Their sense of the event’s appropriateness as a venue for their own or their group’s self-expression is precisely why some gay participants are angered by the parade’s increasing appeal to those completely outside the gay and arts communities. Almost since the event’s beginning, talented gay designers had turned to the parade as a giant public stage to display their work, themselves, and their vision of the world. The campy nature of their costumes readily distinguished them from the horror and sci-fi masks worn by so many straight participants, their flamboyance—indeed their hilarity—was well suited to the exuberant nature of the celebration. Although the presence of so much camp seemed to undermine Lee’s spirit world vision for the parade, Lee himself liked such unlikely juxtaposition. But I also use the word seemed, because underneath the parody sometimes lies a utopian vision peculiar to the gay predicament within a predominantly heterosexual, patriarchal culture. And in that sense the campy costumes had a seriousness very much akin to the parade itself.

Ross Burman is a freelance fashion editor and stylist who appeared in the parade for many years with a group of friends.

“The first year I decided to do the parade, I thought I would be Connie Francis. I sort of pulled the thing together, and

I took so long to put my makeup on that I missed the parade completely.

got downtown about 10:30 or 11:00 o’clock at night. So that was that. We just walked around and went out to dinner. Later we went to Christopher Street, then we tried to find some clubs that we could go to. My best friend Danny was Veronique Lake, and my roommate-to-be was Tippi Hedren and the Birds, and a female friend of mine was Marilyn Monroe. We were all just celebrities. There was no concept at all. We did this all weekend at different clubs, and we
decided that we would never go out four nights in a row like that. It just takes too much of our time.

"We hadn't yet gotten to our conceptual Halloween. It was fun but I felt there was something missing, something wasn't clicking. There were a hundred other people dressed exactly the same way we were, doing exactly the same thing, and we felt we weren't reaching a degree of design that we could. So the next year we decided we would do something conceptual, and there'd be four of us doing it. We went through everything in the world, and we decided on sixties' stewardesses. Then we came up with the idea of 'TWAT,' which stood for 'Transvestites Will Attempt Travel.' I was the head stewardess because I was the tallest and I was the most vocal and I was the funniest, so I was Connie. We all had names: Connie, Barbie, Luvie, and Tippie. And I was Connie, formerly of Lingus Airlines—Connie Lingus. So that's where that went.

"We started planning 'TWAT' in August. A friend of mine made the patterns for the costumes and basically did the sewing. The costumes looked rich and expensive. We used a bright yellow because we wanted to be seen. We were all wearing the same color, but we also wanted a definite look to each of us so we opted for a separate color in stockings, scarves, and gloves. I became red, Barbie became purple, Luvie became green, and Tippie became blue. But everything else matched. I went up to wholesale jewelry showrooms to get tasteful earrings, because we wanted to stand out in a field of drag queens. We wanted to be conceptual but not be Lana Turner, Marilyn Monroe, or Jayne Mansfield. We wanted to do something that would sort of be camp and sort of fun and sort of more accessible to people, because we felt that it would be a very accessible thing to be flight attendants. You could do the whole spiel, and people have met flight attendants whereas they have not met Marilyn Monroe or Joan Crawford. As it turned out, we were very well received. It was beyond our wildest dreams. People would applaud us as we walked through the parade and screamed for us. And people recognized us out of costume afterward that we had never met before. They would come up to us and say, 'You were the TWATS.' You were wonderful! It was incredible.

"The next year we played a group of Chinese prostitutes—'The World of Susie Wong'—which drew some hostility from the audience. We were too glamorous, whereas with the stewardesses we were like everyone's friend. The next year we wanted to do 'Chanel Cycle Sluts' to coincide with the opening of the Chanel Boutique on East Fifty-seventh Street. These were motorcycle girls à la the late sixties or early seventies. We couldn't get it together in time so we opted for the stewardesses. Once again we were very well received. People wanted to know where we had been the year before because they missed us. We were disappointed that the China Girls costumes weren't well received because we spent so much money on them—$500 or $600 apiece. That's why we felt we should do a concept. We should make a statement about what we're doing, not so much a political statement—it just happened when we did the 'TWAT' thing that TWA was on strike then. So everyone was saying, 'Oh, how political of you.' But it just happened that way.

"To be very blunt about it, the reason I do these costumes is because I love the adulation and the attention. I become a different person almost. I become an entity that is part of me that is not a part of me. I mean, I can say and do whatever I want to. And it's just a wonderful feeling to be able to do that, to be able to approach anyone I want to and say something risqué, or say something funny. Also, when you get into drag it brings out all the female mannerisms that you have but you keep low key. But it's very easy to adapt to them when you put on high heels and stuff. So that makes you a whole different kind of person.

All of a sudden your hands are swooshing all the time. You're so animated.

But I think it also might make you a complete person. And it wouldn't be the same if we were doing it and there was no
one else doing it either. It's with the whole group. The whole atmosphere means a lot.

"People say this is a gay parade, but I think the parade is for everyone. Because the people who do it really enjoy it and it seems like the people who watch it really enjoy it. The first time we did it I was worried that we'd be sort of offensive. It's not a nice word—'twat.' And the first time we flashed the T.W.A.T. letters we each had, everyone just screamed and yelled laughing. We were all amazed by the reaction of the people. Our jaws dropped to street level. We had never been to the parade before. The year before we had wanted to so we went to Christopher Street. People there weren't cheering. They tell you how good you look, but it's not the same thing. Because we put a lot of work into it, there's something we want from it. We want this adulation. We want to be seen. People should say the next day, 'Did you see those T.W.A.T.S'? It's a very theatrical thing. And we really appreciate people who have also spent as much time and energy as we have in putting things together. We don't think twice about going up and telling them how wonderful they look and how incredible they are.

"One of the things that's great about this parade is that all kinds of people participate in it—artists, stockbrokers, wall street lawyers. It's just normal people who let loose. It's a real release for people. You get an emotional rush. And we don't drink at all when we do it, but it's like a drug. Drag is our drug. It's like a movie that's going on and you're in this movie and someone has written a script and it's just coming out. It's a wonderful release, it really is. And I don't know if it's so much the drag part of it, although I do think it's more the drag than just being in costume. I think if we were just dressed up as Batman or Bullwinkle or something it might be a little different kind of release."

Robert Tabor is a designer in his twenties whose clever large-group costumes (such as pink flamingos, giant goldfish, and slices of pizza) earned him a good deal of adulation. Tabor was born outside of Boston and came to New York to pursue a career as a graphic designer. Almost from his first parade Tabor became enthralled with the idea of doing ensemble costumes—the larger the group, the greater the challenge.

"My approach is to take things and blow them up real big. Like six-foot-high pizzas. I take a lot of everyday objects that people take for granted. I just exaggerate a lot. I always try to think of making someone into something they're not supposed to be. That's what provokes the reaction in people. The cocktails are so relatable to everybody, probably too much so. It was immediately recognizable. It's a real up kind of thing. I try to pick things that are more campy, more festive—like flamingos, which is a trendy thing right now, things that are relatable to people.

"More than anything, I do it for the challenge of it. Since I'm doing it for myself, I don't see that many boundaries to it. I'm sure if I was working for someone else there'd be a hundred and one boundaries, but I just like the fact that it's a departure from my everyday career.

"I spend a long time making the costumes. I started the flamingos in July, sketching and shopping for fabrics, then sewing in August and September. I use a lot of painted foam rubber and airbrushed fabrics. It took about two and a half months to make the costumes, working evenings and weekends. I did the work myself, and then I had to find people to wear them. That's getting easier because the costume wearers are having more fun so they now volunteer. The participants range from realtors, lawyers, retail people, one or two other fashion designers, a publicist, and two architects. The routine we used for the pink flamingos emerged from a feeling I had that the costume could be enhanced by a few simple dance steps and V-formation things. I tried to bring out the character of the flamingo as a group, although they each had their own character: Miss America Flamingo, Nurse Mingo, Officer Mingo, Wall Street Mingo, House Wife Mingo, Weight Lifter Mingo, Punk Mingo, Cowboy Mingo, and Cheer Leader Mingo.

