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The Theatre of Truth? Photographs from the Halloween Parade in New York City

Giovanni Savino

Abstract

This is a photo essay about Halloween, wearing masks and costumes, and the im/possibility of showing one's true identity.

Some say that in today's social spaces, especially big cities, we all need to "wear a mask," over our own faces and truest feelings, in order to ease or just to make possible nearly every social interaction we entertain with our fellow human beings.

So it is interesting and perhaps anthropologically intriguing, in occasion of certain popular events, still widely practiced in modern society, such as carnivals and, in this case, the Halloween celebration in New York, to see people wearing actual masks, costumes and disguises to parade along city streets.

What is the meaning or scope of these costumes and disguises that range from colorfully carefree to dark, sometimes ominous, tones?

Could we interpret them as a surprisingly honest, social or personal, visual statement, enacted by wearing an actual physical mask for one day, in place of the invisible mask we wear every day, from the workplace to the supermarket, or even when in the presence of friends and family?

Could this colorful display that takes over the usually grey urban space for a day, albeit always under a careful monitoring by local police, be considered a finally spontaneous "Theater of Truth"?

Could it be that in today's world, and perhaps throughout the entire history of civilization, our truest feelings, our unspoken or unspeakable truths, our most recondite attempts of interaction with the supernatural, with the mysterious forces of the universe and of our souls can only be manifested publicly by hiding our own face behind a mask?

These photographs (Figs. 1-10) were taken during the Annual Halloween Parade along Avenue of the Americas (6th Avenue) in Downtown Manhattan, on October 31st, 2015.









Figs. 1-10: Halloween Parade, Spring Street and Avenue of the Americas, West Village and Tribeca, Manhattan, New York City, October 31st, 2015. Photo credit: Giovanni Savino.

About the author

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