miller's (2010) dialectical theory of material culture and Ingold's (2013) concept of correspondence. In the second section, I describe how creating material culture for carnival serves as a way for individual krewe members to engage with some part of themselves that they consider meaningful. I build on this point to show how these individuals can then use this material culture as a way to communicate this meaningful aspect to other people interacting with their objects by witnessing them during the krewe's parade. Finally, I discuss how making these objects by hand allows individuals to engage with whatever facet of themselves they objectify in their own unique way. I conclude with a summary of these three key findings, including a brief discussion of carnival's significance as the host of the material culture that new-

wave krewe members create. Carnival, the initial reason people are in krewes and put on parades and activities to begin with, provides interviewees with a space to celebrate the parts of themselves that they express through the material culture they craft for their participation.

### **Objectifying and corresponding: How new-wave krewe members make meaning**

Interviewees expressed some part of their identity through the objects they make for carnival. This highlights that material culture serves as an outlet for engaging with and expressing particular aspects of oneself. That is, a person's relationship to the material culture they create by hand is a means of engaging with a particular interest or idea that they consider meaningful. To begin, I draw on Miller's (2010) dialectical theory of material culture and Ingold's (2013) concept of correspondence to explain how interviewees objectify parts of themselves into the external world and manifest them in the items they make. This allows interviewees to interact with parts of themselves through their relationship with the object, which can be seen as a form of correspondence.

The things interviewees make for their carnival participation act as outlets for expressing and engaging with a part of themselves, as krewe members objectify this aspect in the material culture they create. To reiterate, objectification is the process in which the mind extends its ideas into the external world and is a key component of Miller's (2010) dialectical theory of material culture, which holds that people and objects work to constitute each other. These ideas are manifested into our lived environments—in the case of my research, interviewees objectify a part of their person into the objects they make. Their relationship with these items enable them to engage with this part of themselves in the external world and express it through their handcrafted material things.

In the section below, I go on to explain how this allows interviewees to do certain things with the objects—namely, engage with a significant part of their identity and communicate it with others. This process of objectification is highlighted in the way that Dan explained his inspiration for his rock costume (see figure 13) for Interrobang’s 2019 parade, the theme of which was a coral reef park:

I mean my ideas for stuff, they usually start off as jokes and then I realize that there’s legs to them. Like the origin of the rock costume was that I was really tired that year and I didn’t want to parade, so it was like my form of mini-protest that turned into the coolest idea. And it was actually like—not to brag—but a lot of people said it was their favourite costume that year....But it was also me being like a grumpy, old grouchy, like “I’m tired, I don’t want to...I’m being a fucking rock on the bottom of the sea.”...Everyone was being these elegant, beautiful sea creatures, and I thought it would be really funny to just be a fucking rock on the bottom of the ocean...I basically designed a giant rock costume out of papier-mâché and chicken wire and it was grey, and I glued a bunch of barnacles to myself. And then I have holes cut out where my arms [were, and] I could retract into the rock, and...if I saw a little kid for example, I would retract and they'd be like, “oh what's he doing,” and then I would come out and my arms would come out of these holes, and they were like sea snakes. So I had long gloves with eyeballs, and these would be sea snakes, and then I was wearing on my head, I made my crab hat...I would retract and then pop out my little crabby arms and head, and my face was painted red too, so it looked really good.



Figure 13: Dan Cardillo’s rock costume for Interrobang’s 2019 parade. Photo taken from the krewe’s Facebook page: Interrobang? Parading Krewe.

Here, Dan demonstrates how he took his feelings that year and objectified them in the form of a “rock on the bottom of the sea.” Marlene illustrates how she objectifies fandoms and interests that are meaningful to her into costumes that she wears for her Chew-Bake-Us subkrewe: “I have three different aprons within Chew-Bake-Us...I did X-files with X-files fabric for the apron. I did—because I’m a martial artist, I practice Aikido—somebody found ninja cupcake fabric. And I also did Batgirl, which was my first fandom as a four-year-old.” Dan and Marlene offer two different examples of how the material culture participants make for carnival by objectifying some idea or part of themselves serve as outlets for expressing and engaging with this element of their identity—Marlene wears aprons that take on some of her personal interests, and Dan created a costume that embodied his feelings of fatigue that year and produced a costume

that he was really proud of.

However, as Hallam and Ingold (2007) explain, ideas are not simply “spontaneous creations of an isolated mind” (8), but they are grown, shared, and shaped from flowing through a person’s web of relationships: “As it mingles with the world, the mind’s creativity is inseparable from that of the total matrix of relations in which it is embedded and into which it extends” (9). The ideas that participants objectified into their carnival items were shaped through their interactions and relations with the social, cultural, and material world around them, which makes this process of expressing oneself through material culture individuals make for carnival an inherently social process. Therefore, interviewees’ relations with the world around them, including the material world and the objects they create for carnival, in turn contribute to shaping their ideas and notions about the part of themselves they objectified. This further aligns with Miller’s (2010) dialectical theory of material culture, as he states that the ideas we objectify and the things we create work to shape us through our interactions with them. Cristina demonstrates this back-and-forth process when she shares some of the meanings that she has attached to her costume pieces and explains how creating things for Krewe de Mayahuel has encouraged her to reconnect with aspects of her Mexican culture:

I think in my case personally with the krewe, it's been a really good opportunity to kind of like go back and do a little bit more reading on the Feathered Serpent and things that I know about because I grew up with it, but it's just been a minute. And so it's been nice to go back and kind of get back into that, and then I get to share with my family who still live in Mexico and I'll send them pictures and they all think it's just really, really cool.

This highlights how the material culture that Cristina made for her carnival participation not only allows her to express and interact with a part of herself that she considers meaningful in the external world, but also how the ideas that she objectified are not “isolated” but have been shaped by her culture and relationships (Hallam and Ingold 2007).

However, it is also important to address Ingold’s (2013) critique of material culture studies’ focus on the completed object for ignoring the processes that go into making things. When discussing the relation between thinking and making, Ingold argues that anthropology can be used as a tool for better “corresponding” with the world. He claims that anthropology can be thought of as an “art of inquiry,” which he describes as a method of making and thinking where “the conduct of thought” corresponds with “the fluxes and flows of the materials with which we work” (6). Working with this method, he explains, forms a relationship with the world that he calls correspondence.

Correspondence is not about describing or representing the world, but rather responding to it by “open[ing] up our perception to what is going on there so that we, in turn, can respond to it” (7). This idea of correspondence leads to his critique of material culture studies, which is that scholars focus on the things that are made and ignore the creative processes involved in making these items. He explains:

In the study of material culture, the overwhelming focus has been on finished objects and on what happens as they become caught up in the life histories and social interactions of the people who use, consume or treasure them... What is lost... is the creativity of the productive processes that bring the artefacts themselves into being: on the one hand in the generative currents of the materials of

which they are made; on the other in the sensory awareness of practitioners. Thus processes of making appear swallowed up in objects made. (7)

Dan's rock costume, for instance, can be understood as a form of correspondence where the costume he decided to make was a response to his feelings of weariness and withdrawal around the time of his krewe's parade, which in turn were a response to his relationship with the external world during that period. This led him to choose materials and find ways of constructing them that assembled this idea of a "rock on the bottom of the sea." His performance of his costume, which was meant to be "kind of like an anti-costume that turned out to be one of the best costumes," was interactive and playful. Dan corresponded with the world around him as he made and performed his costume, which allowed him to express his feelings of fatigue, while the positive interactions during these processes continued to act upon (respond to) him and shaped how he experienced and perceived of the costume, ultimately re-energizing him.

In order to understand how krewe members express some meaningful part of themselves through the objects they make for carnival, I combine Ingold's (2013) idea of correspondence here with Miller's (2010) dialectical theory of material culture. This allows me to consider the significance of the objects interviewees make without neglecting the creative processes and sensory experiences of making the item. Ingold (2013) stresses that the actual process of creating things is fluid and does not simply begin with a concept in the mind that is manifested into the external world, but is a back-and-forth process that occurs through responses between the external world and ourselves—it is this correspondence with the world, our relation to it and the way we respond to it, that produces both us and the things we create. Miller's (2013) dialectical

theory of material culture holds that the things we make through objectification of our consciousness into the external world also help to make us through our interactions with the world around us. These ideas are complementary, as the ways that we are shaped through our interactions with the world, including material culture and the things that we create, in turn informs how we respond to the world. In other words, if selves are in part shaped through interactions with material culture, then the ways that people correspond with the world around them are also shaped by material culture. Therefore, my research can be thought of as an “art of inquiry” that helps to understand one way that new-wave krewe members correspond with the world—through the meanings and relations that emerge from making material culture for carnival. In the section that follows, I illustrate how interviewees create material culture for their carnival participation that expresses and communicates some meaningful element of themselves. I also explain how handmaking these items enables them to engage with this part of themselves on their own terms and in ways that matter to them.

### **Making and sharing meaning**

Because the individual is creating the material culture themselves, they are able to objectify whatever part of themselves they wish to connect and interact with, meaning that the person can choose something that they assign meaning and value to. New-wave krewe members can use the person-object relationship they create by making material culture for their carnival participation as an avenue for communicating something important about themselves or certain ideas to others, and handmaking the items allows interviewees to accomplish this on their own terms and in whatever way they wish.



*Expressing what is meaningful*

Interviewees objectify some aspect of themselves into the things they create—this allows interviewees to create material culture that reflects their personal interests and values.

Crafting material culture provided interviewees from the Intergalactic Krewe of Chewbacchus with an outlet to express their individual fandoms in ways that they would not normally have. For example, when asked what the objects that she creates represent for her personally, Jenn explained how the costumes, throws, and the making of these things for her particular subkrewe, the Jayne Austen Book & Gun Club (a mashup of Jane Austen and the science fiction show *Firefly*), carve out a space for her to express something that she is passionate about and help to form her individual identity.

It's kind of an identity, because I have this love of this geeky genre of things, and I think in my professional life, if you were to see me at work, you would never think so. You'd think oh there's this lady, no one's even going to notice. So there's like an identity element to it of this is something that's really part of my character and my person, and both the creating and kind of the themes and the elements that you bring into it.

Making things for carnival serves as an outlet for Jenn to engage with fandoms that are important to her, as well as to express her interests through the things that she creates since she does not get to share them in other key spaces of her life. For example, Jenn crafted a gorgeous wig out of repurposed Mardi Gras beads that looks like Princess Leia's hairstyle from *Star Wars* (see figure 14). By objectifying her particular interests into the items she makes, Jenn is able to engage with this part of herself through her relationship with the objects. Marlene explained how she and other Chewbacchus

members “make throws that entertain ourselves as well as we hope they entertain other people. And that means that there’s a lot of diversity in the throws because there’s just a wide range of interest in fandoms in Chewbacchus.”



Figure 14: Jenn wearing her Mardi Gras Princess Leia costume. Photo courtesy of Jenn Coursey.

Moreover, Cristina highlights that the things she makes are meaningful to her because they offer

a way to reconnect, I would say. Because I've officially been living outside of Mexico for about ten years now....I gravitate a lot towards artistic forms that kind of gravitate around skeletons, and kind of like these things that would normally be a little bit morbid or a little bit violent. But it's just so fascinating and I'm very, very proud to say this is a part of me and I want to share more of it, and I think there's more that can be shared and can be taught than just what people see in Hollywood or whatever.

By making things that draw on the importance and meaning of her cultural background, Cristina is able to express and share this important part of herself. Because she left Mexico and now lives in New Orleans, creating things that express her culture provide Cristina with a space to interact with this part of her identity that she did not have before, as well as to connect with other members of Krewe de Mayahuel who share her culture. As such, making things for her krewe participation serves as a way for Cristina to engage with an important and meaningful part of herself by expressing it through the material culture that she creates for Mayahuel's parades and other activities.

#### *Material culture as communication*

As well as expressing some significant part of themselves through their handmade material culture, krewe members can use these objects as a means of communication to others. Not only did interviewees enjoy sharing what they made with their friends and family, but also their objects provided a means of communicating with audiences who witness the material culture individuals and krewes make during their parades. In this sense, material culture serves as a tool for sharing elements of krewes' identity as well as for communicating other important ideas or qualities to others. To illustrate, I will consider how Krewe de Mayahuel members use the costumes and throws they create as a way to connect with their culture and to educate New Orleanians about Mexican culture. Additionally, I will look at how the Krewe of Full Bush uses their costumes to communicate important ideas about body positivity to the public during their carnival parades.

One of Krewe de Mayahuel's main goals is to challenge stereotypes about Mexican culture in New Orleans and educate the public about what their culture actually is. While

describing Mayahuel's history, María explained the krewe's goal in the following way: "We decided to start promoting Mexican culture in New Orleans, and the goal was that the people know us and in that way they respect us and they accept us. That we live here and this is our home, even if we are foreign here. We are immigrants and we want the people to know us better. So that's a goal of Krewe de Mayahuel—let people know us." One major way that the krewe achieves this goal is through the material culture the group makes for their events and parades. By making costumes, throws, puppets, and floats that represent a piece of their culture or history, Mayahuel communicates accurate information about and educates New Orleanians on their Mexican heritage.

Mayahuel's theme, which the members democratically select each year and informs what costumes each person will make for that year's parade, centres around important features of their culture—María stated that "we try always to choose our topic based on our traditions or things that represent us." For example, Roberto explained that Mayahuel's theme for their 2020 parade was focused on the Aztec world and underworld, and their costumes all related to Aztec gods and goddesses. Roberto made a jaguar warrior costume, and María created a costume that mixed an Aztec dancer with La Piedra del Sol, or Aztec calendar, which is a rounded stone that was found to represent the god of the sun, Tonatiuh (see figure 15). The krewe made a pyramid-shaped float that carried a member who stood on the top blowing a conch shell during breaks in the parade. The krewe also marches with giant puppets, including the skeleton figure of La Catrina, that they made during workshops with a professional puppeteer. By depicting these various figures and images through their costumes and incorporating other unique components, such as handmade throws and choreography of Aztec dancing, Krewe de Mayahuel is

able to share these significant pieces of their Mexican culture and identity with the public, which takes in these elements while watching their parade, and educate spectators about particular parts of Mexican history.



Figure 15: María's costume of La Piedra del Sol and Tonatiuh. Photo courtesy of María Rodríguez-Casillas.