"What do I get out of doing it? I get a lot of satisfaction more than anything. We have won a few prizes: a thousand dollars two years ago at a disco for the Cocktail Party, then this year at another disco for the Pink Flamigos. The money went to pay for the whole thing. But really it's just more fun to do it than anything. There's a lot of satisfaction knowing I can pull something like this off. And it's good exposure. People come up to you and write down your name. Also, the parade is almost like a little meeting ground. Everyone gets together, and I see people that I really don't see any other time of the year.

"Halloween for me is a chance to develop any character, wish, whim that may be inside you. It's the chance to bring it out, express it, and in a sense masquerade your true self. And it's a chance to be totally creative; there's no boundaries whatsoever, and you just try in a sense to fool
the people that know you. I love the creativity in this parade. All the concepts and thought processes. I've never seen so much energy in one event, especially creativity wise. I enter the parade not so much as a professional but as a person. I feel like my own sense of creativity is on parade more than as a designer.

"To a degree, the parade is related to New York City. If you look at the parade and you see the outrageousness of it, that in turn tells you that New York is outrageous. Also, the parade brings out creativity in people who don't deal with creativity every day. So they can go for it just for one day or one evening. It promotes unleashed creativity for everyone. So it opens up a part of the self for people."

Tabor's assertion that by fostering creative activity Halloween "opens a part of the self" suggests a subtle political agenda of artists participating in the parade with distinct ideas about the mental and perhaps even the physical health of individuals and society. That agenda is particularly apparent among some gay participants determined to create a sense of wellness in the face of the terrible disease that is ravaging their community.

On October 31, 1987, two hours after the parade is over, in the middle of Christopher Street and Bleeker I spot Fred dressed as a fairy godmother in a white gown, silver crown, and a large wand with a tinsel ball at the end. He is casting magic spells on a row of Japanese tourists who in turn are shooting him with their cameras. He does not pay much attention to me (I suppose because I'm busy with a note pad rather than a camera), so I cannot exchange star-dust for a spell. Feeling somewhat slighted, I approach him and ask for one. He looks strange up close with his stubby complexion. But he's friendly and in response to my request he casts the spell. "Do I get a wish?" I ask. "Yes. Anything your heart desires." "I want your phone number. I'd like to talk to you." Two weeks later we're sitting at the Bagel And, a fast-food restaurant on Christopher Street.

Fred isn't dumb. I knew that when I called him to confirm our appointment. Before hanging up he tells me to look for someone in red glasses and brown curly hair. I, of course, would have looked for a man dressed as a fairy godmother. Fred spots me even before I recognize him. Out of costume he is a tall, slender, good-looking man about forty. I learn that he is a playwright and lives in a still not gentrified block in the East Village. Fred has been involved with the parade either as a spectator or a participant for the past ten years.

"This costume came to me. I just said I wanted to be the good fairy. It just came to me. It was like a gift. I think that's creativity. I also used to be in children's theater. So I have access to the fairy tales, and I also had access to those costumes because my friend Norman ran a children's theater and he had all these costumes in his apartment. But that was really secondary, because I was going to do it anyway even if he hadn't had the costume. This just had a strength to it which surprised me. People saw this, they knew, they waved to me across the street, they came up to me and said, 'Oh, give me a blessing.' You know, 'Make my wish come true.'"

"The costume was designed by someone who's done a lot of work for dance companies. It's sort of a takeoff of a ballet dress from the eighteenth century. It was beautiful. Sort of a white satin with glitter and silver sequins. I wore a blonde wig with glitter and a wonderful crown like a head-dress, which actually was from the Snow Queen. I made the wings myself from foam that had been used as packing for a stereo. I used wire and glitter. When I finished gluing, I smiled because I thought, 'Yes, there's something so fanciful and frivolous about glitter that it's like the antithesis of being practical and down to earth. The wings looked kind of frumpy and weren't straight. They looked kind of like I had done a lot of flying around. I liked the bedraggled aspect of it. I wanted to be slightly frumpy as if I had gone through the mill a bit myself and had still come to the fact that goodness is the bottom line. And I wore white tennis sneakers sort of like Yuppie women who go to the office in sneakers. I thought, 'Well, the good fairy has got to save her feet, too.' I made the wand from a wooden dowel and I put an aluminum tin-foil Christmas tree ornament at the end of it.

"It's sad to see all those costumes in Norman's apartment and realize that it's really the people wearing them that make the costumes come alive and not the other way around. Some of the jewels were falling off the crown. They looked sad in the apartment. But once I got it on and I got out there it came alive."

"What kind of performance did I do in the parade? I wasn't actually in the parade. Crowds make me nervous. I mean, conformity makes me nervous, too. So I thought I would just work on the peripheries and whoever needed me would find me. I went from Christopher Street to the Metropolitan Community Church on Seventh Avenue where I met some friends, and we went out to a coffee shop. And then I..."
came back to Christopher Street and Bleecker and I just stood there and held court for a while. That's when I met you. When I went to the coffee shop, none of my friends were in costume and I wasn't sure if I should enter because a meeting was in progress. But I said, 'Screw it!' and went in. The meeting stopped, and they all applauded. They loved it, and I was a big hit. Then we all went outside and I granted a few wishes. My friends couldn't believe how into the character I was.

'I was in the parade once as King Frost. I was in a beautiful kaftan, multicolored in icy colors, with a full face mask and a beard and a big hat and big, long fingers in gloves. I felt very protected, which was great because I was nervous about going out like that in public. Then I realized how well children and people in general responded and the goodwill of the crowd. Last year I went as a reindeer. I had on antlers. But I had lost two friends who died that month, and I couldn't get into it. One died from AIDS and one from cancer. I was in grief. I wasn't going to do anything. But I had the antlers on hand for a show I had done. So I put them on, and it made me feel a little better. But also I think this year, having gone through a grief process, I could say that life is too short and this world needs some love and goodwill and some healing. And I was ready to really go out there as a persona. I felt I was a persona. I wasn't holding back.

'This year it seemed to me there were a lot more observers than participants. But even so I was touched by the crowd. I was going up to people with all their facades and defenses, and 98 percent of the people just melted. There were three kids, very, very angry teenagers. I went up to them, and with my wand I went bonk, bonk, bonk, and they melted. One guy came as a ghoul. I bonked him on the head and nothing happened. I did it again and he just stood there. He wouldn't give me an inch. He was just stubbornly staring me down. So I said, 'Oh, come on.' And I bonked him. And he melted. A Korean woman came up to me and said, 'What does it mean when you bonk them on the head?' I said, 'It means you get your wish, darling.' 'Oh, she said, 'do me, do me.'

'Then another woman dressed as a frog hurled herself at my feet and she said, 'Make me into a prince!' I kept going like this [Fred motions with his outstretched arm as if he were waving a wand] but it didn't work so I figured I would try it again. I thought, 'Maybe if she wanted to be a princess it might have worked. It's too complicated, I can't deal with it. It's two wishes.' Or maybe I could do it, but I thought that she needed to live with it a little longer. Also, I thought it was touching; there would be a group of friends and they would say, 'Oh, get him. He really needs it!' I could tell that this person was really hurting. Whether it was for personal turmoil or heartbreak or a physical situation. They come up to me with such earnestness, saying like, you know, 'Make this better!' And

it was a very rewarding thing to hit them with the wand. It seemed to cheer them up anyway. People have this innate reverence for the power of this mythological figure. And I guess that was what I was thinking of. It was really the power of goodness that captivated me about it and also instructed me. I had no idea that I would get such a response going out as some embodiment of mercy and goodness. It was really very gratifying. A friend of mine who was with me and is very spiritual, kept saying, 'Fred, you're really healing people.'

