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CULTURE

FREAKS TO THE FRONT: **THE HALLOWEEN MYSTERY OF BECOMING THE OTHER**

by [Alex Brzezicka](#)

As the boundary between realms dissolves, we set on to an exploration of light and dark behind Halloween disguises.

Baby, it's Halloween. Once again, mortals get a superpower of transformation. For one night only, ordinary citizens transmute into characters of their dreams and nightmares. Fantastic freaks head to houses, and club floors, overflowing the streets. From the pagan Celtic Samhain, and Christian All Hallows' Eve to the modern costume haven, the night of the 31st of October lets the weird flow into our realm. Beware, when your neat, office-job, neighbour changes into a disarrayed werewolf, a co-worker gets crowned a king and you start to feel an ick to break free from yourself.

Of course, the costumes are an everyday affair worn by legitimate groups for distinction and a sense of community. Those are the ones we subconsciously accept within the status quo. Halloween brings out the bestial side of it. It lets us embody parts of our personality stigmatised in a given society. We welcome our alter egos to roam guilt-free, escaping the mainstream gaze. In psychological terms, it can be Carl Jung's shadow, hidden, repressed aspects of the self or Freud's id, a pleasurable, animal side, revealing itself to the material world. Becoming, even unintentionally, our deepest fears and desires, makes us empowered against the unknown in our minds, spaces to which some won't venture often. Remember a square couple from the cult classic *Rocky Horror Picture Show* entering the doctor's mansion? First terrified of the strange habits and outfits of the inhabitants, with time, the lovebirds let loose of their usual behaviour and went wild with the rest. Taken out of the traditional context into the rule of flamboyant indulgence, it's easy to give in to temptations. To express it all.

Though, it can be more of a trick than a treat. Within the pool of taboos, we get equipped with ready-to-go transgressions. The finished products to choose from to satisfy the shadows have undergone customizations. Depending on the social circle, it seems silly to be something that only you would recognise, right? Nobody wants to be laughed at like Cady from *Mean Girls* when she dressed as a scary bloody bride when the theme was slut chic. The Halloween costume rule-book is a collection of pickpocketed parts of various alternative cultures, subcultures and trends, that could suit the occasion without causing too much havoc.





It's a simple transaction with satisfaction guaranteed. Choose your new form, present it in full glory to get rid of it with the first sunray. Fascinated by the other, we become it and join their folly freak circus, to later dispose of that temporary identity. It rings a bell to sociologist Stuart Hall's discourse of 'the Other', a being different from us that's often a subject to marginalization, stereotypes and negative portrayal. In the moonlight, we join 'the Other', use its qualities and then disregard them. Think of Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands*, an outcast who gets integrated into the local community for his fantastic grooming abilities to, after a series of exploitation, become expelled for one wrongdoing.

The subcultures are often victims of the process. During Halloween, there's always an overflow of goths and punks. Recently, the BDSM scene is having a moment with gimps popping up on every corner and social media feeds. Borrow artefacts of the subcultures are made redundant of their original meaning. It's a speedway to cultural appropriation, "playing" the others without facing the daily discrimination faced by them¹. Though sometimes the by-product of exploitation is an accidental empowerment of marginalized groups and individuals. With the exposure, there's a hope for 'the Other' to become less alienated.

Halloween's over. We explored the new corners of our psyche, danced the house down and scared a few passers-by. Now, back to reality. We're welcome to continue residing in a land of superficial gratification, having proved that we're cool enough to pursue the forbidden but in some cases not brave enough to keep it going. Halloween allows us to superficially satisfy the shadow's demands within the accepted ways of doing so. Transgression 'opens up chaos and reminds us of the necessity of the order'². On the first of November, the werewolves hide the claws, the royalty knocks crowns down from their heads, and you continue as if it was all just a tale.

Once upon a time, for one supernatural night, the creatures of Earth got granted the power to change a form. Some went on mimicking exiled, rare species. Some painted engraved bodies with patchworks of foreign symbolism. Some became terrors from the ancient stories. At the break of dawn, the spell started to weaken. The mission of fun was completed. Everyone is saved until the next year. Only a few of them couldn't get rid of the ick...

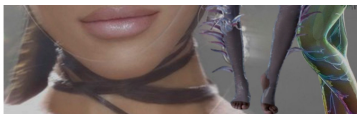
[1] Johnson, Kjerstin. *Don't Mess Up When You Dress Up: Cultural Appropriation and Costumes*. Web. October 25, 2011.

[2] Jenks, C., 2003, *Transgression*, Taylor & Francis Group, London. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. [12 May 2020].

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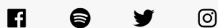
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