When asked about the personal meanings behind the costumes she has created, María explains how this quality of communicating and sharing meaningful parts of herself through her handmade material culture matters to her. Her costumes “represent[] my ancestors, my people, my tribes, so they have that significance that I can show with them to the people [in New Orleans] where I come from. And who are my people and how is my country where I'm from. So yeah, they represent my history, my country.” Not only do her costume pieces express something meaningful about who she is, but also they provide her with a way of sharing her culture and history with others. Additionally,

Cristina's explanation of how she got involved with Mayahuel highlights the other side of material culture as communication—her story shows how she was *communicated to* through the material items that Mayahuel had created that year and the person-object relation that she formed with a throw she received:

Krewe de Mayahuel—I saw them for the first time I think it was three years ago, and I forget what parade it was. I think it was the Halloween one. And they all dressed up like Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. And they had a bed and everything that they were carrying. And I didn't know that they existed. And so I've been here I guess two years at that time. And when I saw them come by, it was like this jolt of nostalgia and emotion because I was like these are my people, like these are my people with this thing that I'm very connected to, and they're a small group but they were all full out in their costumes. And they gave me an Ojo de Dios, which is one of these guys. Just this little . . . It's like a protector, it's supposed to be the eye of God that protects you. And I used to make these when I was a kid, and so they gave me one with the name because it had had the little sticker on it, right, and I had it in my car for like years and years. Well, I still have it. Is it still in my car? Anyway, I had it for like the whole year and I was trying to figure out who they were and how I could get involved with them.

Cristina's story demonstrates how she, as a spectator witnessing the krewe's parade and their material culture, felt connected to the group because they were expressing something that is important and meaningful to her as well. Similar to Craig's (2011) study of how poetry chapbooks exist *as* specific meanings within poetry communities instead of merely representations of meaning, the material culture that Mayahuel

displayed during their parade were in themselves meaningful, communicating the members' Mexican culture to spectators. Cristina connected with the group and formed her own relationship to Mayahuel through the group's handmade things. Her description of the throw she received, an Ojo de Dios (figures 16 and 17), also acted *as* meaning, evoking memories of and emotions from making them during her childhood. In other words, the Ojo de Dios held particular anchor narratives, which are the memories and relationships that are materialized into specific objects (Woodward 2016). Cristina initially accessed these narratives through her interactions with Mayahuel's material culture during the first parade she saw them in. Feeling a sense of connection and nostalgia because of what Mayahuel presented during their parade, Cristina sought out and joined the krewe. Now she participates in their activities, parades, events, and creates objects of her own that express this significant part of her identity, acting as "a way to reconnect," she explains, with her Mexican identity and culture and to share it with other people as well.



Figure 16 and 17: Handmade Ojo de Dios throws from Krewe de Mayahuel. Photos courtesy of Cristina Sanchez.

Another example of the use of material culture as a form of communication can be seen in how Krewe of Full Bush communicates their message of body positivity and acceptance of body hair during their parades. When asked what she thinks their costumes symbolize to the public during their parades, Marie-Claire said, “I think our costumes kind of symbolize that it is cool and sexy to own your body, and make decisions about it that you feel comfortable with. And that it’s fun.” While individual krewe members create their own costumes, each member follows that year’s theme, colour scheme, and is required to wear a “bush” somewhere on their costume. Susannah explains: “we all have to wear bushes, so...there’s a wide variety of bushes that are made for this. Like light up bushes and wigs, and I have one that’s made out of a loofah, and I don’t know just all sorts of stuff that you could form a fake bush around.” Each Full Bush member baring some kind of “bush” helps convey their message of normalizing body hair by subverting the idea that people (particularly women) should not have pubic hair, while the “wide variety” that krewe members present themselves with results in a comedic and playful challenge of the norms surrounding what a “bush” should look like and who can have one. The Krewe of Full Bush’s costumes are another example of how a krewe uses the material culture they create for their parades as a tool to communicate ideas that are important to its members to those who witness their parade.

### *Why handmaking matters*

An important and notable feature of the alternative walking krewes that my interviewees belong to is that they create the things they need for carnival—their costumes, throws,



floats—by hand. As I have illustrated so far, individuals often objectify some part of themselves through these objects, which allows them to express and engage with a meaningful aspect of their identity and to communicate this element with others. What is significant to consider following these points is what role handmaking these items plays and why it matters. Indeed, the act of handmaking the material culture that interviewees create through objectification allows participants the freedom to express this meaningful element however they want and to engage with this aspect in their own ways, whether this is executed through the craftsmanship of one's items or more conceptual inventiveness and creativity. This can be clearly seen in three different instances interviewees relayed to me: Jenn participates in a subkrewe that merges two specific fandoms that she enjoys, Dan discussed how making his costume allowed him to feel like he was embodying the spirit of a Kodama, a film character he loves, and Ricky explained that while costuming is secondary to him, he prefers to make costumes that are “shticks” that he performs, such as his “minty fresh” costume. These examples demonstrate that making things by hand matters because it enables participants to engage with costuming on their own terms and to express some part of themselves through the things they make in whatever way they prefer.

Jenn belongs to the Jayne Austen Book & Gun Club, a subkrewe that marches in Chewbacchus. This krewe combines members' shared interests in Jane Austen novels and the show *Firefly*, which she describes as a show about “space cowboys,” with a main character whose name is Jayne. She describes her krewe in the following way: “we make these Jane Austen period costumes and we wear them with the hat that the character from the show wore, Jayne, he wore like this orange knit cap. And carry nerf guns. And all of

our stuff is kind of this crossover between science fiction and Jane Austen.” In addition to her costume (see figure 18), Jenn makes throws that draw on both of these fandoms; for example, the group gave out custom tea bags at their last parade, and Jenn makes tiny books with a story she writes that merges Firefly and Jane Austen (see figure 19). Making the items for her involvement with the Jayne Austen Book & Gun Club by hand allows Jenn and the other members to express and celebrate these two typically distinct interests in a combined unique way. Handmaking provides Jenn with the opportunity to engage with these interests on her own terms through the material culture that she makes for the krewe’s parade; that is, the act of handmaking her things provides Jenn with the freedom to choose how she wants to interact with her interests. This allows her to express and share them in ways that appeal to her, as opposed to being restricted by what is available for purchase. Additionally, she combines these two seemingly incompatible cultural forms in playful and original ways that convey a kind of carnivalesque absurdity, satirizing science fiction pop culture on one hand and more formal, classic English literature on the other.



Figure 18 and 19: Jenn’s handmade costume (left) and tiny books (right, depicting an image of Jane Austen dressed with the toque and gun the main character from Firefly, Jayne, wears) for the Jayne Austen Book & Gun Club. Photos courtesy of Jenn Coursey.

By making his costumes by hand, Dan explains how he can “embody [...] the spirit of the thing” he is costuming as. He explains that he would not feel this way if he was wearing a store-bought costume. For example, one year Dan made a Kodama costume, which are characters he likes from the film *Princess Mononoke* (directed by Hayao Miyazaki in 1997):

They’re called Kodama. They’re like little guys, and the essence of them is like they’re the spirit of the forest. So if they sense that you are good they will lead you through, and if they sense that you are bad they’ll make you more lost. But they don’t speak and they’re very creepy, and they just kind of hang out in the branches, and they look at you like this, and I just really like them. So I made a Kodama

costume one year, which was supposed to be something totally different but I only had time to make the head. But I made a giant Kodama head, and I would run through the parade, like if I found a tree I would run up ahead and hide in it and just wait until people passed by, and they wouldn't notice. And then they would notice, and be like "oh my god!" And then people who knew what I was would freak out because they also like the character. But I wouldn't talk to anybody because a Kodama doesn't talk. I was embodying the tree spirit.

He goes on to explain that, "I wouldn't feel like that if I was wearing a Party City Iron Man mask" (Party City is a chain store that sells all manner of party supplies, including mass-produced costumes inspired by Marvel, DC, and other film franchises). In other words, Dan stresses that making the costume himself is important for impersonating and "embodying the spirit" of what he is costuming as—handmaking enables him to objectify whatever thing or idea he wants to express through his costume and his feelings around it into the costume he creates, allowing him to embody that thing or idea. Another example is Dan's breakfast costume. He was having trouble thinking of a costume that year, so his friend said to him, "'well you're always talking about breakfast and how much you love breakfast, so why don't you just be breakfast for Mardi Gras?'" Dan described his costume: "I just dressed in a chef's outfit but I Velcroed a bunch of little cereal boxes and toy eggs and shit to myself. Walked around with a bread basket and I would throw the little cereal boxes at people. Happy Mardi Gras!" These examples highlight that creating material culture for carnival by hand is important to Dan's costuming experience, because it allows him to translate any concept he wants into a costume and to feel like he is embodying whatever he expresses through his costume.

Finally, one of Ricky's approaches to costuming further supports the important role that handmaking material culture for carnival holds. He stated that costuming is secondary to him as he focuses on creative expression through some of the many other forms that are possible during carnival, such as music—he has been involved with various bands that throw or perform at parties and events, he is a member of an Afro-Brazilian street drumming band called BateBunda that marches in parades, and he DJs at an outdoor party he and his friends throw on Mardi Gras day. He explained that “usually I spend a lot more time getting my look right for the shows,” as opposed to making individual costumes for occasions like Mardi Gras day. When he does costume, Ricky enjoys making costumes that are “shticks” he can perform to others. For example, he is very proud of his “minty fresh” costume:

I prefer shticks. I like gimmicks. Like one year, I think it was Eris last year, I put the costume together in an hour beforehand and I was so proud of it. I was minty fresh. I wore an all green suit and it said “fresh to death” on the back or something. And I just had pockets full of mints and candies and stuff....And I would just sneak up by friends and be like “hey, you want a little breath freshener?” And they'd be like “what are you talking about?” [I'd be?] like “do you want a piece of gum or something?” And they'd say “sure.” I'd be like “do you want winter greens, spearmint, bubble mint, double mint, whatever,” [laughs] and they'd be like which one and I would know which pocket it was in to give it to them. [Kelly laughs] And I came up with that costume like I said like an hour before, and it was a hit, I was really proud of it.

Ricky's approach to costuming here demonstrates that the significance of handmaking

material culture is not always about the objects specifically but what they allow one to do and how they can be used. Preferring costumes that are “shticks,” he explains that he “like[s] when it’s a performance.” The comedic, clever, and fun experience he created and presented through the minty fresh costume and that was well-received by others is what made him feel proud of the costume, as opposed to the craftsmanship that went into creating the particular items themselves. Moreover, Ricky’s “minty fresh” gimmick plays with tropes in commercials and advertising that we “need” certain products to be successful members society—in this case, that gum creates successful interactions between people by mediating the smell and taste of the body, which should be “fresh.” His performance satirizes this example of how American capitalism commodifies our social world, and a part of the costume’s success was in embodying and making fun of this recognizable “minty fresh” idea. Ricky told me that he loves performing and it is something that defines him, which highlights how his method of costuming as a performance makes sense for him. This other impressive kind of costuming shows that handmaking remains a vital component of how individuals can express themselves in any desired way through material culture, regardless of the varying levels of significance that creators place on the actual making process or aesthetic details of the costume. By putting a costume together that allowed him to perform his minty fresh concept, Ricky was able to have fun, feel proud of his work, and costume on his own terms.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter dove into how making material culture for carnival is meaningful to individual new-wave krewe members because it often serves as an avenue for expressing parts of themselves that they consider valuable and significant. I began by using Miller’s

(2010) dialectical theory of material culture to explain how interviewees objectify this important aspect into the external world in the form of the costumes, throws, and other items they make for their carnival participation. Because ideas are not isolated entities in a person's mind but flow and grow through our systems of relationships (Hallam and Ingold 2007), what individuals make for carnival and the processes of making them are also influenced by the ways interviewees correspond with the world. That is, the characteristics of the material culture interviewees create is shaped by both the maker's web of relationships, including their relationship to the object world and the materials they use to create the items, as well as how the materials interact with the maker (Ingold 2013). I illustrated how interviewees use these objects not only to engage with and express an important part of themselves, but also as a tool for communicating their ideas, interests, and identity elements to others who witness and engage with the items during carnival parades. Finally, I explained how making these items by hand allows interviewees to share certain parts of themselves in ways that matter and make sense for them. By paying attention to these meaningful qualities of the objects interviewees create for carnival, this chapter highlights material culture's important role as a means of corresponding with the world: the objects serve as a way for new-wave krewe members to engage with important pieces of themselves and share these with others, and the processes of handmaking the items provide individuals with the freedom to create material culture that conveys their ideas in whatever way that is most meaningful to the maker.

This chapter speaks more broadly to one element of carnival's importance to people in new-wave krewes. Because interviewees make these items for their carnival

participation, carnival is what hosts these objects and is the initial reason why people are creating them. Carnival is a celebration—and interviewees often referred to it as exactly that. Susannah explains:

It's about celebration...One thing I've always loved about carnival is just that there are different pockets and types of Mardi Gras traditions, and what you do on specific days or how you celebrate, and it totally varies from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, like community to community, but it still just feels like the whole city, no matter how different people are, everyone's celebrating in some way for the same reason at the same time, which is so nice. It feels so good.

Marie-Claire shared, “I think during carnival we celebrate being a community, and then that celebration is so centered around enjoyment and the experience of being a person.” Moreover, while describing how Chewbacchus differs from cosplay, Marlene highlights how carnival can be a stage for celebrating what matters to a krewe or individual: “a lot of us just dress up to celebrate in some ways sci-fi fandom or the principles that probably drew us to sci-fi fandom.” These interviewees and the arguments throughout this chapter speak to just one reason why carnival matters to its revelers. Carnival is a space for individuals to celebrate themselves through making material culture that express meaningful parts of their person. These objects can serve as an outlet for individuals to engage with these particular aspects of themselves, which they may not have had an avenue to do so otherwise. In the next chapter, I shift from focusing on objects' meanings to individual krewe members to exploring the social nature of making material culture for carnival, and I examine objects' capacity to frame interactions between people.



## Chapter 6: The Social Lives of Carnival's Things

I went to Maddie's house Saturday morning before the Endymion parade to spend a couple of hours costuming together, and she helped me make the headpiece for my Mardi Gras costume, the Sun tarot card. She had given me a plastic headband to use as a base before, but I didn't know how to go about making something that looked nice and well-made, let alone functional. I brought over the base piece, fake flowers and leaves, a styrofoam ball for the sun, and the paint and glue gun that Maddie had lent me before. We started with the sun—I had no idea how to make it, but after seeing the more professional headpieces at the costume market, I envisioned using some kind of metal wire sticking above the base piece to have the sun float above my head. Maddie offered a different approach that was much more practical and doable. She used a serrated bread knife to cut the foam ball in half, and then we hot glued it to the front of the plastic headband base. I painted the styrofoam yellow, and then Maddie told me to use the fake flowers and leaves to cover the rest of the headband. I think if I had tried my idea and had it sticking up higher it would have been too top-heavy and would have looked out of place. She showed me how to pop the leaves off of the flower and stem so everything is separated. It was easier to work with and actually glue down, and you could mix and match the leaves and flowers to make the piece more detailed and textured. Maddie advised me that it's good to start with some leaves to cover the base, which I did to make it look more like a garden, and then I picked some flowers to glue onto it. I lined the bottom of the sun with flowers to frame it and glued the big sunflower I found at the dollar store to the back. While we were crafting together, Maddie found a little king cake baby and she asked if I wanted it. It gave me the idea to glue it to the front of my headpiece to be like the child on the tarot card image while adding some New Orleans flavour!