'I even had a fantasy of going to midtown dressed as the good fairy. I may even do it. I think there's a magic in Halloween that allows people to suspend things and allow certain fantasies and let their own wishes come true. So I don't know if that would work on a Tuesday afternoon in the middle of 'reality.' But it did work on Halloween. It certainly did. I was just impressed with the power of goodness. I guess that Halloween is a custom we have. On a certain day we feel this. On a certain day we feel that. We're patriotic on the
Fourth of July. We feel a certain sense of renewal around Easter in the Christian world. On the other hand, I’m also into astrology. Halloween is in Scorpio. It has to do with the sense of death and renewal, too, which is the sign of Scorpio. The Christians have taken that up and made it All Saints’ Day. Before Christianity, that is when the dead people rise from the grave. It’s sort of the dark side of it. That’s I think where the ancient roots are from. And so it’s both sides. The dark side on Halloween and the light side on All Saints’ Day, which is both sides of Scorpio in a sense. But I felt like I wanted to be a good figure on that night. It’s funny, but I guess I’m just like that out of darkness does come light.

Maybe that’s mixing up a lot of symbols, but it seems like out of negativity is a lot of potential for good. And I just felt like my costume was a lot more successful than the people who were trying to be scary. I felt like there was a magnetism and a magic coming from me.

“Do I see this as a gay event? No. I don’t see the Gay Pride March as a gay parade either. I see it as a people’s event. People just being themselves. I’m gay myself, but I’m definitely a person first. For me the parade is an opportunity to explore sides to being human. Whatever you’ve got to work on. A friend of mine went as the wicked sea hag witch, and she said she’d never do it again. She went to McDonald’s and pressed her face against the glass and was picking her nose. People hit her. They were negative toward her. She was, perhaps, getting out some of her anger and resentment. But it’s sort of what you sew you reap. She said she would never do that again. But I think she had to do it that time. I see people getting out anger at the Church. They cross-dress as nuns. There’s a guy from that church on Christopher Street with a cross impaled through his neck and he’s like this manic preacher. I’m at peace with the Church. I think God is all around. So I don’t need to make fun or work out anything with the religious world. I just felt so full of love and goodness this year. I think after going through the grief process, it was such a devastating experience; it’s funny the ironies of life, but it released so much goodness in me and so much love. I could have gotten cynical, too.

“I suppose Halloween really must be some sort of primal ritual for people, some kind of need to act out something. I think it’s becoming New York’s holiday. And that’s great. It’s a chance for New York to celebrate its diversity of character. It’s really a very creative city, even despite all the yuppification and gentrification. Also, you know New York is in some ways perceived as a city of greed and of practicality. Money talks. I think this is perhaps a cleansing ritual for the city to recall where its heart can be—one of fantasy and imagination. It can relinquish some of that hard edge.

“Is this a peculiarly Greenwich Village vision of the city? Well, the West Village is considered the gay capital of the city. Gays have a lot of lessons to learn, but in a sense they have allowed themselves to break from some conventions about gender and other conventional roles a human being can play. The straight world has that more defined. When someone comes out as a gay person they have to question all of that. They may come up with some stereotypical answers, but there really is an opportunity to come out as a truer individual. I certainly don’t think that’s limited just to gay people, but it’s something that gay people definitely have to deal with. The parade allowed me to act that out for myself. I think the parade allows people to reveal a lot about themselves.

“Take the promenade on Christopher Street. It’s almost like the adult version of the Halloween parade. I’m wondering if it isn’t something about the ambivalent sexuality of it that attracts people. This city is very alienated from its sexuality. I think that’s why we have all the pornography and all the acting-out places. Christopher Street is like a sex center, and people are confused and fascinated about their sexuality and about what gender means.

“So the promenade has a sexual charge in it. You know, men dress as women, flirting with straight men. I’ve seen straight men flirting with female impersonators. And they know it’s a man, and they’re enjoying it. It’s titillating. I don’t think it means they’re necessarily gay either. But it allows them a release from these preconceived notions about what it means to be a straight man and a gay man. There’s a mix of everyone there. You can really feel the tourist aspect of it. I was a little resentful initially because I realized it’s really not my place anymore. On the other hand, I realized that people need to be reminded of this other side to life—this life of imagination. So I thought, Well, OK. It’s changed. It’s not my ball game anymore, but let them be here and let me be here, too.” And I felt accepted by them. I felt they got something from me, and that gave me something back. I had to shift gears, though. I felt like, instead of being in an aquarium all on my own, it was more like being in an aquarium being watched. I was aware of all the outsiders.”
What
Halloween
Is About

Although many have noted a decline in a visibly gay (i.e., drag queen) presence in the parade, in part due to the appeal the event has for an ever wider audience outside the gay and arts community, interviews with participants attest to the extraordinary appeal that the holiday Halloween itself continues to have for the gay community. The reason for this is not difficult to fathom since “dress up” indicates the malleability of gender and that its characteristics are culturally rather than naturally determined. But performing drag also highlights the distinctly parodic sensibility that underlies gyness, stemming undoubtedly from the ambiguity of male and female within gay culture. This is why they take the parade so seriously, why they so frequently refer to Halloween as their Christmas. What better holiday could there be for a community born out of choice rather than blood, without prior existing kin, ethnic or neighborhood ties? Although the same could be said for many straight people who live within America’s largest cities, it holds even more so for gay people. Indeed, what better holiday for people accustomed to hiding identity and masquerading the inner self in the trappings of someone else’s codes of conduct? Given the very deep connection Halloween has to the gay experience, no wonder so many gay participants feel quite erroneously that the parade was in origin a gay event now infiltrated by straights and that the entry of even a small number of commercial floats, large numbers of store-bought and a fair amount of blatantly political costumes (created for the most part by participants themselves) is a betrayal of their holiday. The following interviews are with two drag queen participants who continue to see the parade as an integral part of their individual and communal lives as gay New Yorkers. The final interview suggests a much greater degree of alienation from an event that now reaches out to include so many different kinds of New Yorkers. Although he, like many of those interviewed, denies the connection, it’s difficult not to tie this sense of loss and decline more generally to the epidemic ravaging the gay community rather than to a substantial change in the quality of the parade.

Daniel Wintrobe is a hair stylist and makeup artist who owns a small hair salon in a fashionable part of the Upper East Side. He is in his thirties and has participated in the parade for nearly a decade, since not long after arriving in New York. For the past few years he and several friends have dressed as *caricata*—exaggerated female forms—with the same basic body but clothed each year in different bras and panties.

“We try to make different social comments—sometimes funny, sometimes more serious. Every year people actually wait for us to come. They bring pictures of us that
they had taken the year before—some have pictures of us from every year. We’ve become a legendary thing. So it’s kind of fun. One year we did a tribute to the Eiffel Tower. The next year it was to South America, then to Chinese take-out food and Coca Cola. That and the tribute to France are our two favorites. Last year I did a stuffed banana, and I made it into Us magazine. This year we did a tribute to war. We called it Desert Storm. I had a tank on my head with rifles—children’s plastic rifles, of course—leaves, hand grenades, binoculars, plastic knives, a green helmet with a Desert Storm veterans patch on the front, and hand-grenade earrings. The bras and panties were made of Desert Storm camouflage material trimmed in gold fringe. I had gold epaulets, admiral stripes on the breasts, and combat boots. That’s about it. I called myself Desirée Storm, some people called me Rambette. I also carried a child’s machine gun with a little recoil action at the end that lit up and made a lot of noise. The name Desirée Storm came about because of one of my clients who has that name. It wasn’t to make a political statement. Not at all. It kind of turned out that way every time the press interviewed us.

“My idea for a costume usually hits me about Labor Day Weekend. The Banana King came about because I was walking by a store and there were these beautiful half-peeled silk bananas, and I thought this would be great. Desirée Storm came about because I was walking past a toy store and there was a tank in the window, it was six dollars, and I thought, ‘I hope it’s not heavy.’ And the next thing you know I was wearing it on my head. So, I don’t think it was political at all. I kind of wanted to make fun of what went on because I think it was not necessary. Being a person who works with the public, I have to be able to talk about a lot of different subjects with a lot of different types of women—punk for the sixteen-year-olds, opera with the seventy-year-olds—so, of course, it affects me. But I really didn’t understand it. The one thing that stood out in my mind was there were so many women involved—the women who were taken away from their babies. And so I guess that’s how it all came about.

“Why do I do the parade? It started off as fun, then I started going after prize money at the local discos. If you plan your week right and your costume is strong enough, you can go between Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan and make quite a bit of money. With the stuffed banana I won $1,700, which paid for the costume and a vacation in Febru-
ary. This year [1991] I did not compete. I judged two contests instead because I was winning every year and people were getting a little sick of it. So the costuming has gone through many phases from fun, to money, to this year where it’s basically tradition.

“What do the costumes mean to me? I think being gay. Halloween is a very gay holiday because it allows the expression of dress up and part of our life is pretend and dress up. There’s so many people who have to live in the closet or be someone else once they leave for their office, so it’s the holiday we relate to very well. These particular costumes were done as a parody of women, and I think that most gay men do have a feminine and a masculine side and that’s what getting in touch with all that is. I think we do it to poke fun a little bit at ourselves. The pads make it such an exaggeration.

**Women love the bodies because they all relate to cellulite,** and the butt and the hips are so exaggerated. And everyone has a good time. The men lust for us, and the women just gawk. It’s amazing how many people look at us and they don’t relate to the fact that it’s padding. They think that it’s our bodies.

“I suppose that Christopher Street has become a Mecca for straights to visit. They need escapism more than we do because they live the lies. I’ve been very fortunate because my life is my own. I’ve never had any interference from parents. People go to the Village because they can live recklessly through other people. I know the sadness out there. I see twenty clients a day. I know what they’re doing. I hear the stories constantly. Also there are some very sophisticated people who come and revel in the fun. All types come. I’m not offended by people who come to gawk. Women are fascinated by the breasts. They grab me and I
grab back. They scream. The husbands get upset. But I say, ‘She grabbed me first!’ Women photograph their red-faced husbands with their head on my breasts. It’s their carnival, their release. It’s part of the fun too. I only get offended if people try to cause me pain.

‘Also, to gay people Halloween is a release. It’s breaking down the barriers one day a year. We do have Gay Pride Day which is usually the last Saturday every June, which is a political thing. But I think this is more of a festival of enjoyment of being all the hidden things you’ve kept suppressed and just going crazy. And straight people come to see the gay people make fools of themselves. This year I was struck by the fact that there were all these political statements in the parade. People marching against fur in the Halloween parade with masks on. To me that’s crap. That’s not what it’s about. I’m not pro or con fur coats. But the bottom line is that this is Halloween. It’s trick or treat. It’s dressing up. It’s that whole feeling. It’s not about ‘save the farms by dressing people up in cow outfits.’ Leave that shit for later. I hated it. Our costumes are making a serious statement by poking fun at women, at exploitation.

‘Do I see the parade as a gay event? This used to be a gay parade. Yes, it used to be ours. The Village used to be ours, too. Through AIDS we’ve lost it just like San Francisco is totally changed now because of everyone dying. I don’t think it has to be anybody’s parade. It doesn’t have to be straight, it doesn’t have to be gay, it just has to be a night when people can enjoy themselves by being somebody else and releasing all that energy. This year for the first time I was egged in my costume. And I went through so many feelings about it because, first of all, I work so hard getting it together that just the idea that somebody’s trying to take that away from me, to destroy it, is very frustrating. And usually it’s very ignorant people who do that. So there’ll always be people who’ll try to take the fun out of it, who’ll try to make something serious out of something that’s not.

‘One friend was egged two years ago. His costume was destroyed, and he won’t do it anymore. I always go back to Sheridan Square after the parade and mingle with the people on Christopher Street. I let people take pictures, but I will only stay for a short period of time now, because the longer you stay lets the people who’re going to cause problems have enough time to get there. They usually arrive later, egging and bating people up. Sometimes groups of kids go through with bats. Imagine being in a crowd of people next to you, body to body, and having all of a sudden young kids with three-and-a-half-foot-long wooden sticks and yelling at the top of their lungs running through a packed crowd and hitting people with these sticks. It’s frightening because there’s nowhere to run. And if you happen to have a four-and-a-half-foot headpiece on your head, and if somebody bumps into you or swats it, you’re either going to have a cut on your head or you’re going to lose it in the crowd. Or it’s going to fall on someone else, and they’re going to be hurt. So these things ruin it. It takes the fun out of it.

‘When my friends and I came home one year after being egged we talked about not doing it the next year. But then again it’s quite a rush to have your picture taken so many times and not knowing where it’s going to wind up. One year I was in a bank window in the Village. You know, I’m walking down the street and there I was.

It’s kind of fun being public domain sometimes."

Jeffrey Wallach appeared in the 1991 parade dressed as an English nanny pushing a fifties-style pram containing a grown man in diapers and accompanied by two other adults, each dressed as a little boy and little girl. Like Wintrode, Wallach is in his mid-thirties and has participated in the parade for a dozen years. He travels widely and uses his knowledge of other carnivals to create his Halloween characters.

‘I first began to participate in the parade because, being a costume designer, it’s kind of hard not to say yes to something like that. It’s an opportunity to show off your finery. The parade then was smaller. It was more like family. I participate in Gay Pride Day to make a political statement about numbers so politicians will take note. However, the Halloween parade was to be with my friends. It’s a big
Mardi Gras carnival celebration. It's a chance to go out and have a blast.

'I used to look forward to seeing the new Ralph Lee puppets. It's lost some of the charm, but it's gained recognition. It's less family and drag queenie stuff, and because of the economy the costumes are not as clever as they used to be. Something is missing in the parade for me—that sparkle that the fags seem to have an edge on. It's sad. I was hoping the rest of the world could catch up.

'In previous years I've done huge showgirl costumes with six-foot-high pink feather hats, long feather tails, rhinestones, and so on. This year I decided to do something simple. I guess it's something about the personality of the performer because I got just as much attention as I always get. We were just guys in costume. We did nothing sexual at all. And unlike previous years there was no animosity from the crowd. So this year was total fun for me. Everybody could relate to the baby and find it nonthreatening and humorous. Drag queens use too much mascara. They overdo it. That's when you can't fool anybody. The simpler it is, the easier it is to get someone to look twice because they're not sure. That's the fun in dressing up.

'Why should it be nonthreatening? It doesn't have to be. But I've been confronting people's fears for years in the Village, and I'm no longer interested in doing that. I guess when you get to be over thirty something, you lose a lot of that young enthusiasm. I already know I'm gay. I don't have to prove anything. Last year some friends wanted to go as a group, so we went in very simple pirate costumes, not as transvestites. The fun is in dressing up, not in the sex thing. When I needed to assert myself and find myself I made sure I would wear the most outrageous clothes I could. However, I got past that.

'To tell you the truth, I do the parade because I just want to have fun. I want to see who's been clever this year. I do costumes every day. I don't need to see costumes. I need to see good costumes or costumes executed with love. I want to see people encouraged to make art live, to be out there, to have fun, to laugh at themselves, to dance in the streets. I don't say much reason to live on this planet if we can't have fun. I enjoy it when people can laugh at themselves. That's when the specialness comes out in a person, when they open up and find out who they are, rather than find out who they're not. Prejudice and racism only come from what you don't know, the fear of becoming that other person. Finding out who you are and living that leads you to not have those fears.