The above vignette is taken from my fieldnotes written in New Orleans during carnival 2020. It outlines the steps I took to create the headpiece for my Mardi Gras day costume—I was a part of a group costume of various tarot cards, and I was the Sun (see figure 20 and 21). Not only was this morning of crafting with my friend Maddie a lot of fun and an important stepping stone for my costume-making skills, but also it encapsulates this chapter's central theme. I found that participants frequently shared ideas, materials, crafting knowledge, and abilities to help each other create the things they

needed for carnival, which illustrates the social nature of making material culture within new-wave krewes. I heard multiple stories of ways that interviewees learned skills and techniques from others that they would then incorporate into their crafting approach. This highlights how making material culture for carnival is a collaborative and social process for these new-wave krewe members, pointing to the important role that social relationships play in the creation of carnival's things. Moreover, I learned that objects people created for carnival facilitated social interactions between individuals, including strangers, by serving as the frame for the interaction to occur through. This can be understood by drawing on Miller's (2010) theory of material culture, which holds that material culture is the frame through which individuals learn culture and social relations take place. This chapter begins by revisiting Miller's theory to explain how material culture frames social interactions and then shifts to a discussion of how the making process within new-wave krewes is often a social affair. I elaborate on how the krewe can hold a valuable position in interviewees' social networks by providing members with a source of relationships and sense of community; making things together is one way that these social bonds are built among members. The third section explores how material culture made for carnival frames social interactions by creating "micro-moments of connection," as Cristina calls them. I describe these encounters as person-object-person relations, and I discuss how these moments can have meaning and value for those involved.



Figure 20 and 21: My Mardi Gras costume depicting the Sun tarot card. On the left are Martha and me all dressed up on Mardi Gras morning. Martha is dressed as the Magician tarot card, featuring the infinity symbol on her hat and carrying the ouroboros (snake eating its tail) and a cardboard “table” with the wand, sword, cup, and coin, all of which were throws from previous parades. Photos from author.

### **A social theory of material culture**

Social relations can take place through material culture, which acts as frames for our social and cultural worlds; moreover, object relations are a significant component of a person’s interactions within their network of relationships (Miller 2008; Miller 2010; Ingold 2013). Because of this, material culture becomes a matter of inherent concern to social anthropologists, who seek to explore and understand how people relate to one another and how these relations inform people’s ways of being in their given surroundings. Therefore, my research investigated how material culture made for carnival takes on a crucial role in krewe members’ social lives. I found that creating things for carnival is a social process that commonly relies on collaboration between members to

create a final product, and crafting together contributes to the social bonds that krewe members form with one another. Additionally, these items served as frames that facilitated interactions to take place between people. Before drawing on examples from my research in the next two sections to explain these points, I outline the framework that I applied to understand and contextualize these findings: Miller's (2010) theory of material culture.

Miller's (2010) theory holds that material culture is the frame through which persons learn culture and that determines the kinds of behaviours and interactions that occur in that particular setting—in other words, it is the setting for our social and cultural lives. Drawing on Goffman's frame analysis, Miller explains that framing informs people of what is and is not appropriate behaviour for a particular context: "Goffman argued that much of our behaviour is cued by expectations, determined by the frames which constitute the context of action" (49). Although frames remain largely unnoticed, they elicit our responses to certain situations as what they are framed to be. Miller describes art as an example—we experience things as art when they are within the frame of being artwork; it is not an inherent quality of the individual thing(s) that distinguishes them as art. When behaviours do not fit the frame of a particular context, they are perceived as inappropriate, which is when we might notice the "expectations [that are] determined by the frames which constitute the context of action" (49). Miller states: "The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully [objects] can determine our expectations, by setting the scene and ensuring appropriate behaviour, without being open to challenge. They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so" (50).

To elaborate on how things inform people's ways of being, Miller (2010) explains how his theory of material culture rests on Bourdieu's theory of practice, which was originally shaped by Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss's theory of structuralism demonstrated that entities do not exist in isolation but exist in relation to the whole. Bourdieu builds on this with his theory of practice, which argues that people are made characteristic of their societies through their interactions with things (again, people do not exist in isolation but are constituted through their relations and interactions with social, cultural, and material environments). Individuals learn their habitus, or their subconscious ways of being and doing that are informed by culture, through their interactions, which includes their interactions with things. Miller explains: "By learning to interact with a whole slew of different material cultures, an individual grows up assuming the norms that we call culture. The child doesn't learn these things as a passive set of categories, but through everyday routines that lead to consistent interaction with things" (53). This is why material culture can be understood as a setting that frames people's identities and ways of engaging with others in various contexts.

An important element of Miller's (2010) theory of material culture is his notion of the humility of things, which helps explain the idea that people are made characteristic of their society through their interactions with its things: objects help people "learn how to act appropriately" while remaining largely unseen and in the periphery (53). He explains that objects "work by being invisible and unremarked upon, a state they usually achieve by being familiar and taken for granted" (50). To reiterate, this capacity of objects to shape us while remaining largely unnoticed is important because Miller argues that "culture comes above all from stuff" (54). The system of things we interact with (he says

it is not necessarily individual things), serving as the frame through which we learn our habitus that informs how we interact with others and the world around us, works to construct persons just as much as persons construct things.

Miller's (2010) theory of material culture applies to my research, as I found that material culture individuals made for carnival played an important role in framing interactions as it often sparked social encounters to take place between people. However, an interesting contrast with Miller's idea of the humility of things arose in my findings. The interactions that this particular system of material culture facilitated did not occur through an environment of objects that went unnoticed or were on the periphery; instead, they took place *because* the objects were striking in some way and became the reason for or prompt of contact between individuals in a very conscious manner. In these situations, those involved were very aware of the things framing the interaction as the objects were central to what the individuals were connecting over or were the primary reason for people to be interacting, such as when a particular object prompts a conversation between people or a parader connects with a spectator to toss a throw to them. As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, objects' ability to frame and produce social interactions even when they are the focus of attention underscores material culture's capacity to contribute to building social bonds between individuals and to provoke meaningful encounters between people. I explore each of these points in turn over the following two sections in order to depict and support the significant contribution that material culture makes to shaping new-wave krewe members' social worlds.

### **Making as a social process**

Speaking with people from multiple krewes, I learned about the variety of approaches

they take to making things for carnival, their ranges of experience and backgrounds in crafting, what kinds of things they liked to make, where they found inspiration, and the amount of time they dedicate to these tasks, to name a few topics. A common thread began to present itself throughout these conversations—creating things for carnival is, in many ways, a social endeavour. My research demonstrated the critical role that social bonds play in the making of material culture within new-wave krewes. Specifically, I found that interviewees frequently shared knowledge, materials, ideas, and skills with one another throughout the making process, and getting together to make things for their krewe was a regular social event. This shows the critical role that social relations play in the creation of material culture for carnival, as well as how the making process helps build social bonds among krewe members.

#### *Sharing ideas, materials, and knowledge*

The making process often relies on a range of contributions from other krewe members—as Ricky summed up, “it’s all just remix.” By sharing ideas about how to make things, what to make, where to look for necessary materials, and so on, interviewees’ stories of the social side of crafting demonstrated that the material culture they make for carnival is shaped by relations among krewe members. Typically, the items had input in some fashion from more than just the individual maker—these objects were created out of a social process in which krewe members contributed to various stages of the item’s creation. One way krewe members shaped the material culture they set out to make was by communicating ideas with each other. Roberto points to this reality when he explains how there is more inspiration and creativity when making with other members. While telling me about the collective making sessions where Mayahuel’s members would get

together and craft, he says,

It's really fun. Because you get ideas from everyone. You get ideas, and sometimes you're blocked and then somebody comes up with "ah, those people sell it," or whatever. Or "I saw those in that," or you get "there is a store there," and "there is a store here," and "they sell those," and then "you can find this," or "you can do this," or "you can do that." There's always a lot more creativity going on when there is more people.

Cristina provided another example when she discussed krewe members' reactions to seeing each other's pieces: "a lot of what people would share ended up being really motivational or inspiring, like: 'Oh, I can make a papier-mâché headpiece.' And then one girl would be like: 'Use a visor.' And I'd be like, 'What?! That is a game-changer. I never would have thought of that.' So you learn these little tips from everybody." Here, Cristina shows how ideas are not only directly shared by relaying tips and tricks to each other, but also by witnessing what others create, which can inspire one's own ideas and new approaches to integrate into their repertoire of crafting abilities. Marlene also touched on this point when I asked her how she finds inspiration for what she makes. She told me about a Chewbacchus crafting Facebook page called Chew Whatcha Wanna (a play on a famous New Orleans song called "Do Whatcha Wanna" by the Rebirth Brass Band (1991) where members post photos of their creations or ask for help and ideas from others who craft for Chewbacchus. Marlene states,

Well, honestly, I get my inspiration from seeing what other people are doing. And that happens a lot; that's why we've got that main crafting page. We share ideas, but I don't see people stealing each other's ideas. I see people—and this certainly happens



to me where I will just see something and it will just flip a switch in my head and I'll think of materials that I use, and it will give me an idea of something that I can do. And that's it, I think by sharing pictures of what we're doing we really continually inspire each other's creativity.

Moreover, I heard multiple stories from interviewees of how krewe members would share materials with each other or act as resources for locating specific materials someone might need. For example, Maria conveyed that "sometimes we share, like for example if a lot of people are going to need feathers, then we buy a big package of feathers and we share. We share the expenses." Cristina demonstrates how krewe members were sometimes crucial to how costumes took shape when she explained how she acquired the piece of wood that she turned into her staff: "The big stick was one of the other members lives near a levee and so she was like 'I could go down and find a giant piece of driftwood if that's what you want,' and I was like 'yes, I would have no idea where to find this thing. Absolutely.'" Through this relation with her krewe member, Cristina was able to obtain the piece of wood that became a central component of her costume (see figure 22). As such, her costume is the result of a collaborative effort and was shaped by contributions that her relationship with other krewe members provided.



Figure 22: Cristina's costume for Krewe de Mayahuel's 2020 parade. Photo courtesy of Cristina Sanchez.

Another important aspect of making as a social process is how krewe members learn from each other and share skills and abilities in order to help others bring their ideas to fruition. Early on in her participation with Chewbacchus, when she was trying to figure out what she could make as throws, Marlene explained how she learned to make throws

out of Perler beads, which are tiny plastic beads that one arranges on a pegboard and then fuses together using a clothing iron.

Well the Perlors, it was just there were a few people early on in Chewbacchus who were making them, and I went to somebody's house and they showed me how to do it, and I immediately caught on and it was like "hm, I'm going to get some more of these and I'm going to play with them."...And then I just played around with some grey and black beads and I made that first smiling alien face and that was my first one. And then I very quickly came up with a couple of 42 designs. But that was it, there were just a couple of people who were playing with them and showed me how to do it.

Since then, Perler bead throws, and specifically magnets with alien faces, 42 designs, and the words "Don't Panic" (the latter two are references to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams (1979)), have become a staple in Marlene's crafting preparation for the Chewbacchus parade each year (she made 835 throws for the 2020 parade!) (see figures 23 and 24). These signature throws of hers stem from initially learning about working with Perler beads from fellow krewe members. Similarly, Dan explained how he relied on the skills of a krewe member who is a professional seamstress to make a piece of his costume. This shows how sharing skills among krewe members can assist in producing a costume that aligns with the maker's vision. Explaining why the beginning of the costume-making process can be overwhelming, Dan says:

I get frustrated because my abilities are not up to my ideas for things a lot of times....I don't always have the tools to create what I'm thinking, and so that gets in my way of [costuming?]....My sea snake gloves were made by [Amanda?], who's

one of our krewe members who’s a professional seamstress, and she designed these perfect sleeves for me in literally ten minutes flat. And I was like this would have taken me so much wasted material and so much time, and I would have fucked it up so bad, and she was just like “oh yeah, how long is your arm? Okay.” She was talking to me while she did it. So yeah, I can’t do stuff like that, so that frustrates me.

While lacking the ability to create things like his sea snake gloves is frustrating for Dan, he adds: “But again, that’s why you’re in a krewe, so you can ask [Amanda?], and she can do that....It’s a whole collective thing. That’s the whole name of the game. You’re there for each other and to make the thing happen.” Dan’s comment sums up the social nature of making material culture for these interviewees—krewe members can serve as resources for ideas, materials, and skill-sharing that shape the material culture individuals make.



Figure 23 and 24: Marlene’s Chewbacchus throws made with Perler beads. Photos taken from Marlene Hester’s Facebook page.

I first experienced the collaborative nature of the making process when I was making my costume for the Box of Wine parade, which takes place on the Sunday afternoon before the Krewe of Bacchus rolls and is a walking parade where paraders carry boxed wine to pour into willing spectators' mouths. I was invited to join Martha and her friends in a group costume called the Secret Order of Assface People or SOAP (see figure 25). We made stuffed buttocks and decorated them to look like faces, and we wore them on our heads like a headband. The following fieldnote excerpt depicts the collaborative effort that yielded the Assface People:

A bunch of us constructed our asses tonight. We sat around Victor and Tim's dining table and tried to figure out how to build them. It became a group effort, all of us trying different things to stuff and wear them. Victor tried cutting up foam to stuff into it and then tie it around his head. Martha tried using the foam to stuff it, and then she stuck the bum onto a piece of cardboard and then taped that piece to a cardboard headband so we could take it on and off easily. This way the ass didn't lose its shape by tying just the foam cheeks around our heads. Janine said she liked this method and we all followed suit to cut them like Martha's. Tim cut strips of cardboard for everyone left. To get the ass to stick to the cardboard, one woman figured out how to sew it to the cardboard, so we all adopted that approach as well. Even though we collectively came up with the same method to follow, people still incorporated their own approaches: stuffing different amounts, sewing them in different ways. All of our headbands were a bit different, and after sewing it the ass-shape turned out a bit different on each one. We took them home to decorate individually, and in the end they all looked hilarious.

During this experience, I had trouble remembering how to sew, which was a central component of how we decided to make the structure of the bottoms. I watched how the person sitting next to me used her needle to pull string through the edges of the structure, and I copied her technique to remind myself of how to do it. Not only was our approach to making the bottoms a result of shared ideas and brainstorming, but also I gained the ability to execute the sewing aspect by observing and learning from another member of our group.



Figure 25: Group photo of the Secret Order of Assface People at the Box of Wine parade. Photo from author.

Combining skills and knowledge also led to krewes creating more advanced and intricate material culture. María and Cristina told me how some members of Mayahuel attended workshops led by a professional puppeteer and learned how to work with papier-mâché. The participants created giant puppets that are now central to the krewe's visual image and presentation (see figure 26). However, Cristina explained how this was

not for everyone, and other members contributed in other ways, such as the carpenter who used his knowledge to build their pyramid float (see figure 27). She highlights how a range of efforts are involved in and are essential to krewes' making processes:

Even if you're not incredibly artistic in the sense that maybe most people think you could be, [...] there's always a way to participate, which is what's nice about the krewes is that there's usually a big project and everybody can participate or jump in in whatever way, or using the skills that they can bring. So if that's like the one who will always go and get the pizza and the drinks, hey that's just as important as doing the papier-mâché because we need a snack. There's just a lot of really cool ways to come together in that way.

Likewise, Ricky explained how the massive floats Interrobang makes are a collective effort that draws on a combination of krewe members' skills and abilities. To make their first float, Gilliam the Cloud Whale (see figure 5), he says, "it was a really great mix of different types of makers and artists that were involved in it, from people who were just good at construction projects to people who were good at lighting design, and people who were just down for all-nighters." Cristina and Ricky demonstrate how a blend of skills and knowledge that members bring to their groups contribute to and inform how the material culture that krewes make for carnival is constructed.



Figure 26: Mayahuel's puppets (left to right: monarch butterfly, the goddess Mayahuel, La Catrina). Photo courtesy of Cristina Sanchez.



Figure 27: Mayahuel's pyramid float. Photo courtesy of Cristina Sanchez.

The above examples all speak to my initial argument: objects typically are not isolated creations but are constituted by a range of contributions from the makers'



interactions with other krewe members. In this way, the process of making material culture for carnival is a collaborative, social undertaking where the network of relations among members contributes to and shapes how objects are created within these new-wave krewes.

*Collective crafting: Building social bonds through making*

For many of the people I spoke with, their krewes also held an important role within their social networks. Their krewes provided these individuals with a sense of community, source of friendships, and connections with people that have similar interests through the bonds they formed within the krewe. One way that I found krewes build social bonds with each other is getting together to craft things for carnival. Roberto shared that his favourite part of making things for carnival is the time spent with others: “I mean I like doing things, but the social part of it is pretty—is my personal best. Getting together with people and meeting new people and sharing ideas. That’s the best part.” When it came to making throws, a regular event was to hang out with other krewe members and create throws together. Full Bush and Mayahuel both work as a krewe to make throws that they then distribute among the members, and Chewbacchus holds an annual throw swap where members trade the throws they made with each other. As such, coming together to make material culture has an important side effect of providing a setting for individuals to build and strengthen bonds with other krewe members.

When I asked Jenn what she gets out of making things with others, she explained that, “usually we’re hanging out and socializing. We’re not always talking about Mardi Gras stuff. We’d be talking about our families and our jobs, and what’s going on, current events. So, you know, just hanging out with each other.” This highlights how crafting

with krewe members also serves as a way to socialize and connect with others.

Interviewees often referred to their krewes as a kind of family or community. For example, Jenn continues to elaborate on her krewe's role in her life:

They are kind of like family. It's funny because we have a group text with probably about six of us that are in the krewe that I have to keep on mute because all the time it starts going off, and I'm at work and my phone's constantly buzzing. And we'll be talking about somebody got a new job, or they went and got a new book and we should all check it out, and it's just like this little kind of ongoing chat that we have. So it's like a great support network of friends....It's a real sense of family and community.

Similarly, Muffin explained how Chewbacchus stayed connected with each other during the social distancing requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic by doing a Sunday happy hour online video call, and before the pandemic the krewe would hold craft nights where "sixty of us would get together and sit there and hot glue all in the same room." She says: "It's nice knowing that you're part of these weird, random, fantastical families." María's discussion of the costume making process in Mayahuel also stresses the important outcome of building social bonds that collective crafting has:

[A] lot of times we get together, like several times prior to the carnival season, to work together, to help each other, to share materials, and so we do workshops. So [...] we get very, very tight because we get together—from let's say October until Mardi Gras—we get together at least twice a month, sometimes every weekend, to work together on things, on our costumes, and so that's a very important part of our costume making, getting together, and [it's just a sense of community].

In addition to providing interviewees with a sense of family and community, krewes can also bring people together who have similar interests that help foster meaningful connections. Mayahuel provides a space for members to enjoy the support and comfort of and spend time with others who share their Mexican culture. Marie-Claire, who said about half of her best friends are krewe members, explained the important role that a group text chat with several close members of Full Bush has for her:

I don't think we hold ourselves accountable, like we're watching each other and judging each other, but through that group text with people who are all in the krewe, we do share volunteer opportunities in the city, calls for direct action, calls for participation in local electoral politics, or things like that....I think I would still be connected to local politics in New Orleans because I care about them, but I definitely hear—we have a network of eyes in different professions sort of looking at...where we need to focus through that, which I really appreciate.

Her connections with other Full Bush members who are interested in local politics and action expand her network of channels to engage in these interests. Jenn, who first moved to New Orleans in 2005 and left after Hurricane Katrina, found her initial experience challenging and lonely. She explained how her relations within Chewbacchus completely changed her experience of the city when she moved back in 2012. She first attended Chewbacchus's throw swap without knowing anyone:

I went in and just started talking to strangers, and that was it. You know we talked about the same stuff, we had similar interests, we all had our own hot glue guns. And so for me, I think the fact that engaging with the krewe is what made my experience here the second time the way I think of it today....I found my people. And I found a

way to make friends and to find people that had similar interests and it made all the difference for me living here the second time around...Now I would say a large part of my social circle and some of my most favourite people are all people that I've met through Mardi Gras.

Jenn's Wookiee Beads were even voted first place during that year's throw swap (see figure 28). She found her people in Chewbacchus, forming connections with others who share similar interests in fandoms and crafting. While there are of course many other ways that new-wave krewe members both form and challenge their relationships with each other during their preparation for and throughout carnival, getting together to create material culture is one important avenue where interviewees build social bonds with other krewe members, who are often valuable relations in their social networks.



Figure 28: Jenn's Wookiee Beads. Photo courtesy of Jenn Coursey.

### **Micro-moments of connection: Objects as frames**

Objects facilitate social interactions between individuals by acting as the frame that sparks these encounters to take place. Interviewees highlighted that it is a common occurrence for strangers to interact through objects they or others have created for carnival, which speaks to the important capacity of material culture to generate social connections during this celebration. In the context of my research, I found that the material culture new-wave krewe members created for carnival was no exception to objects' role in framing social interactions (Miller 2010). Interviewees told me many stories of instances when they connected with someone because of the material culture that framed the situation. In order to capture these kinds of interactions, I follow Cristina and refer to them as “micro-moments of connection.” When discussing the reactions that she has received from the public when wearing her costume, Cristina explained:

So what's really fun is when you're walking down and you're carrying your things or whatever and somebody will shout out “Viva Mexico” or something like that. And you'll turn back and be like “Viva Mexico!” And you're having this super intense moment. And it may be somebody who has nothing to do with that, but they know that much and they know that that's going to connect with you, and then when they get that reaction from you back, it's just—yeah, it's all about those micro-moments of connections which make it really worth it.

Cristina shows that these brief moments of contact between individuals, often strangers, can still be very meaningful to one or both parties. I argue that the micro-moments of connection that material culture facilitates by framing these interactions deserve scholarly attention in order to understand their value. First, I position these interactions within

Miller's (2010) theoretical lens by describing them as person-object-person relations and discussing the contrast they present to his idea of the humility of things. Then, I focus on some key examples of meaningful micro-moments of connection that interviewees relayed to me, demonstrating not only how material culture acts as the setting for these interactions but also that they can encompass memorable and significant moments for a person. Finally, I conclude this section by outlining why these fleeting moments of social interaction matter and are worthy of social anthropologists' attention.

### *Framing while in the spotlight*

Building on Miller's (2010) use of person-object relations, I label interactions that occur through material culture as person-object-person relations. The material culture that spurred the interaction to take place is the source of these micro-moments of connection. In other words, these encounters would not have happened without the object(s) initiating and framing them; they can therefore be understood as person-object-person relations. For example, Marie-Claire explains that part of why she enjoys making things by hand over purchasing them is because of the potential conversations with others that these objects will bring: "it makes you feel really cool to be able to make beautiful things out of nothing. And I mean part of the fun of Mardi Gras is also talking to other people about how you made your costume and where you found everything and what inspired you. And if you just bought it, then that conversation would just be two minutes and nobody would care." The object is a key player in producing certain interactions—in this case, Marie-Claire points to how conversations surrounding costumes with others, including strangers, are common occurrences that are framed by the costume.

Significantly, as she emphasizes, handmaking the costume was important for

framing certain interactions as well. Marie-Claire’s statement above shows how material culture made for carnival provides a frame to engage with others about their costumes, providing the context to talk about making the costume, the skills and interests that went into crafting and inspiring it, and so on. If the costume was purchased, then she said that the “conversation would just be two minutes and nobody would care”—this implies that the appropriate context of the interaction that the costume is framing involves discussions about the handmaking process.

Not only did I find that interactions can occur through material culture, but also my research showed that material culture can still do this framing work while being in the spotlight. As noted, Miller (2010) explained that objects typically work as frames when they go unnoticed, which happens when they are familiar and taken for granted. However, my research displayed a contrast with this quality of material culture that he calls the humility of things. Material culture can still serve as the setting for our social and cultural worlds when it is the foreground of our sensory experience and very apparently colours our surroundings—during carnival, material culture hardly goes unnoticed. In the case of carnival, material culture works as the setting *because* it is visually stimulating and noticeable. This brings me back to the key point of this section—one particular consequence of how material culture frames carnival while being in the spotlight is that it triggers social interactions to take place between people, which can often take the form of micro-moments of connection. The following story of what happened to Marie-Claire and a friend while out for a walk illustrates this key point:

The city kind of rotates around carnival, right. And I think some of that is from the tourism industry and is created to manufacture interest in the city, but I also think that

. . . I mean so many people's lives are like mine or like the girls in this krewe.

Yesterday I was walking around the neighbourhood with one of the girls in the krewe.

And we were walking to catch up because we hadn't seen each other in a while, like masked. As we were walking down the road, this man stopped us and he said "I love your shoes. What size shoe are you?" And I said "oh, I'm a ten." And he said "oh, well my wife recently passed and she has the most amazing shoes, and she's an eight and a half, and I was just thinking—like I've been keeping my eyes out for people wearing amazing shoes just so that I can give them to somebody who would really love them." And [Margaret?] was like "oh, I'm an eight and a half." And so he took us into his house, into his wife's old room, and she had like a wall full of shoes that were designed for Mardi Gras. There were like these satin heels with skulls on them, and short pirate-ish shoes with big buckles and spikes, like every shoe imaginable, and her whole room was decorated with posters from carnival and crazy costumes, all of this stuff. And he told us that she had passed like three months ago and that she had had a stroke, but that her life really revolved around Mardi Gras and riding her motorcycle, and he just wanted to make sure that her stuff went to somebody who would appreciate it. And I just feel like a lot of the city...even when it's not Mardi Gras, you're thinking about it.

This story is a beautiful example of how material culture created for carnival can frame interactions and facilitate connections within the community. Recalling Miller and Parrott's (2009) discussion of divestment, which encompasses how people use and separate from material objects as one way to manage the process of losing a relationship through separation or death, the man wanted to share his wife's shoes with people who



would appreciate them—gifting the shoes to such individuals also creates a kind of afterlife for his wife’s creativity and love of carnival, circulating her memory or spirit through these objects within the community. He looked for people wearing shoes that stood out to him, and he engaged with Marie-Claire and her friend because her shoes caught his attention. The shoes framed the interaction, leading to the man taking them to see his late wife’s Mardi Gras shoe collection and giving pairs to Margaret. By being in the spotlight, Marie-Claire’s shoes triggered this micro-moment of connection to take place.

Marie-Claire’s story also touched on how carnival is a central piece of New Orleans’ culture and is entangled in so many people’s ways of life in the city—“the city kind of rotates around carnival.” An alternative perspective to the contrast I have raised to the humility of things could be that although carnival’s material culture is in the spotlight and not on the periphery, one might argue that because carnival is so central to New Orleans culture, its material culture actually is familiar and taken for granted in the sense that carnival attendees expect to witness this visual feast every year. Interviewees often touched on ways that costuming bleeds into other events and daily life in the city, such as dressing up to go out to events or talking about ideas for costumes. To see someone riding along on a bicycle while costumed is not out of the ordinary in New Orleans. However, this does not negate the fact that material culture frames this context by being in the foreground—by being what others notice, what is asked about, and what draws people’s attention. An important quality of material culture is its ability to frame our social and cultural worlds while being the focus of attention.

Another way material culture facilitates micro-moments of connection between

individuals is as throws during parades. A powerful experience described by many interviewees is when a person in the parade makes eye contact with them and specifically chooses to give them a throw. Jamie describes this phenomenon as a special moment not because of the particular item that you are given but because of the connection with the rider or marcher.

They reach down and bring up like a special stuffed animal or something, and they throw it directly to you and that's a real moment somehow. Like you remember that, like that makes your parade when something like that happens. It's interesting that the stuff creates intrinsic value, but if you see it on the ground, it's not worth as much as if you see that rider and they go down and get something special for you and throw it to you. Then suddenly it's like that thing, you might keep that for a couple of years, where the other stuff like once Mardi Gras is over, you're just like give it all to the Arc<sup>1</sup>, or throw it all in the garbage. But that bear, where you looked at that guy and you guys had a connection and he threw it right to you and you caught it, that's something.