'What does a pirate costume have to do with who I am? A swashbuckling adventurer? Oh, I think that's me. A mothering nancy, that's me. A flaming feather-covered showgirl? That's me too. But that's just how I am. My friend belongs to a Christian youth group, and they came as '101 Dalmatians.' And to me, to see all these people being silly puppies was charming and so much fun, and certainly nonthreatening to anyone. As the parade became less drag queenie and more open and more mainstream and it moved onto Sixth Avenue, it became a space for political folk. Last year a whole group of people who were walking in front of me were handing out 'Don't Wear Fur' flyers, and I thought that didn't belong in the parade, but I wasn't about to tell them not to be in it. What annoyed me was they weren't in costume. There was a Christian group dressed up as sheep. At least they were dressed up and into the spirit of the whole thing. You don't have to love their pamphlets, and you don't have to read it. But at least they were in the spirit of what was going on. There was a group handing out condoms, and they were in their costumes in leather. As I said, once the drag queens cleared out there was a whole big area for political folk to come on in. And in New York people will go to great lengths to get some kind of attention. If the TV cameras are there, the fur activists are going to show up.

'The changes in the parade have a lot to do with what's happened to the area. The Village isn't the home it was ten years ago anyway. It's not that kind of a family village. The Village is only a word now. The diversity that has moved in has made it be no longer an artist's community within the city. I don't think it will ever be that again. Who lives in the Village now? Everybody. In this city you live where you can afford to live. The economy has a lot to do with it. You don't look for a community. Spanish Harlem ain't that Spanish. Black Harlem ain't that black. Drugs are everywhere. It's tough to live anywhere or everywhere. So I see lots of families in the Village. I'm happy for that. When you mix up lots of people you get better understanding. At least I want to believe that.

'Gay used to be an oddity, but in New York it's no longer an oddity. Besides there's not as many outrageous things going on in the streets anymore because there's nothing we have to prove. The medical situation has certainly changed the face of the planet. Look. The designer
Brandy Alexander died of AIDS. He was an institution in the parade. However, I don’t really believe that it’s AIDS that has changed the parade. It has to do with the parade’s becoming mainstream and becoming recognized. I personally would like to play down the AIDS thing and the parade. I’m there to have fun. There’s not as much outrageousness because we don’t need that anymore. We’re past that. You see, my roommate died earlier this year. I’m sad that a lot of those people don’t walk with me anymore. But I have to go on. Yeah, I’d like a whole lot of those friends to be here this year walking with me in the parade. I suppose a lot of those people were some of the more outrageous ones. They went pretty fast. They were the wild ones who tried everything. Yeah, there’s validity to the fact that it isn’t as gay as it was because of it. But I just don’t think along those lines. I guess that’s me.”

At the end of the interview Wallach gave me Steven Rosen’s phone number; Rosen had appeared in the parade as the little boy in a sailor suit in Wallach’s “Nanny and her Pram” routine. Rosen, who is in his thirties, skews out a living as a costume jewelry designer. Even more than Wallach, Rosen denies any connection between the impact of AIDS and the decline in the number of drag queens in the Halloween parade. Rosen has appeared in five previous parades: in an antique Napoleonic uniform and devil mask with gold mylar (also made by Wallach); as a member of “the happy family,” with giant smiley faces; as a house of cards. One year he appeared in drag as a Hasidic Jew. Whereas other costumes are more purely whimsical, in doing the Hasid Rosen had a point he wanted to make.

“I had on your basic hat with black telephone cords stapled to the hat that looked like huge sidelocks down to my feet. A black overcoat—

**fishnet stockings and your basic sensible pumps.**

I tried to think what a Hasidic Jew in drag would wear, and I decided it would be something very plain and sensible. Also, I can’t walk in high heels. Although I’m Jewish myself, I can’t stand Hasids because they had been fighting against the gay rights bill. That was the first time I ever marched in the parade.”

Like Wallach, Rosen has utter contempt for those who insert their own political agenda into this event, without carefully cloaking it in humorous garb.

“When I first started there was nothing political in it except some fringe people giving out pamphlets. Since Act Up and Queer Nation became politically active, they used to do things in the parade. Now there are other groups in it doing things. The parade has become very political, but this is not the holiday to do it. You can’t help make a political statement if a man dresses up as a woman. The personal statement is the political statement. But it’s all done in fun. Now there’s the antifur people—all liberal causes—the environmental people, three Saddam Husseins in electric chairs, it’s kind of tasteless. There was someone trying to remind people how many Iraqis died in the war. Tasteless. That’s not what Halloween is for. You wouldn’t do that on Christmas. Halloween is like Christmas for me!

“When I first started going to the parade, it was within the community. People were making personal statements, it wasn’t an outreach thing. It was all artists and gay people—everyone watching and participating. Now a lot of people are gearing what they’re doing to this huge humongous crowd, which is basically suburban straights. So that’s
where you get all these political things. There were these great stewardesses called "TWAT" and they're not there anymore. There was a lot more outrageous sexual stuff. I think it's tamed down. Those things still exist because I see them in the bars afterward, but I don't see them in the parade.

"Last year they had Mardi Gras in New York for the first time. The idea was that it would only be a Village thing. A lot of people threw Mardi Gras parties, and restaurants had Mardi Gras specials. It was a new thing, and I didn't know any of the traditions behind Mardi Gras—how to dress and what to do. I think a lot of people were like that. It's kind of foreign, but the whole concept behind it was to have something to replace the Halloween parade that would be just a Village celebration, to capture the spirit of the original Halloween parade. It's very cold so you don't really want to dress up in a really great costume. That's one thing that's always made Halloween so great.

It's the last chance for all the gay men with great bodies to show them off before winter.

"I don't think the changes are because of AIDS. No. There are always new people. A lot of our best and brightest have died. But gay people are all over the place and being born each day and they all come here. And there'll be more gay people to come up in future generations. But a lot of gay men don't want to do this for the gawking straight people; they want to do it for their family, their gay family."
Seen through the eyes of drag queens, the parade is in decline, and the most talented performers have either died or are seeking alternative venues for their routines. But for the majority of those who participate, the parade still offers a chance to have fun, to perform on the streets of the city wearing simple masks, store-bought or even laboriously created costumes, to bask in the glory of a great public spectacle, and to capture public acclaim even for a short time. Still, others are less interested in having fun but are determined through their costumes to have an impact on the city, to rally others for their cause. Given the economic ills faced by New York since the late 1980s, an increasing number of participants and spectators consider such a political turn appropriate.

Tasha Depp appeared in the 1992 parade as part of "The Tornadoes." A thirty-two-year-old graphics designer, she has participated with the same group of women for the past seven years. As an artist, Depp relishes the opportunity to perform for a broader public than she can by exhibiting her work in small New York galleries. The larger the audience, the more people there are who's sensibility she can challenge.

"It started when I was at Cooper Union as an art student and my roommate and I did costumes together. After I graduated it evolved into a larger and larger group of women friends. There were always wild Halloween parties to go to, and then I discovered the parade by accident. Making the costumes is really fun. As artists we just really like to do that. And it's fun also because we're all so busy now that this is a good way for us to catch up and socialize. It's like a quilting bee. We visualize something and then become it physically. It's just strange to envision how a person can become a thing. One year we were caryatids, and another year we were giant soda bottles filled with blood.

"Generally, the way we work is that somebody does the design or comes up with the idea, and we agonize over whether to do it or not. Usually that goes back and forth, and we change our mind a lot. Now it's gotten so that it's not until three or four days beforehand that we actually decide what we're going to do, which is awful. Then somebody designs it. We have this joke where one of my friends is really notorious for coming up with the greatest ideas at the very last minute, and so every year in September we start telling her that it's Halloween in a week. This year my friend Chris who's the architect went and bought the wire mesh and all the materials that we needed to do the tornadoes. She actually convinced us to do the costume because she had put so much work into it. We just felt that since we have to do something, this might as well be it. We each worked on our own costume in the shop but helped out if someone fell too
far behind. It depends what the idea is, but it usually takes maybe three- or four-hour sessions to make the costume.

"Chris liked the tornado idea because she was interested in the structural problems involved with turning a human body into a tornado. But I just felt like it didn’t have enough either political or social or even just humorous content. It was too simply a structural idea. So I kept on trying to find a way to connect it to the recent hurricane in Florida because that might have made me happy. But that really didn’t get through to people.

"The Tornadoes were each about twelve or fifteen feet tall, and we wore them on our bodies. They were made out of wire and two or three metal structural rods. The metal rings got bigger and bigger as they got higher. They were covered with cotton batting, which we pulled out and stretched diagonally around the wire rings, because tornadoes go in rings like that. Then we spray-painted the batting dark gray on gray. At the last minute we stuck some little things into the costumes. I had a man’s hand coming out of mine to look like the tornado had sucked someone up. And we had a few victims walking with us who were friends of ours. One of them was really great. It was like his head had come through a trailer window and he was just wearing a portion of the trailer around his neck. He had blood coming down his face, and he was stumbling along. It was nice. The whole thing cost around $180. We split that up, and so it came to $30 or $40 a piece. That’s pretty average.

"The audience reaction would vary depending on whether we had the energy and enough room to do our performance of rotating, sucking up, and trying to chase after the victims. And when we had a wide enough space and we weren’t being swallowed up by other costumes, the crowd would actually scream, ‘Oh, wow! Tornadoes!’ And you heard this clapping. There’d be all excited. But then other times you had people saying, ‘What are you?’—people who came up to you real close and they couldn’t really see the other tornadoes or the victims. They just saw this big weird thing coming towards them and they didn’t know what it was. So it varied. I always find that real disappointing. You go to all that work and people say, ‘What are you?’ That’s just really awful. I never answer.

"It’s sort of hard to explain what these costumes really mean to me. It depends what they are. Like one year when I was a maxi-pad by myself, a sanitary napkin. That had a whole feminine political bent to it. Two years ago we were men and that was really fun. Last year we were male lifeguards, and we had these big muscles. We looked like we were naked. It was done with stockings and stuffing material. The year before we were muscle-builders, and we had on big gold chains. We copied the idea the second year. But it was fun because people really couldn’t decide whether we were men or women. And then when they realized what we were, they were so surprised and shocked. It was a really great costume, really fun.

"As an artist I like the fact that I have an audience. It’s really hard when you’re an artist in New York. You struggle and struggle to show your work. This way people lined up for blocks to see you in a costume or to see your artwork. There’s something very gratifying about that. And serious about it, too, particularly when we’ve come up with the more conceptual types of ideas like impersonating men. One year we were flowers. There was something kind of feminist about doing these huge flowers that walked down the street. They were twelve or fifteen feet tall. That was kind of nice. And also there’s something about just making art that visible and that important and that public and understandable that seems really important, too. Because a lot of people don’t walk into art galleries. They don’t want to deal with art that way.

"The significance of dressing as men, of course, is making fun of men. And I hesitate to say that it’s not vicious. It’s making fun of the power that men take on with muscle-building and things like that. And we’re sort of saying we can look this way, too. At least for a night. Or we can try to embody this kind of power. I think when you’re wearing a costume you do take on the qualities of whatever it is you’re dressed up as and that’s really strange. It takes a little while to fall into the pattern.

When we were the men we all started to walk differently
and carry ourselves differently. And that's pretty exciting. Another fun thing about being men is that we could flirt with all the gay men who were embodying women. That was hilarious. That's a nice thing to do in the parade—to have a costume that interacts well with other people. It forces people to communicate with each other just because they're dressed up as something. It breaks down all these barriers.

"If you ask me what the parade does for the city, one of my immediate answers would be that a lot of people who aren't from the city now come to this parade, and that makes it both fun and unfun. I remember when the parade had a lot more to do with the West Village and the gay community. I think maybe the costumes were a little bit more individual and a little bit weirder, and now it's becoming a little bit less interesting. But I think it still is a real focus for the city on the night that it occurs. This year after I left the parade, it seemed as if nobody else was even dressed up. The whole city was focused on the parade. And if you weren't at the parade then you weren't interested in Halloween. Generally, though, I think people in New York make a big deal about Halloween. I'm not sure why that is. Maybe because it's sort of a slightly satanic offbeat holiday and people in New York kind of really jazz it up. I can't imagine this parade in another city.

"My parents live outside Richmond, and I just can't imagine this level of commitment to Halloween. I can just imagine a whole Southern fundamentalist idea operating where they don't want to celebrate Halloween. I think one reason why I like it so much is that it is not a Christian holiday. And that's important to me personally, because I'm not a Christian, and that's partly because I have a lot of born-again Christians in my family, and I find that a lot of things about Christianity are really repressive. And there's something about Halloween—it's kind of like Mardi Gras. I remember being in that parade where it was just one amazing visual thing after the next. I can think of things like someone who was Mona Lisa with a gold frame around themselves. And there were all kinds of amazing ideas and some of them are really political, some of them are sexual, and some of them are just visual. It's such a barrage of amazing expressions of people's ideas. And that kind of creativity does not come out in any other holiday. I mean people just do not do that. It's not about repression at all. And it's not about carrying around an image of someone on a cross and feeling sorrowful. It's totally wild, unpredictable, and chaotic. It's much more like life is. So for me, it's more important than any of the other holidays."

Theresa Demas is in her late twenties. She is a politically active singer who plays keyboard and synthesizer in a rock band. The first year she was in the parade, Demas appeared as a wicked witch from Oz wearing gothic black clothing.

"After that I came as Mr. Bubble. I had a couple of hundred balloons, and I was blowing bubbles at the crowd. And then I was Tammy Faye—I had a big bucket that said 'Tammy Faye's Mascara Fund' and people would give me money. I was Leona Helmsley. I was in jail suit with an enormous royal purple robe and a crown. Another year I was Marla Maples, and I went with two other people—a Donald and an Ivana. One year I was this very strange exoticish thing like something from a fairy tale, and I was throwing fairy dust at people. Then I was a mummy one year."

Although she considers current events in designing her costumes, Demas insists on interweaving the serious and the light-hearted. Laughter, after all, is subversive. In 1992 she appeared as "A Thousand Points of Light" together with her husband Craig, who came as the Easter Bunny. I asked her about the combination.

"If you believe in one, you're just as likely to believe in the other.

I wore very large pink glasses because when you look through them.
everything looks rosy.

I had a small little safety net with me and a big sign that said 'Thousand Points of Light' with a big yellow smiley face on it. I carried a magic wand and a bag of fake money with Alfred E. Neuman’s head instead of George Washington’s. My husband came as the Easter Bunny. He carried a basket of carrots and Easter eggs. He’s also currently unemployed and will be so until spring (ha, ha). And he’s a good spokesperson for family values because he came from a very large family. So the costume connects to modern-day American mythology. I was a superhero who most people have never seen but they’ve all heard of so it was the first opportunity for people to see me in the flesh.

“My husband and I have been married for a year, and this was his first time in the parade. He didn’t know a lot about it. He does sculpture and jewelry, and I told him that this is right up his alley. At first he needed encouragement. We live now in New Jersey, and when we left home it was like we were the only ones dressed up. But as soon as we got off the train in New York, there were people walking around in costume. New Yorkers are so used to eccentricity and diversity that people didn’t take any notice of us. I used to live in the Village, and on Halloween I would wear my outfit all day. I would go to the bank, do errands, and even be at work in costume. Most of the time I worked in a record store. People would come in, see a witch, and they’d think it was a hoot.

“I pick my costumes by which ones interact well with the crowds and with other performers in the parade. When I was Mr. Bubbles, there was a medieval lanceman who was bursting all the bubbles I was blowing. When I was Tammy Faye there were all kinds of other preachers, and we would totally cut it up or people would say, ‘Tammy Faye, I gave you enough money’ and I would start crying in an exaggerated way. This year when I was ‘Thousand Points’ people would tell me that I was the scariest costume in the parade. And I would give them the fake money with Alfred E. Neuman’s face instead of George Washington, and they would burst out laughing. There were a lot of Barbara Bushes in the parade, and I would pose with them and we would cut it up a bit. Next year I’m definitely going to do the parade, and I’m already thinking of what to do. But it depends on what’s in the headlines and what people are talking about because I like to interact with the crowds.