I also experienced this kind of micro-moment of connection through a throw while watching the Krewe of Cleopatra's parade. A float rider made eye contact with me and tried to throw roses to me. He missed the first two times, but on the third attempt I caught them and we both threw our hands up in celebration. I felt seen and special because out of all the people in the crowd around me, he chose me to throw something to, and I was able

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<sup>1</sup> The Arc refers to the Arc of Greater New Orleans (ArcGNO), a non-profit organization that provides assistance to individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. The Arc recycles Mardi Gras beads and other carnival throws, providing jobs to people with intellectual disabilities who sort and prepare the items to be resold (see <https://arcgno.org/> for more information).

to have that micro-moment of connection with him. Jamie explained to me that it is the connection you experience with riders that makes the throw a valuable item—this moment of connection enchants the particular object to take on new meanings and changes it from being a mere mass-produced commodity to become something personal and distinct, shifting the object from its commodity phase to a different stage in its social life (Appadurai 1986). However, this moment of connection would not have occurred if not for the piece of material culture framing the interaction. While Jamie’s story stemmed from watching the bigger float parades, Muffin explained how she experiences this phenomenon while rolling with Chewbacchus and giving throws to people at eye-level, which new-wave walking krewes typically do: “the joyous exchange is really beautiful, and that’s part of the thing about riding on a tricycle and being eye-level with the people and just literally handing it to them. The joy and that exchange of joy, it fills you with something that you just can’t get any other way.” Muffin shows how throws have the potential to frame meaningful micro-moments of connection for both the parader and spectator. While this example of how individuals connect through throws is unique to carnival, it speaks to material culture’s ability to frame meaningful interactions between people, even strangers.

#### *Micro-moments with macro-meanings*

These micro-moments of connection that occur through material culture made for carnival can offer a lot of meaning to individuals, and it is important that scholars do not overlook or discount the value of these moments of fleeting connection with another person. Jenn shared one of these memorable moments with me when explaining that her favourite part of making things is when someone gets excited about her costume because

they recognize what it is and enjoy it, which she said feels really good.

I'm kind of a heavier set person, and when I was in my Viva Darth Vegas costume I wore kind of a showgirl costume, and this woman came running out to me in the street, and she was like "oh my gosh, you look beautiful and you look just like me." And it made her feel so good to see someone that she felt like she identified with that made her feel like she was pretty. And it made me feel good too, but it also clearly meant a lot to her because she ran out into the street, you know. So I love that.

The woman who spoke to Jenn shows how micro-moments of connection can be meaningful to one or all individuals involved. Although they did not know each other, the costume Jenn wore (see figure 29), which incorporated conventionally sexy elements of a showgirl outfit, communicated to the woman that one can have a larger body (not a typical signifier of beauty in North America) and be beautiful, a moment that both made Jenn feel good and seemed to have a very positive impact on the woman who engaged with Jenn. This example also overlaps with a key point I outlined in the previous chapter that material culture can be used to communicate with those witnessing it. While Jenn was not intentionally relaying the particular message the woman received, this example still supports the power of material culture as nonverbal communication. Being within a discipline that seeks to understand different kinds of social relationships and their salience, my research highlights why social anthropologists should pay attention to material culture—it can play a crucial role in creating meaningful interactions that add richness to individuals' social lives in the form of micro-moments of connection.



Figure 29: Jenn's Viva Darth Vegas costume during a Chewbacchus parade. Photo courtesy of Jenn Coursey, copyright The Times-Picayune 2016.

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed the social nature of creating material culture for carnival—I considered how making is a social process and how objects can facilitate meaningful moments of social interaction and connection. I applied Miller's (2010) theory of material culture to make sense of my findings in this chapter, which I revisited in the first section to explain how material culture frames social interactions.

The examples I discussed throughout the second section illustrate how making things for carnival within these new-wave krewes is often a social process. These makers frequently leaned on their fellow krewie members throughout the making process by sharing ideas, materials, knowledge, skills, and abilities with one another. Notably, this collaboration also speaks to a key point in the previous chapter of how material culture

made for carnival is shaped through the makers' numerous interactions with the material, social, and cultural world. In the case of my interviewees, the objects they created are often born out of a web of interactions with others. By drawing on the collaborative efforts of other krewe members while creating their carnival pieces, interviewees spoke to the value and role that relations among krewe members add to the creative processes of making material culture. The social side of making things within these krewes also accentuates how crafting together contributes to the formation of bonds among members, as interviewees shared that getting together to work on their costumes or to craft throws was a common social affair.

Finally, I explored how material culture can frame and initiate social encounters between individuals, often strangers. The things individuals create prompt the interaction to occur, such as someone asking a person about a particular costume piece they are wearing or paraders connecting with spectators while giving them throws. Interestingly, these person-object-person relations present a contrast to Miller's (2010) idea of the humility of things, as I found that this subset of material culture does its framing work by being in the spotlight and the focus of attention, as opposed to going unnoticed. I refer to these encounters as micro-moments of connection after a term that Cristina used. I discussed several instances of micro-moments of connection that interviewees shared with me, demonstrating that despite their fleetingness, these moments can be valuable and meaningful to those involved. This highlights an important contribution material culture makes to adding texture and richness to individuals' social lives by prompting meaningful interactions that would not have occurred otherwise. Next, I attend more

closely to the actual items involved in these processes to investigate the different roles that objects can play in framing carnival and people's experiences of the celebration.

## Chapter 7: Crafting Carnival

I often tell people that [my] first Mardi Gras was very much about witnessing and taking it in and understanding the magic of carnival season. And every subsequent Mardi Gras [was about] feeling like I was trying to give that energy back in a creative way, and all the stuff that I took in, like realizing that a parade is nothing, a parade doesn't exist. It's all about the people in the parade, right. And sort of eating up that idea that any one individual's contribution to the magic of carnival season, especially in New Orleans, is the essence of the entire thing, you know. (Ricky)

This chapter builds on my arguments in the previous two chapters by exploring the more conceptual role played by the material culture that new-wave krewe members make for carnival. In the previous chapter, I used Miller's (2010) theory of material culture to explain how these objects have the crucial responsibility of being the setting for carnival. Without the material culture that frames carnival and decorates its landscape, carnival and Mardi Gras would not exist in the ways they do—without floats or costumes, there would be nothing to marvel at during parades; without throws, there would be nothing to catch; without any of these items, the micro-moments of connection that occur through objects would not happen. I imagine that attending a parade without any one of the categories of objects that structure it would not be nearly as enchanting an experience. Therefore, by making the creative and artistic components that the celebration features, including costumes, throws, floats, music, dance, and so on, people are actually *making carnival*. As Ricky points out above, the essence of carnival stems from the people participating in and contributing to making the celebration happen. Moreover, by making the things that structure this part of carnival, new-wave krewe members are helping produce attendees' experiences of carnival. Not only are they shaping their own experiences by participating in krewes that put in countless hours of work to make their



parades, but also the way that audiences experience carnival depends on the material culture that frames it. While various creative elements contribute to the production of carnival, including music and choreography as well as visual arts, this chapter focuses on how the material culture of new-wave krewes helps make this pocket of carnival, the downtown walking parades, and in turn how it shapes people's experiences of carnival. Without the hard work of those crafting carnival, this valuable celebration would not exist.

Additionally, I use Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell's (2007) methodological approach of "thinking through things" to consider how objects are constructed by taking on particular meanings of a person's carnival experience. I explore how material culture made for carnival shapes and is shaped by the social setting of the celebration, demonstrating how an object can be changed without altering its materiality. This is because objects typically exist *as* meanings and not simply representations (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007; Craig 2011), so material culture can be shaped and reshaped through the social and cultural dynamics of the setting it is involved in. In this sense, material culture made for carnival can act as an extension of a person's carnival experience—a "vessel of meaning" (Craig 2011) that articulates meanings of the instance it was associated with, including interactions involving the objects. Individuals can also construct objects into "technologies of memory," which are used to preserve the meanings and perspectives an individual has of the setting it helped frame (Layne 2003; Lewis 2018). My research supports the value that "thinking through things" can offer anthropologists as a tool for investigating social and cultural phenomena.

### **Making material culture, making carnival**

To begin, I will explain how interviewees' efforts to make material culture is one way these individuals contribute to crafting carnival, drawing on Miller's (2010) theory of material culture. Interviewees placed great importance on putting effort into what they made, because they feel it shows that they care about the experience they are creating. Then, I shift to a discussion of how the things interviewees make for carnival are also making both their and audiences' experiences of the celebration. As Miller tells us, material culture is the setting for our social and cultural worlds; therefore, by making the things that produce their parades, new-wave krewe members are also making the frame that shapes people's carnival experiences.

#### *Making carnival*

In the first substantive chapter, I explained how new-wave krewe members made material culture for carnival through the process of objectification (Miller 2010). This served as an opportunity for them to express aspects of their identity through the objects they created, allowing them to engage with and communicate to spectators a meaningful part of themselves. In the second chapter, I discussed how material culture is the setting for carnival and frames interactions, both among krewe members during the making process and in the form of micro-moments of connection. These chapters both speak to the broader role that new-wave krewe members' crafting efforts have—because of the important ways that material culture structures carnival, by making material culture for their participation, new-wave krewe members are actually *creating carnival*. Without the effort interviewees put into making the costumes they wear in their parades, the throws spectators look forward to catching, the floats, puppets, signs, or any of the pieces they

roll with, new-wave krewes' parades would not exist. Therefore, by crafting the material culture that structures their parades, new-wave krewe members are making a piece of carnival. If, as I have argued, material culture works as the setting for the celebration and the social interactions that occur throughout it (Miller 2010), then it follows that by making material culture for carnival, these new-wave krewe members are helping to make the frame of carnival as a whole. This is why interviewees' efforts to craft material culture for their krewe's parades can be understood as creating carnival.

Many interviewees seemed to acknowledge and understand their important role in making carnival. For example, when I asked Marie-Claire what the costume pieces she made represented for her, she explained: "I think they're deeply connected with my sense of self-esteem, and who I am as an individual and who I am related to other people, like that I am a contributor to a joyful atmosphere but also that I'm part of that, and that I share this love with other people." She costumes for many carnival events and throughout the year, and she sees herself as a "contributor" to multiple facets of the celebration. By making material culture to participate in carnival in any capacity, including as a Full Bush member putting on their parade, as a spectator wearing a handmade costume, or crafting an intricately decorated or whimsical Mardi Gras day costume, Marie-Claire contributes to making a piece of the whole that is carnival. Her costume becomes a part of carnival's setting, working to frame her experiences and interactions and those of the people she encounters.

Marlene also referred to herself as a creator of carnival when she compared her participation as a spectator to being a Chewbacchus member. She said, "it's a much more meaningful experience when you become a part of a parade krewe. Because then you're

making Mardi Gras. We even use that term, ‘time to make Mardi Gras.’ . . . We enjoy so much making costumes and making throws that make people who come to our parade have fun.” Marlene derives meaning and value out of the opportunity to “make Mardi Gras” for people attending Chewbacchus’s parade. Moreover, she points to another common theme that emerged from my interviews. Many interviewees referred to a consensus that dedicating time and effort to create a “good” costume matters because it shows that they care about their contribution to carnival’s landscape and consequently about making a positive experience for those who witness and interact with their material culture. Dan illustrates this norm when he says, “the making stuff in New Orleans, and especially the making of a costume, is everybody. Like that’s the ethos of a lot of people’s . . . it’s just part of the fabric of the thing. Like if you show up in a crappy costume, no one’s going to say anything, but it’s also like [brief pause] there’s a lot of people who put in a lot of effort to them because they really care.” While he seemed to be including all participants of the downtown carnival parade and Mardi Gras scene (krewes, spectators, those costuming for Mardi Gras day, etc.), Dan highlights that putting effort into what one makes indicates that they care about doing their part to produce carnival and a positive experience for themselves and others.

The effort put into creating their pieces was also reflected in interviewees’ ideas of what makes a good and bad costume or throw. For Marlene, “a bad throw in Chewbacchus is a throw that somebody didn’t put any care into or any thought into or didn’t actually make themselves. A good throw is something that somebody put care into, that they made themselves, and that they thought about what it was going to mean to the person who receives it.” Likewise, I asked Cristina why handmaking was important to

her idea of what a good costume was, and she stated: “Because it just shows that you care more and that you spent the time doing it and you didn’t just order it off of Party City.”

Not only is making a costume part of the fun of participating in carnival, but also, putting in the effort to create their items demonstrates that they care about carnival and Mardi Gras as a whole, as well as the experience they are helping to construct by making the material culture that frames the celebration.

Moreover, Ricky explained to me that “carnival is the stage for grand things.” Carnival offers makers an opportunity to create elaborate pieces of material culture that characterize the celebration’s scene. As we have seen, Ricky was involved in making Gilliam the Cloud Whale, Interrobang’s first large float and an impressive work of art in itself. He explains, “The whale...would not exist if Mardi Gras didn’t exist. And there are other places that people are building things like that. All over the world, I mean. Have you seen videos of Rio? That’s insane! [laughs] Of giant puppet festivals all over the world, but this is our excuse to build something huge and be big, be loud.” As “the stage for grand things,” carnival provides a space for people to produce multiple forms of creative expression to participate in and contribute to the celebration, including material culture like Gilliam and individual costumes. Without carnival, things like Gilliam would not exist; however, the experiences of both makers and spectators would not exist without things like the Cloud Whale to frame them. This leads to my next main theme: by making the material culture that creates carnival, interviewees are helping to make people’s experiences of the celebration.

### *Making experiences*

People's interactions with and through carnival's objects shape and inform their experiences of and relationship to carnival. In other words, the objects that are made for and frame carnival help structure individuals' ideas and meanings of the celebration by shaping the experiences they have throughout it. To illustrate this point, I turn to Dan's story of his first visit during Mardi Gras in 2015. Originally from Connecticut, he mentioned this particular moment that solidified his decision to move to New Orleans:

I basically like left the house that I was staying at and I turned the corner, and parked on the corner was this giant whale made of clouds, with all of these hot half-naked people twerking on it, and they were all dressed as angels and there were lights coming out of the whale and sick house music, and it was like stumbling into a fever dream. Like I really didn't know if I was asleep on the couch still or not. And I had already wanted to move, but that was really the moment that crystallized it.

The whale that Dan saw was none other than Interrobang's Gilliam the Cloud Whale. As Ricky explained above, the whale would not exist if it was not for carnival. But as Dan shows, his experience of carnival, as well as the experiences of the krewe members involved in creating it and all those watching and participating in their parade, would not have existed in the same way without the whale. The whale can be understood as one of many pieces of material culture that played a formative role in constructing Dan's relationship to carnival and to New Orleans as a whole. Therefore, new-wave krewe members' crafting work makes carnival in terms of both framing the broader celebration and shaping the experiences that they and their audiences have.