“There’s a lot of political stuff in the parade, but I don’t really see the parade itself as a political event. It’s apolitical and political—both. The satisfaction to me is when you get lots of people to laugh and to play along with you. Most of the time New York is not like this. It’s a harsh kind of place, and this is the time when everyone in New York just comes together and laughs together and feels around together. Like two days before the parade this guy was acquitted of stabbing some guy in Crown Heights, and all the papers were trying to make it into a racial thing and stir up race riots. But in the parade everyone just got together and had a good time. You saw every nationality in the parade and every nationality on the sidelines. People went there to have a good time, and that’s what they did.”
Given how many approach Halloween intending to articulate particular political and cultural agendas, it is somewhat surprising that a number of participants even think about the religious implications of the holiday, designing their costumes and performances as a meditation on the struggle between Life and Death, Good and Evil, God and the Devil. Some do it tangentially, as part of their interpretation of a persona, the meditation is almost an afterthought. Others do it intentionally; for them it constitutes the reason for participating in the parade, the very meaning of the holiday. Even such seemingly political costumes as Richard Nixon or Saddam Hussein may be less “political” than a part of the larger license the holiday provides to play at being evil, or in the words of one informant, “to do a little business with the Devil.” Such costumes constitute the overwhelming majority of those worn at the parade, although the intentions of their wearers are seemingly quite secular. Their meanings, however, can be rather complex: they appear to celebrate evil, but in doing so, the intentions may be simultaneously to exalt as well as to dispel.

Ray Nunez is a thirty-one-year-old doorman who has appeared in the parade as Fidel Castro for the past several years.

"The biggest fun for me was the debate between Bill Clinton and Mr. Bush at the parade, because having Mr. Fidel Castro in the middle to separate them is really quite funny. I found that to be pretty exciting. The parade was moving along, they would stop and I would get in the middle and that would be the end of that.

"Why do I do Fidel? Well, number one, nobody does Fidel Castro, and being from a Caribbean island—I’m from Puerto Rico, it’s right next to Cuba—I like to do Fidel Castro. It’s something unusual. It’s really a lot of fun, and I get very good vibes from people, good reaction. There are a lot of people who are happy to see Fidel Castro at the parade, and I actually looked pretty good out there.

"The fact is that it really doesn’t make any difference what costume you get dressed up in, the whole point is that you're going to go out and people are going to appreciate you getting dressed and having the guts to go out and march in the parade. And people look at you and say ‘Man, you did it!’ That’s the thrill I get when people come up to me, shake my hand, and say, ‘You really look like Fidel. Hey, you look good! You look good! You really do. Nobody else is Fidel but you!’ I go,
'Hey, somebody's got to do the dirty work.'

[Laughs] That's my kick.

Norbert Lopez is a professional wrestler who earns his living by driving a truck. He is in his twenties, lives in the Bronx, and for the past few years he's been attending the parade dressed as "The Road Warrior." The costume resembles a skimpy coat of mail with metallic-looking spikes and a large silver sword. In 1992 he participated with two other people: a woman friend was his "so-called manager" and held onto him with a chain; a male friend came as "The Terminator." Lopez has never been to Christopher Street and knows nothing about the promenade. When the 1992 parade reached Union Square, Lopez headed to the Palladium to compete in a costume contest sponsored by a local radio station. He was eliminated after making the semifinals.

"I thought it was really wild, a really outrageous type of thing. I didn't think the parade was a gay thing. Just people having a good time, having fun. I've been in it three times. The first time in black and silver, then red and black, now black and silver. I changed the outfit just by changing the color.

"I first heard about the parade from 'Hot 97 FM.' I was a spectator at it once, and I said to myself, 'If I could just be part of it, marching in the parade, showing off my costume!' The fun is having people say, 'Man, look at that costume! Look how unique it is!' It's like an original because I made it all. Nobody helped me, I put it all together myself.

It's based on two professional wrestlers known as 'The Legion of Doom.' They have the shoulder pads and the leg gear. And another team known as 'The Demolition' had the face mask, and what I did was I combined them both together into one outfit.

"Next Halloween I'll probably play somebody else. Maybe a professional wrestler known as 'The Undertaker.'

Or perhaps someone other than a wrestler. I like to be very unique in my designs. It may be time to try something new for next Halloween, something unique and outrageous that will make people look twice or three times. Just to outdo other people. This time I scared a lot of people. I even scared dogs. A lot of people wanted to know where I got the outfit. It's fun because you get interviewed by TV. Being in the newspapers is just like the ultimate high because you can say I was part of it. I've been in it. It's a nice thing.

"None of my friends participates in the parade that I know of. I tried to get them to go to some clubs afterwards, but most of my friends would rather go out throwing eggs and bombing people with flour and shaving cream. To me it's not my type of having fun—running around and causing trouble like that. It's not my way. I was brought up by good parents not to start trouble like that."

Dmitry Lontsman is a twenty-two-year-old Soviet Jew originally from Turkistan who is currently a theater student at New York University. He appeared in the 1992 parade as Data, a character from television's Star Trek: The Next Generation. Lontsman's costume stood out partly because of the meticulously detailed replication of Data, but also because he combined it with a robotlike performance and remained in character throughout the parade. He says he spent a year developing the costume.

"The reason that I do the parade is because it's interesting for me as an actor. When you act on stage, you feel free but it's complicated. There's you, there's the audience. You act, they watch. But on Halloween everyone can be an actor. The people in the audience were getting into the act with me. And at the Halloween parade you feel free because on stage if you make a mistake you blame yourself. But on Halloween you can do anything. It was fun when people were smiling and saying, 'Oh Data, Data!' And I said, 'I'm not Data. I'm Lore his twin brother!'

"It's fun also because I meet people. It's a carnival, and people like carnival. You can see people dressed like Madonna or the Beatles, and you can't see these people everyday. I saw the Beatles and I knew they were not the Beatles, but the audience and me acted like they were the Beatles. The same was for me. Many women like Data, and they would scream, 'I love you, Data.' And I would say, 'I'm sorry. I'm not capable of emotions.'

"New Year in Turkistan was a little like this. We would dance around a Christmas tree and put costumes on.
But this is different because on Halloween we try something forbidden. On this day we can do a little business with the Devil, and we won’t be punished by God. For me I just like to walk around and scare people. I remember how I scared an old woman. She wanted to ask me something, and so she said ‘Young man, young man.’ I said, ‘Hahhhhhhh’ and showed her my long fangs. She got scared.

‘My first year in the United States I worked as a paperboy in Staten Island and on Halloween I saw all these pumpkins and skeletons, and I had no idea what they were about. Actually, the first information I had on Halloween was from the movie E.T., but I had no idea what it was. The first time I wanted to put on a costume was when I came to class and saw that some of my friends had black faces and strange-looking eyes. I had no money, but I’m creative so I put some chalk on my face, I found an ink pen and I painted my lips black, and I put black around my eyes. I had a rehearsal on that day and later when I came out, I saw the people walking around. I wanted to be a part of it, and I promised myself that next Halloween I’ll do something.

‘Last Halloween I got the idea of making fun of a policeman. I was just mimicking him when he wasn’t looking. I was doing his pose and the public was laughing, and when he turned towards me I stopped. I also loved the part when I saw a guy who was dressed like the Pope and kept saying ‘God bless you!’ to the people. I got in front of him and said, ‘God damn you!’ I was dressed like a devil. He put his cross in front of me and I said, ‘I’m a Jewish vampire. I’m not afraid of you.’