For many interviewees, creating the material culture of their parades or events was a significant piece of their overall carnival experience. It provided them with a space to create things that express meaningful ideas or parts of themselves and to communicate these aspects to others through the things they created, and the making process often served as a valuable social activity. María describes how

the process of making a costume is a very important step toward enjoying carnival. It is a very important—I mean all the process before, all the months that you were creating your idea, building it, are an important part....Okay, one day before Mardi Gras I'm going to buy one, my costume. You don't get to enjoy all that process and all that creation. I mean I think you just miss that part if you just go and buy one. Because it's not...it's all the things that are behind that counts, I think.

Roberto explains that making things “motivates you” because “you look forward to carnival. And because you look forward to carnival, then you look forward to making your costume because you remember that it's coming. So you have to wake up in the morning and start doing that thing because if not, you won't have a nice carnival.” While he said that making things can get overwhelming, he highlights that it is an essential component of how new-wave krewes prepare for carnival. As such, the making process and the things interviewees produce can play an important role in shaping their overall carnival experience.

Marie-Claire's explanation of what she gets out of crafting for carnival shows that while she derives meaning out of the activity and it adds to her personal experience, she also finds meaning in what it allows her to do for others.

I think it's like a sense of joy and whimsy, a feeling of accomplishment, I don't know. I love looking fun. I love the idea of my presence bringing joy to other people, and I think that's why I have crazy dyed hair and wear a lot of colours just in my regular life. I just like the idea that maybe by being somewhere and looking the way that I do, I might remind people not to take things super seriously and have a nice time.

Not only are krewe members' own experiences informed by their processes of making material culture and the kind of items they create, but also the material culture that audiences witness, engage with, and interact through shapes what kind of experiences they have. For example, Jenn discussed people's reactions to receiving her throws during the Chewbacchus parade:

Sometimes people will be like I don't know what this is, but I love it. Or they may not get the quote or the reference, but they're still happy. Or maybe you introduce somebody to something brand new because they look it up. There's a quote on this magnet and they get it and they're like I don't know what this is, and they google it and suddenly they're going to see something they've never seen before.

Jenn highlights how the objects she creates frames and constructs others' experiences—in this instance, the kind of throw she gives someone can expose them to something new. Additionally, person-object-person relations and the micro-moments of connection that can result from interactions through objects rely on people to create the material culture that prompts these encounters to occur in the first place.

By making the material culture that forms this pocket of carnival's landscape, new-wave krewe members are helping to craft carnival and make the frame for people's



experiences of the celebration. While the objects themselves serve as meanings that are shaped by the setting they are involved in, material culture's value also lies in what people can do with and through it. Jenn illustrates this beautifully when describing how carnival is not just about the objects one might receive at parades, but also about the experiences around the objects (the social processes enveloping them).

I would do these beautiful purses [when I rolled in the Nyx parade], and someone stole one off of [the float], you know like reached up and grabbed it off the float because to some people, you get this perspective, or this perception, that the thing is more important, but I think to most of us the experience is what's really more important. Like half the stuff that I catch, I don't care about the stuff, like I'll give it to whomever. It's fun to catch it, you know. It's fun to catch it. It's fun when someone looks at you and you make eye contact and they give you a thing and you're like "they gave that to me." But I think we all get a little frustrated about people who seem like they're really just there for the stuff and they're willing to kind of shoulder you out of the way to get to it. Because they're not getting the true—and I don't think it's just frustrating for us, I think it saddens me that they're not getting the true experience of Mardi Gras, right. Because it's really about being out with your friends, hearing awesome music, like feeling the drums, the bass drums from the bands going by, you can feel them in your chest. Or seeing the Disco Amigos, or the Rolling Elvi, or the Laissez Boys, you know seeing all these really phenomenal krewes, and maybe seeing your friend that's in one of them. That's what's awesome about Mardi Gras. It's not about the beads, it's about everything around that.

In this sense, material culture is what sets the stage for carnival's magic to unfold. However, Jenn points to an interesting tension that different categories of carnival's things present. While material culture frames people's experiences of carnival, Radice (2018b) explains how some researchers and commentators are critical of throws. They argue that throws can work against and detract from spectators' visual enjoyment of parades, as the yearning and effort to catch them pulls audiences' focus away from appreciating and taking in the aesthetic experience that other kinds of material culture offer, such as a parade's costumes or floats. I experienced this kind of throw-focused spectating while watching an afternoon of the large float parades uptown with my friend Maddie. A rider threw glass beads to me, which are smaller and more delicate than the plastic strands and feel more like real jewelry (see figure 30), and a woman we were standing beside told me that those were rare and a good catch. I then became fixated on catching more of these lovely beads; Maddie, who was also excited about them, and I proceeded to go up to the floats as they rolled by and ask if they had any glass beads, and soon she was given some as well. In doing so, however, we were often pressed up against the floats and therefore not able to see what they actually looked like.

While it was easy to get swept up in the addictive game of throws—like Jenn said, catching them really is quite fun—and thereby miss the larger picture of the floats, in walking parades, especially, throws can also work to complement the other kinds of material culture featured. Many interviewees explained who they choose to give their throws to is influenced by the person's level of engagement with and excitement about what they are seeing. Susannah says,

I'll give throws to people that seem super excited in the crowd, are making eye contact with me. Someone that shows some type of increased participation in some way I might give a better throw to. You can tell they're actually appreciating and thinking about costumes that they're seeing and not . . . some people are just like "woo!" the whole time, but someone who is like "wow, look at that, I love your . . . this thing," and taking it all in and really thinking about it, they're engaging at a really high level, you might want to give them something special.

Marlene also explained, "we try to find people in the crowd along the route who look like they want something. People who have dressed up. Some people will hold up signs....[Sometimes people] try to make meaningful eye contact." Although this was not always interviewees' approach to giving out throws, the point remains that different categories of material culture creating carnival can both work together and against each other in how they frame a person's experience.



Figure 30: Strands of glass beads. Photo from author.

### **Thinking through carnival's things**

This section draws on Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell's (2007) methodological approach of "thinking through things" to investigate material culture's role in articulating meanings for new-wave krewe members. Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell challenge the separation of things and meanings, arguing that they should be taken as one: "meanings are not 'carried' by things but just *are identical* to them" (3-4). In this sense, they argue that the things one encounters in ethnographic settings should be taken seriously—the method allows the things to articulate their own meanings and "to dictate the terms of their own analysis" (4), offering a more heuristic way of exploring informants' understandings of the world through the theoretical possibilities things themselves may present. Indeed, the authors describe that the method's aim is "to take 'things' encountered in the field as they present themselves, rather than immediately assuming that they signify, represent, or stand for something else" (4). Lewis (2018, 297) used this approach of "thinking through things" to explore how objects create and sustain relationships among a group of older women in a working-class East Manchester neighbourhood. She thought through the things to determine how to examine them according to the meanings they conveyed for her informants. The women exchanged small objects, such as cards, gifts, and money, to draw on and maintain this informal network of support and help each other cope with the precariousness of their lives.

By thinking through the things I encountered in my fieldwork and that interviewees chose to share with me, I was able to examine how material culture made for carnival is constituted and articulates meaning for these new-wave krewe members. I begin by exploring how objects act as "vessels of meaning" that shape and are shaped by

the social and cultural settings and interactions they are involved in (Craig 2011). I examine how material culture can be moulded in varying ways without altering its materiality—while objects are not distinct from their meanings (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007), I found that their meanings can change depending on the scene they participate in. Moreover, I consider how participants use material culture as “technologies of memory” (Layne 2003) that communicate the meanings and perspectives an individual has of the setting it helped frame (Miller 2010). As such, my research supports the value and possibilities that “thinking through things” presents to anthropologists as a tool for better understanding social and cultural phenomena from the perspectives of our informants.

#### *Objects as vessels of meaning*

Writing about poetry chapbooks, Craig (2011) considers how some objects can be vessels of meaning—the meanings of the material object itself and the practices and interactions it generates—rather than vessels *for* meaning, which refers to objects as “mere packaging for the meanings we ascribe to them” (47). That is, she “examine[s] chapbooks for their object status, rather than their status as textual representations” (49). She explores how chapbooks participate in social interactions and help produce the social and cultural context they are involved in (the subculture of contemporary poetry communities). Chapbooks perform important functions through their creation and circulation, acting as “key players” in how poetry communities produce and maintain their identities, values, and practices as a community. In this sense, objects can play important roles in social interactions by helping to produce the meanings of the interaction, as opposed to simply representing or reflecting them (Craig 2011; Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007).

Similarly, objects created for carnival participate in shaping and are shaped by the social and cultural dynamics of carnival, such as the interactions spurred by conversations about one's costume or the practice of catching throws. These objects work as “vessels of meaning” that contribute to shaping people's experiences of the parades and events they attend, and in turn, the objects' meanings are shaped by the interactions and practices they engender.

For example, Jenn made a gorgeous Mardi Gras Leia costume featuring a bead wig crafted out of recycled Mardi Gras items, including beads, toilet plungers (Krewe of Tucks throws), and ribbon (see figure 31). She shared that it is her “pride and joy piece,” made for her first year of parading with Chewbacchus and worn for Mardi Gras since then. This costume piece consists of important meanings for Jenn, shaped through the interactions and experiences it has been involved in that it also contributed to producing, making the wig into an object she highly values. She shared, “I mean it's just [made using] a glue gun, but I am very proud of it. I loaned it to a friend once to wear, and I was so nervous, I was so worried that something was going to happen. But it was [fine?]. She brought it back intact....And then I was like I'm not going to loan it out again, because that made me really nervous because I love it....Like I'd loan you my car, but I don't know about this.”



Figure 31: Jenn wearing her Mardi Gras Leia costume in a Chewbacchus parade. Photo courtesy of Jenn Coursey. Watermark: EnigmaArts.com.

An object's meanings are not static, either—its meanings for one individual can also shift without any alterations in the physical object's materiality or form, reminiscent of Appadurai's (1986) assertion that things can move through different phases in their own social lives. While an object may initially mean one thing to a particular person, what takes place within the setting a particular object helps frame can change the object's meanings. That is, while material culture helps produce the social and cultural dynamics surrounding the object (Craig 2011), the object can also be *reshaped* as a vessel of new, even conflicting, meanings through how the context it is involved in unfolds. Muffin describes how her person-object relation with the purses she decorated to throw during the Krewe of Nyx 2020 parade (lavishly decorated purses are their signature throw) changed following the events that took place during carnival and later that year.

So I unfortunately rode in Nyx part of the way this year, and it changed my feelings and everything. The Krewe of Nyx had a fatal accident about ten floats in front of mine. And we made it four blocks onto Magazine and I still have four

purses that are sitting on my table that after the controversy that our captain created by not acknowledging Black Lives Matter. I pretty much should just throw away the purses on my table, but it's hard for me to throw away something that I've made like that. But I think all of us that rode in Nyx have a very different opinion of it now. Do I think that I wasted my time in years past? No, I think people cherish my purses, they love them, they're like prized possessions. But the things that surrounded the Krewe of Nyx this year made my feelings change, and I am hopeful there are several new female krewes and even joint male-female krewes coming out, I am hopeful that the future is brighter and better. But yeah, in terms of the time I spent last year, I look at it as straight up being wasted. I literally took five hundred dollars' worth of throws and threw them on the ground of the float loading lot and walked myself home. I can only say that my experience this year was not a typical experience, but after hearing that Endymion also had a fatality, we got out of town and skipped Mardi Gras day this year [2020]. I couldn't mentally handle it.

Muffin sees the purses she made for that year's parade as time wasted because they were involved in negative experiences of Nyx during the krewe's parade in February and later that year, when the Nyx Captain, Julie Lea, wrote "all lives matter" on the krewe's Instagram during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests in June 2020 (Radice 2021). The phrase "all lives matter" has been associated with a refusal to recognize the disproportional violence to which Black persons are subjected at the hands of police. The captain's social media post led to an immediate social media response and a series of in-person protests at the Captain's home and a slew of resignations. For Muffin, these tragic



deaths and political controversies reshaped her relationship with the purses and their meanings. Although she asserted that she should “just throw away the purses,” she held onto them as things she put time and care into making—yet they cannot be celebrated because of the meanings they now convey, leaving them caught in a state of ambivalence. Muffin’s case demonstrates that objects can be continuously reconstructed through the back-and-forth process of objects and their social and cultural contexts making each other. In this way, I found that certain objects can be understood as an extension of one’s carnival experience, taking on the meanings of the interactions and processes that they were involved in for a particular individual. This leads to an interesting capacity of material culture to serve as “technologies of memory” through the assorted meanings they articulate (Layne 2003; Lewis 2018).

### *Technologies of memory*

Layne’s (2003) study of mothers who lost their child during pregnancy found that they often used physical objects to preserve their child’s memory, such as the shoes they purchased for them. She explained how these mothers treated memory as a tangible thing, pointing out that this leads memories to then share the characteristics of things: “They can decay and decompose, be lost, or ruined; they can be also be kept, stored, lovingly cared for, and preserved for posterity” (209). These “technologies of memory” are a specific kind of thing, one that is “special, precious...[and] sometimes likened in size and value to jewels or other treasures” (209). While Layne specifically refers to how consumer goods can be engaged in this way, I found that the things krewe members make for carnival can also serve as technologies of memory. For example, I received a small bag of straws with one shorter than the rest as a handmade throw from Martha during her

roll with 'tit Rəx in 2020, which was the very first carnival parade I attended during my fieldwork (see figure 32). She also gave me a few of the other throws she made relating to her float following the parade. 'tit Rəx is a “micro-parade” featuring around 35 floats made out of shoeboxes. The krewe’s theme that year was “That’s a Little Much,” and the float Martha made with her partner Brian and Janine Hayes and Chris Ellison, two members of 'tit Rəx, was based on the idea of “the straw that broke the camel’s back,” though the float itself was called “Camel on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown” (see figure 33). To me, these throws serve as “technologies of memory” for the range of meanings I have equated to my experiences that they helped construct, including my first parade experience, my first impressions and feelings of New Orleans (I went almost directly from the airport to the parade), and more broadly of the surreal experience of writing a master’s thesis about carnival—I had the privilege to research something that normally I would have attended as an exciting new experience regardless of the project, and I had the opportunity to witness what I had read about and meet numerous incredible people during fieldwork.



Figure 32 (top): Throws from 'tit Rex 2020 correlating with Martha's float. Photo from author.  
 Figure 33 (bottom): Martha's shoebox float for 'tit Rex 2020. Photo by Ryan Hodgson-Rigsbee.

Moreover, the handmade character of the objects made for carnival tends to structure them as being more worthwhile as technologies of memory. Handmade objects include not only handcrafted items but also things made through processes of design or personalization; consider, for example, the memorial T-shirts second liners design and wear during parades for friends and family who have died, which are machine-printed yet

serve as powerful meanings through their personalized images and statements in relation to the deceased (Regis 2001). I first noticed this when unpacking after fieldwork—I displayed the headpiece that I made for my Mardi Gras day costume on a shelf, considering it as something “special” and “precious” from my first carnival experience that I wanted to keep (Layne 2003). Likewise, interviewees described certain items as worthy of display, such as Jenn emphasizing that she displays her bead wig on her mantle instead of storing it in her costume closet. Marlene collects things that other people have made as well as displaying some of her own creations as “mementos.” She has a shelf where she displays things from Chewbacchus that year, and she explains that while she might keep “really pretty beads” or “really nice throws like plushies” from the large float parades “where they throw mass-produced stuff,” she donates most of these items.

However,

as far as the handmade things that I collect from fellow Chewbacchus members and from [some of] the other walking krewes, like Krewe du Vieux and Krewe Bohème, those things I save even if I don’t display them, because those are things that people made and sooner or later, if it’s not on display now, I’ll probably figure out something to do with it, or I’ll just keep it in a box as a memento. But those things, the handmade things, are special.

Cristina made a similar statement: “it’s so much more special when you give it to somebody and they see that it’s also handmade, it’s just it’s a lot more meaningful.”

Additionally, a common value among these krewes is reducing carnival waste, often by reusing materials and making throws by hand instead of throwing huge quantities of mass-produced items, particularly the iconic plastic Mardi Gras beads—in 2018, the city

cleaned up 1,200 tons of waste following the parades, a lot of it being beads (National Geographic 2019). Dan shared that the beads are “incredibly wasteful and bad for the environment,” which led him to explain his thoughts on throws:

Dan: It’s literally tons and tons and tons of plastic that you throw at someone once and then it’s thrown away, so yeah. And they’re boring. It’s just like, purple beads?...Throws are a thing, but throws are something that you craft and throw at people. Like this is one of our throws that I kept....I think, I forget which parade this was, but the idea was just that we had dreams that we had, and then we printed them on floppy discs and we would throw them to people. So this dream—can you read this?

Briana: Interrobang archives. Dream number 104. I’m tiny and I smell like asparagus. [laughs]

Dan: Yeah. So that was just a dream that my friend had, and he was just like “here, here’s a floppy disc with a dream on it,” because I think we were doing something with dreams that year. But this is a throw that I would keep. It’s a funny joke. It’s something that somebody made, it’s not like just cheap plastic. So that’s the difference.

While one might argue that a written-on floppy disc is, indeed, “cheap plastic,” this throw demonstrates how being handmade—in the sense that it was repurposed through art-making processes to become the dreamer’s personal creation related to the krewe’s theme that year—changed how Dan sees the physical object and moulded it into something he felt was worth keeping: the disc enunciated value and meanings for Dan that shaped it

into a technology of memory. Similarly, Susannah shared the meanings of a Full Bush doubloon she keeps as a “perfect little memento” of the krewe she has helped create:

I think the doubloon is sort of more like a time capsule of what we’ve created as a group of friends. Less about the message of Full Bush or the process or the party, and more just like look at this thing we created, this whole krewe. Sometimes we just laugh that we established this krewe, that people, like you [the author], email us and they’re like “I heard about your krewe, can I . . .” We’re just like what, this is so crazy and funny, or my friends will go on dates and there are people who will be like “you’re in Full Bush? No way.” And we’re like what? We just slapped this together. We like to say it’s an inside joke that went way too far. So my doubloon is I’m like look how legit we are, and it’s funny and weird and exciting, and I want to hang onto this to share with people in the future.

The doubloon consists of particular narratives and memories as a “time capsule” of this important experience in her life. Susannah uses the doubloon as a technology of memory in order to “hang onto” the meanings she ascribes to her Full Bush experience. In addition, she states, “I like it more than the stickers and stuff because it feels less like garbage. . . . But I like that this is wood, I like the image on it, like the illustration was our logo and it’s very us, and it says the year, and I just think it’s the perfect little memento.” Again, the handmade qualities of the doubloon helped produce an object that was fit to serve as a technology of memory, both in its materiality not being seen as garbage and the visual aesthetics of the item evoking the meanings of the experience it took on. By treating certain things made for carnival as technologies of memory, the object becomes the array of meanings associated with the social and cultural processes surrounding the

memory(ies) that it was involved in framing. This transforms the item into something of value and significance, acting as an extension of the individual's particular carnival experience.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter shifted focus from the individual (chapter five) and social (chapter six) processes happening with, through, and around material culture to consider how objects both allow these processes to happen and inform how an individual experiences carnival by serving as the celebration's frame. New-wave krewe members play a valuable role in creating part of the whole that is carnival—through their efforts to craft costumes, throws, floats, and other things they use to put on their parades, they are actually *making carnival* by producing the frame for this pocket of the celebration (Miller 2010). Moreover, how a person experiences carnival depends on the material culture that frames it. That is, objects structure individuals' perceptions of the celebration and the interactions they have throughout it. As such, by crafting the setting through which carnival occurs, new-wave krewe members are not only contributing to their own experiences of carnival but also shaping how other people experience it.

While this chapter focused on material culture's critical role in framing carnival, it is important to acknowledge that there are many other forms of creative and cultural expression that are vital to its construction and are equally deserving of research, including the many kinds of music, bands, and dance that enrich the celebration. Material culture is not solely responsible for creating carnival, but, as this chapter illustrates, objects play an indispensable role in crafting both makers' and audiences' experiences.

Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell's (2007) approach of "thinking through things" led me to explore how the material culture created for carnival participates in shaping and is shaped by its social and cultural dynamics. These objects act as "vessels of meaning" that generate practices and interactions in the setting they are involved in (Craig 2011). I showed how an object and its meanings can be changed by its surrounding social context, without altering its materiality, as illustrated by Muffin's Nyx purses. Moreover, I found that interviewees engaged with handmade material culture as "technologies of memory" (Layne 2003; Lewis 2018). Technologies of memory are physical objects that are used to preserve a particular memory by treating it as a tangible thing, shaping the object into a special, valuable item (Layne 2003). While Layne specifically studies consumer goods used in this way, I found that the handmade nature of the items created for carnival, such as costumes and throws, distinguished them for their makers and receivers from store-bought, mass-produced items. While the latter were likely to be described as clutter or waste, the former were seen as worth keeping and, as a result, were invoked as a technology of memory.

My research illustrates the value and potential "thinking through things" offers social anthropologists as an approach to qualitative research. While some scholars have argued that non-human things do have a kind of agency to act (see Bennett 2010 and Kohn 2013, whose work suggests a different line of interpretation), my analysis follows Craig (2011, 49) in seeing objects "as exerting forces rather than simply representing them, without going so far as to ascribe material objects with anthropomorphic agency." By attending to things as I have encountered them, I was able to investigate material culture's role in creating carnival and making people's experiences, as well as how



objects both shape and are shaped by the social and cultural processes surrounding the setting they help frame.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

I mean it's very much about costuming and fun and making our throws, especially for Chewbacchus. It seems really silly to spend so much time making stuff that you're going to give away, but when we roll on our trike in our green alien heads, it's one of the greatest experiences of my life. And I don't know why giving things to strangers is so delightful, but it's just a high that you just can't achieve any other way. To me, Mardi Gras is just magic. (Muffin)

This thesis addressed the question: *What meanings are produced through the making of material culture by new-wave krewe members for New Orleans' carnival?* Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, digital ethnography, and semi-structured interviews with new-wave krewe members, I explored the meanings of the things crafted for New Orleans' carnival and the processes of their creation. I used a material culture perspective that combined Miller's (2010) dialectical theory of material culture and Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell's (2007) approach of "thinking through things" to frame my study. My research adds new understandings to two bodies of literature, material culture studies and contemporary carnival practices in New Orleans, from a social anthropological perspective, highlighting the significance of object relations to shaping and framing social relations. The interview recordings and transcripts will also be deposited into a public archive on carnival practices at the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History at Louisiana State University, making a large body of data on carnival permanently accessible to the public.

I structured my analysis around three key themes: the meanings of (making) material culture; social relations around material culture; and the broader role of the objects themselves. First, chapter five examines how making material culture for carnival offers new-wave krewe members a way to interact with and express an idea, interest, or

part of their identity that they consider meaningful and may not have had avenues to do so otherwise. For example, crafting for their respective krewes allowed Cristina to reconnect with elements of her Mexican culture and provided Jenn with a space to engage with various fandom interests. Individuals also used the objects they created to communicate this aspect of themselves to others who witness and interact with their material culture during the krewe's parade or events. By handmaking the items, individuals could engage with this facet of themselves and express and communicate it on their own terms and in any way they desired.

In chapter six, I focused on the social processes surrounding material culture and its creation in new-wave krewes, including how krewe members contributed to the making process by sharing ideas, materials, knowledge, and skills with each other, which highlights how objects are produced socially. Interviewees' krewes often held a valuable place in their social networks and acted as an important source of friendships and community, especially of people with similar interests. Getting together frequently to craft for carnival contributed to building these social bonds. I also described the micro-moments of connection that are framed by this subset of material culture, which are fleeting moments of social connection, typically with strangers, that often proved meaningful to one or all individuals involved.

Chapter seven considers how new-wave krewe members are creating carnival by making the material culture that frames the downtown walking parade scene, which, in turn, helps construct audiences' experiences of the celebration. Interviewees emphasized that putting effort into handmaking their costumes and other items is an important component of doing one's part to contribute to the celebration—it shows that they care

about creating a good experience for themselves and others. This chapter also explores how material culture can work as “vessels of meaning” (Craig 2011) that shape and are shaped by the social and cultural dynamics of the scene it is involved in. For instance, the intricately decorated purses Muffin made for Nyx’s 2020 parade changed from being a cherished throw she makes for spectators to wasted time in light of the negative events that took place during the parade and with Nyx’s leadership that year. Moreover, I examined how some objects were “technologies of memory” (Layne 2003) that take on and convey a person’s meanings and understandings of the experience the item helped frame.

A recurring theme of my analysis is that the handmade characteristic of the material culture new-wave krewe members crafted for carnival allowed them to interact with and use the objects in meaningful ways. Handmaking enabled them to express meaningful aspects of themselves in whatever way they chose; it was key to prompting the micro-moments of connection I discussed in chapter six, along with the collective crafting activities that helped form krewe members’ social bonds. Interviewees asserted that dedicating effort to handmaking one’s costume shows they care about carnival and attendees’ experiences of it; and handmade items were seen as more worthwhile technologies of memory. Additionally, the act of crafting was often described as calming, therapeutic, and an outlet for creative energy, and although some interviewees stated that crafting was stressful or overwhelming, they still emphasized the importance of handmaking things for carnival. To this effect, my research sheds light on the importance that crafting for carnival holds for these interviewees and their krewes, and it adds new understandings to material culture studies of the meanings individuals attribute to and

derive from the material culture they create and that fills their worlds. Because handmaking was particularly key to producing these meanings, my research also implies that crafting may offer similar benefits and opportunities to all kinds of makers. While carnival provided interviewees with a space and reason to craft things, people across the globe engage with the object world to create the systems of material culture that comprise people's materiality, and my research speaks to how the processes of handmaking matter to the maker and can inform their social worlds. Therefore, my findings support the primacy of object relations and interactions while illustrating the profound value and richness they can add to individuals' lives in ways that are not restricted to carnival.

Moreover, my research contributes understandings of the celebration's material scene and its creation to literature on contemporary carnival practices in New Orleans, which includes exposing material culture's integral role in framing carnival and producing people's experiences of the celebration. These findings point to the potential for material culture to hold a similar role and level of significance in other celebrations and events across the world. In this sense, perhaps we can think of crafting as creating frames for these diverse social and cultural events and the dynamics unfolding within them. Future analyses of other festivities would benefit from exploring material culture's role in this regard.

Future research would be beneficial for expanding on any of the themes discussed in this thesis, particularly through participant observation in krewes' collective making sessions to investigate how the social processes surrounding crafting for carnival play out in practice. Researchers should also examine whether micro-moments of connection are found in other social contexts and more closely explore the value and meanings these

kinds of interactions offer as components of individuals' social worlds. Another direction for future research is applying personhood as a framework to deepen understandings of how material culture shapes selves. Since relational personhood holds that selves are constituted out of relations with others, how are krewe members (or other makers) shaped by their person-object relations with the things they create for carnival? This investigation would be useful for building on my discussion in the fifth chapter of how interviewees use material culture as a means of engaging with and communicating meaningful aspects of their person. Further inquiry into how object relations more broadly contribute to shaping selves would also be worthwhile. Overall, researchers should continue to pay close attention to our diverse material landscapes. The material culture that new-wave krewes create for carnival adds to New Orleans' rich and enchanting material aesthetic; while their creations are unique to these individuals and their krewes, they speak to the amplitude of new insights that can be gained through focusing on people's materiality.

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## APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

\*Thank them for participating!

\*Public or private option for interview data. Can decide after the interview and change mind until 1 year from now.

- If public: you will have the opportunity to read your interview transcript before it's made public. If you would like any of the information you shared to be removed, it can be taken off the record.
- If private: I will send you a copy of your interview transcript once it's completed. I can remove any of the information you shared with me until December 1, 2020.

\*Informed consent reminders

\*Questions?

Start recording: state my name, interviewee's name, the date, and location

\*This is Briana Kelly in Halifax, NS here with [interviewee] in New Orleans, LA on [date]

### **Section 1: New-wave krewe context questions**

1. Are you from New Orleans?
  - a. If yes: What part of the city?
  - b. If no: Where did you grow up? When did you move to New Orleans, and why?
2. What is carnival and Mardi Gras "about" for you?
3. Tell me about your first Mardi Gras.
  - a. If from New Orleans: Tell me about your first memories of Mardi Gras.
4. Tell me about [Krewe].
  - a. How long have you been involved in [Krewe]?
  - b. Why did you decide to join [Krewe]? // How did you get involved with the krewe?

- c. What kinds of activities do you participate in with the krewe?
- d. What did your participation in carnival look like before you were a member?
- e. How would you describe your krewe's place in carnival?
- f. What do you think your krewe adds to the carnival scene?

## **Section 2: Object-based questions**

### *Object 1:*

1. Tell me about this item!
  
2. Can you walk me through how you made it?
  - a. What materials is it made out of?
  - b. Where did you get the materials for it?
  
3. How long did it take, roughly? Did you make it all at once or in stages?
  - a. *Object 1:*
    - i. When in the year do you start *thinking* about what you're going to make for carnival, and when do you actually *start* making these things?
    - ii. How much time in total would you say you put into making things for a single carnival season?
  
4. Did you make this while you were alone or were you with other people?
  - a. What would you say you get out of that?
  - b. Where do you usually make your items?
  - c. *What was it like to make this [on your own//with others]?*
  
5. What was your inspiration or motivation for making this item? How did you come up with the idea for it?
  - a. *Probe if needed: does the inspiration relate to a parade or krewe theme?*
  - b. *Object 1:*

- i. How do you typically find inspiration for the things you make?
  
- 6. How did others react when they saw what you made?
  - a. Do you recall a particularly memorable reaction?
  - b. What did their reactions mean for you?
  
- 7. Why did you decide to keep this item?
  - a. What do you do with it now?
  - b. *Object 1:*
    - i. Do you keep all the things you've made for carnival?
    - ii. How do you decide what to keep and what to get rid of?
  
- 8. Are there any stories that you think of when interacting with this item that you'd be willing to share?
  
- 9. Why do you choose to make things for carnival and how is it different than buying them?
  - a. What do you get out of making these things?
  - b. Do you think you're like others in your approach to making things and your reasons for making them?
  - c. *Probe idea: Why is the effort put into making things important?*

*Object 2: \*Repeat object-specific question*

### **Section 3: General questions**

- 1. What kinds of things do you need to make for your involvement with the [Krewe]?
  - a. Is there typically a theme to follow? How is that theme chosen?
  - b. What meanings do these items symbolize or represent for the krewe?
    - i. What do you think they express to the public who sees them during krewe parades or other activities?
    - ii. What do you think they symbolize or represent for you?

2. How would you describe the space that carnival takes up in your life?
  - a. What kind of space does making things take up in your life?
  - b. What role does the krewe play in your life?
  
3. What are your most and least favourite parts of making things for carnival by hand? *Can you give me an example?*
  
4. What do you think makes a good or bad [costume]?
  
5. How did you learn to make pieces by hand?
  
6. What do you think the pieces you make say//express about you?
  
7. What kinds of things have you made that you are the most and least fond of or proud of? *Why?*
  
8. Has anything you made ever been misunderstood or misread by other people?
  - a. Do you have any examples that you'd be willing to share?
  - b. Have conflicts ever emerged with other krewe members surrounding the things that you've made?
  - c. Did the misinterpretation change your own personal meanings/feelings toward the item?
  
9. How do you think Mardi Gras will change next year because of COVID-19?
  
10. What other kinds of things have you made for carnival?
  - a. *If one category is throws:* How do you decide who to give throws to during parades?



#### **Section 4: Follow-up**

1. Thanks for answering my questions and sharing your thoughts with me. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
2. Do you mind me asking how old you are?
3. Am I right in thinking you identify as female//male?
4. Do you mind sharing what your ethnic identity is?

*Thank them for participating and for sharing their experiences! \*\*Stop recording\*\**

5. \*Confirm privacy decision: public archive or private/anonymized
6. Would you be willing to send me a photo of the pieces you showed me today?  
(Note: to keep with the transcript and to possibly include in my thesis/presentations of the research)
7. I wonder if you know of anyone else that might be interested in participating in this study?

## APPENDIX II: LIST OF CODES

<p><u>Costuming/making codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Costume closet</li> <li>- Kinds of costuming</li> <li>- Time spent making</li> <li>- Dedication</li> <li>- Preparation</li> <li>- Reusing materials</li> <li>- Locating materials</li> <li>- Sharing materials</li> <li>- Choosing materials</li> <li>- Making process</li> <li>- Finding inspiration</li> <li>- Making together</li> <li>- Making alone</li> <li>- Sharing ideas &amp; learning from others</li> <li>- Skill sharing</li> <li>- Impersonate/embody something</li> <li>- Choosing colours &amp; designs</li> <li>- Importance of working on costume/throws</li> <li>- Learning new skills</li> <li>- Enjoyment (in making)</li> <li>- Accomplishment</li> <li>- Feeling proud</li> <li>- Pain from making</li> <li>- Benefits of making</li> <li>- Expectations</li> <li>- Good/bad costume</li> <li>- Anti-buying costume</li> <li>- Pro-buying costume</li> <li>- Pro-handmade things</li> </ul>	<p><u>Other object/making codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expressing individual thru objects</li> <li>- “doing it as me” (objects=product of maker)</li> <li>- Making/community relation</li> <li>- Objectification</li> <li>- Getting recognized</li> <li>- Spreading joy</li> <li>- Keeping MC</li> <li>- Displaying MC</li> <li>- Value of object</li> <li>- Culture of crafting</li> <li>- Costuming w/o carnival</li> <li>- Crafting w/o carnival</li> <li>- Making MG</li> <li>- Reactions to costume/MC</li> <li>- Adding to carnival scene</li> </ul>
<p><u>Throws:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opposition to beads</li> </ul>	<p><u>Carnival as social:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating bonds thru krewe activities</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desirable throws</li> <li>- Kinds of throws</li> <li>- Connecting thru throws</li> <li>- Collecting throws</li> <li>- Who to throw to?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interactions thru carnival</li> <li>- Instrumental value of krewe ties</li> <li>- Spectator interactions</li> <li>- Community around MG</li> <li>- MG as performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Spectator/krewe interactions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><u>Krewe-related codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Krewe's role in carnival <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Krewe goals</li> <li>o Symbols of krewe</li> <li>o Communicating krewe thru symbols</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Krewe operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Joining krewe</li> <li>o Organizational structure</li> <li>o Logistics</li> <li>o Collaborative decision making</li> <li>o Kinds of krewe activities</li> <li>o Time commitment</li> <li>o Collab w/ other krewes</li> <li>o “Found my people”</li> <li>o Mentoring new members</li> <li>o Individual role in krewe</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Frustrations//Conflicts</li> </ul>	<p><u>Carnival and New Orleans codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MG first impressions</li> <li>- MG first memories</li> <li>- MG as addictive</li> <li>- MG changing impressions</li> <li>- Parade culture</li> <li>- Mexican culture in carnival</li> <li>- Learning on the streets</li> <li>- New Orleans/carnival relationship</li> <li>- Carnival's omnipresence</li> <li>- Meaning of MG</li> <li>- New Orleans draw</li> </ul>
<p><u>Other:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- COVID</li> <li>- Level of individual participation in MG</li> <li>- Learning about self</li> <li>- Tourists</li> <li>- Eco-conscious</li> </ul>	

## APPENDIX III: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORMS



### **Invitation to participate in a research study** **Grasping Joy: New Wave Carnival in New Orleans**

**Lead researcher:** Dr. Martha Radice, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University. Email: [martha.radice@dal.ca](mailto:martha.radice@dal.ca). Tel. 902-478-7546

**Other researchers:** Briana Kelly, MA student, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University. Email: [briana.kelly@dal.ca](mailto:briana.kelly@dal.ca)  
Dr. Helen Regis, Associate Professor, Department of Geography and Anthropology, Louisiana State University. Email: [hregis1@lsu.edu](mailto:hregis1@lsu.edu)

**Funding provided by:** Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

**Outline of the research.** My name is Briana Kelly and I'm a master's student in social anthropology from Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada. I am conducting research in New Orleans on carnival as part of a small research team of three led by my professor, Martha Radice. We are especially interested in the 'new wave' of carnival krewes – the 'alternative', smaller-scale, handmade, satirical krewes that have multiplied over the last few decades. We are interested in why people join these krewes, how they participate in them, how the krewes are organized and what they do, and how they shape and reflect life in New Orleans. We are doing our research by observing and participating in carnival, and by interviewing people who are involved in carnival. Anyone aged 18 or over who is or has been involved in carnival in New Orleans can participate in the study. In total, we expect to conduct around 60 interviews and to be involved to some degree with about a dozen carnival krewes.

**Invitation to participate.** I invite you to take part in an interview for this research study. The choice to participate is entirely up to you. Please ask me as many questions as you like about the study before you decide.

**What does the interview involve?** I will ask questions about your experiences of watching and participating in parades, krewes, Mardi Gras and other carnival-related activities and events, and your thoughts about how these things fit into life in New Orleans. I would also like you to bring two things that you have made for carnival (which can be anything—costumes, throws, headpieces, parts of a float or other contraption). I will ask questions about how you made these items and what they mean to you. I will also invite you to share photos of these objects. The interview will take about an hour or two, depending how much you want to say. We can do it over the phone or the Internet

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DAL.CA

(using an audio-recording platform for which I will send instructions). I will audio-record and take notes of the interview, unless you prefer me to take notes only.

You do not have to answer any question or line of questioning that you do not want to answer. You may end the interview or take a break at any time or tell me to pause recording if you want any part of our conversation to be ‘off the record.’

**Are there any risks or benefits of participating?** The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to those you would encounter when talking about carnival in your everyday life. The main benefit of participating is indirect: you will contribute to new knowledge about carnival practices in New Orleans and what they mean to people.

**What will happen to the interview material? How will it be used?** One of the team members will transcribe (type up) the audio file to make a transcript of the interview, which we can send you if you wish. We will use this to think about patterns of participation in new-wave carnival in New Orleans. We will make presentations and write reports and publications about carnival. Briana Kelly will write her MA thesis about it. We also want to make podcasts and a photography exhibition about carnival, in collaboration with a photographer we are working with.

There are two options for what happens to the audio file and transcript of your interview in the long term. It could be made **public** by being added to the archives at the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History at Louisiana State University. Or it could be kept **private** just for this research study, which means that only the people working on this research will have access to it. The choice is up to you. If you like, you can decide after the interview is finished. You can also change your mind up until one year from now.

**Public option:**

- The audio recording and transcript of your interview and the photos of your items will be deposited into the archives of the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History at Louisiana State University. The files will be made accessible to the public five years from now. You will have the opportunity to check the audio recording and transcript and photos and to erase any portions of them or make corrections to the transcript before they are made public.
- Your name will be associated with the files. When the files are made public, after five years, anyone will be able to see that you participated in the research and request access to the files.
- We will use your name when we quote you or refer to you in presentations, reports, or publications resulting from our study.
- We may use part of your interview in a podcast, presentation, or exhibition, or for teaching.
- If you choose this option, please sign the attached release form. The release form enables the Williams Center to make your interview available to researchers and gives the Center permission to use the audio files, transcripts,

and photos in public presentations including but not limited to audio or video documentaries, Internet publications, presentations, or exhibits.

**Private option:**

- We will keep the audio recording and transcription of your interview and the photos private, in our own password-protected, encrypted research archives. Only members of this research team will have access to these interview files. The team members are Dr. Martha Radice and graduate student Briana Kelly of Dalhousie University, and Dr. Helen Regis, our collaborator at Louisiana State University. Any other people employed on the project have an obligation and will sign an agreement to keep all research information private.
- You may choose to use your real name in this study. You might want to do this if, for instance, you are a musician or artist and want your work to be recognized and discussed. If you choose this, we will use your real name when we quote you or refer to you specifically in our research presentations, reports, or publications. We will keep your audio recording and your transcript so that we can carry on learning from it as we build up knowledge about carnival.
- Alternatively, you may choose to use a pseudonym (fake name or alias) in this study. If you choose this, we will remove your name and other identifying information from the transcript and notes of your interview and the photos of your items. If we quote or write about any material from your interview in our presentations, reports, or publications, we will connect it to your pseudonym, not your real name, and we will remove or change any other details that could identify you. We will keep the anonymized notes and transcript of your interview so that we can carry on learning from it as we build up knowledge about carnival. Because the audio file will contain your voice and identifying information, we will destroy it after five years. When we send you updates about our research, we will not mention that you participated (in email subject lines, for instance).

**Withdrawing from the study.** If you decide to stop participating in the research after the interview is over, please contact me. We can remove your information from the study up until six months after the interview. After then, we will not be able to completely remove the information you provided, because we will have integrated it into our overall analysis. However, we will not quote you or refer specifically to what you tell us.

**Communicating.** Whether you choose to make your interview public or private, we will keep your contact details private, in a password-protected computer file stored separately from the transcripts and notes from your interview. If your interview features significantly (more than a few lines) in an article or book we want to publish, we will share it with you to get your feedback before publication. We will send updates as our

publications become available, but please feel free to contact me if you want to know more.

**Questions.** If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to ask me now or in the future. If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you can also contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email [ethics@dal.ca](mailto:ethics@dal.ca) (reference REB file # 2019-4938).

Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.

Thank you very much for your interest in our research project!

Briana Kelly

**Consent form: Public Option**

**Grasping Joy: New Wave Carnival in New Orleans**

**Lead researcher:** Dr. Martha Radice, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University. Email: [martha.radice@dal.ca](mailto:martha.radice@dal.ca). Tel. 902-478-7546

**Funding provided by:** Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this study by being interviewed. I understand that direct quotes of things I say may be used in presentations and publications resulting from the study. I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study completely until 6 months after my interview is completed, and partially after then, by contacting Briana Kelly ([briana.kelly@dal.ca](mailto:briana.kelly@dal.ca)) or Martha Radice ([martha.radice@dal.ca](mailto:martha.radice@dal.ca)).

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of interviewee) do hereby give assign, transfer and donate to the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History at Louisiana State University (LSU) all rights, title and interest in the audio-recorded interviews, including the photos taken of the items discussed in the interview, conducted by \_\_\_\_\_ (name of interviewer) on \_\_\_\_\_ (date(s)).

I understand that these interviews are subject to US Copyright laws and will be deposited in the LSU Libraries for the use of future scholars. I also understand that the audio files and transcripts may be used in public presentations including but not limited to audio or video documentaries, CD-ROMs, podcasts, internet publications, presentations, or exhibits. This assignment and donation does not preclude any use that I myself may want to make of the information in these recordings.

CHECK ONE:  Tapes and transcripts and photos may be used without restriction  
 Tapes and transcripts and photos are subject to the restrictions noted below or overleaf

Restriction notes:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_



**Consent form: Private Option**

**Grasping Joy: New Wave Carnival in New Orleans**

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I agree that my interview may be audio-recorded. Yes No

I would like the researchers to use my real name when they present or write about the study.

Yes No

I would like to receive a copy of the interview transcript. Yes No

I agree that the photos taken of the objects discussed can be used to illustrate presentations

and publications resulting from the study. Yes No

Signature of Interviewee \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Interviewee \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone number \_\_\_\_\_  
Email address \_\_\_\_\_