‘The idea for Lt. Commander Data I got last Halloween, but I didn’t know where to find the shirt. Before I came here I used to work in the theater, and I knew I could make the pants and everything, but I couldn’t make the shirt. So last year I had to go as something else. When I left my country I took with me a top hat, tails, and a vest. I just thought that I’d make some kind of costume. I didn’t like Dracula because it was too classical. I thought that I would make myself as a Diakon, a Russian vampire. So I bought this big hat on a chain to put on my chest. I put spiders all over me. I put on frightening makeup. I bought rubber teeth. I worked one whole week making it. It was beautiful. At the parade I didn’t know what I had to do. I thought I would just walk. Suddenly, I felt that I had to dance. I shouldn’t have done it because once I started I couldn’t stop. I danced all twenty-three blocks.

‘Very often I feel like Data because it’s hard for me to fit in. I’m an alien. I can understand that people get bored with me. I don’t have the interests they have. Also, most of the guys here in school are eighteen years old. Three years’ difference sounds like nothing, but it isn’t. They have different interests. Mostly, the problem I have is because of language. I can’t express what I feel. My teacher told me that a person who thinks clearly explains clearly. But when you have mashed potatoes in your mouth you can’t. But even before I came here I felt that. I’m a little bit different. And sometimes I feel like I have a robot ability. I’m so logical. I can’t find contact even though I’m a social person. When I talk, people listen to me like Data, but actually my point of view is different. It’s close to human but it’s different.’

For many participants the satisfaction they derive from the parade has a good deal to do with the license their costumes give to explore an otherwise inhibited aspect of the self. Most take considerable satisfaction in expressing such aspects humorously—appropriately so, given the close ties between the politics of this event and the subversiveness of laughter. Those committed to a more serious form of expression devoid of satire may find the parade a disappointment, the response of participants and spectators much too shallow. The following interview suggests the degree to which some participants may misinterpret this event by seeing it as a genuine dialogue with the pagan world of spirits rather than what it is, namely a collective celebration of self and community.

Michael Broderick is a twenty-three-year-old graphic designer who works in a toy store in Manhattan. At the 1992 parade he wore a red wig spiraled into points to look like horns with a ponytail in back. Black eye shadow created an image that he describes as “clownlike, but with thin black lips, it was more harlequin than circus clown.” He wore a short jacket that was diamond-quilted in various shades of red covering a medal-filled red shirt. He also wore red pantaloons, red tights, and black slippers. His friend Rory Tyler, a window dresser, accompanied him. Tyler, whose dark black costume contrasted sharply with Broderick’s red outfit, was dressed as a personification of evil with large feathered wings, pale makeup, a long black robe, talonlike fingernails, pointed ears, and bright violet eyes. Together they made quite an impression, gathering a coterie of admirers greedy for the perfect photograph wherever they walked.
"I was supposed to be an evil clown, as if the Marquis de Sade had a court jester."

I go every year as some sort of clown. This year I wanted to do something that had a macabre edge to it. All of my costumes ever since I was little had been good or benevolent in some sort of way. I wanted to do something evil because Halloween is not about good and kind but about the scary things that come out and go bump in the night.

Tyler: "I'm attracted to dark beauty. Evil. I think our general idea of beauty as shiny and perfect is boring. I like the darker side, the cemetery or crypt. It's all about embracing the dark side. If you find these things beautiful, it dispels a lot of fear. I was brought up in a home that you would call paganistic. A lot of people in the family are into witchcraft, Tarot cards, things like that. So the pagan and psychic world are natural to me. I'd rather be a dark angel than a light angel—it just seems to me that the dark angel would be much more interesting.

"Halloween to me is supposed to be when the two worlds are closest—this world and the spirit world. It should be a time when you celebrate that, when you recognize that there are other realms that you can't see. The Halloween parade should be more like a grand procession celebrating death and the spirit world. Instead, it's become kind of juvenile to me. Halloween is not really a religious holiday because you don't need to observe anything. But it's just a time to consider death and not do this high school sort of howie wowie. It's like the Mexican Day of the Dead. You should also have fun.

"Halloween is significant for me because it's a release. The barriers come down between the world of the real—the sane and logical—and the fourth dimension. The result is a kind of controlled chaos. Like an orgy of the spiritual and the occult. Art has a lot to do with that. But people who don't wear costumes can still celebrate Halloween. But the part of Halloween where people are scared has been replaced by people drinking and having a good time. It's more like New Year's than Halloween. I increasingly see people with beer cans and tee-shirts. To them it's New Year's Eve in October.

"I spent a week and $400 on my wings, and people would run right into me without regard for my work. After the parade, I went to a party uptown at the Jacob Javits Center sponsored by Z100 FM. There was a cash prize, and I was hoping to win that. The cash was $1,500. Judging was an audience thing, and according to the audience response, I should have gotten second prize. But a Frankenstein family and not me was asked to go back up. First prize went to a big pair of pants with a penis hanging out. Yes, I was mildly upset.

"Of course, in New York it's more of a drag festival than anything else, which I view as sad. Someone can get in drag any night of the week. Drag has nothing to do with the link between this world and the spirit world. Halloween is about spirituality and the unseen. I tried to get others to go to the parade, but most people I know have abandoned it. A lot of it is that people don't have the time to do it. They're growing older and thinking that Halloween is childish. It also has to do with the growing right-wing Christian influence that wants to dispel Halloween because of its association with the occult. There are not as many Halloween specialties on TV. It's like everyone is trying to forget about Halloween. They've just turned it over to the gay community and said, 'OK. Here's a holiday for drag queens.'"
New York City's Halloween celebration does more than provide a public venue for ridiculing authorities and the conventions they prescribe. The parade also legitimates alternate visions of authority, or perhaps what might be better termed as counterauthority. The previous chapters examined the meanings Halloween has to various groups and individuals; these last two chapters consider the ways in which the parade reconfigures the city and particularly its inhabitants as an "imagined community." Such collective imaginings, as Benedict Anderson has noted, are critical for the formation of national identities among peoples far more attached to their local cultures. It has considerable significance, too, for a city many of whose residents have been born elsewhere or have chosen to attach themselves to communities that are not based on ethnicity or other bonds of kinship but rather on common interest or lifestyle. Because of the problem of housing availability in the city, few of these communities can establish themselves in one residential neighborhood. For communities as ephemeral or dispersed as those of designers, artists, performers, and gay people, the need to dramatize their existence is always present. But the need becomes increasingly urgent when their way of life is threatened or the turf they've long felt to be their own is occupied by others.

Unlike most civic celebrations, the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade makes no claim to respectability. Rather than challenging the city's elite by marching along Fifth Avenue—the typical route of ethnic events—the Halloween parade consecrates its own terrain. Particularly in its early years, as it wound its way through the streets of Greenwich Village, the parade both outlined the parameters of the neighborhood and dramatized its uniqueness. Indeed, unlike other parades, this dramatization of place—Greenwich Village—defined, initially at least, a way of life, a bohemian, artistic, and frequently gay way of life. Although the gay relationship to Greenwich Village is not in dispute (aside from the threat to its size and vitality posed by the AIDS epidemic), Greenwich Village as a bohemian artist colony is a thing of the past. New York neighborhoods have undergone transformations in recent years that are leaving whole sections of the city unrecognizable to their long-standing working-class or ethnic residents, and neighborhoods such as Greenwich Village are no exception. Given the high cost of housing in the city in general, including Greenwich Village, this charming neighborhood of early nineteenth-century row houses maintains a link to its celebrated past as an artist and writer's colony largely through Westbeth, a subsidized residence for artists. The fact that the parade was organized by artists living there, that in its early years it originated there and fanned outward through the neigh-
horhood and in more recent years has sought to link its route with its downscale counterpart, the East Village, New York’s contemporary Bohemia, suggests the contentious aspect of the parade, its attempt to incorporate and consecrate space that in real life is no longer its own. Outside the framework of a one-day public celebration, Greenwich Village has become part of the ordinary work-a-day world and not the artists’ world of ‘work as play.’

Although this event draws much of its authority as a licentious ‘tradition’ from Greenwich Village, its significance is increasingly associated with the city more generally. Perhaps this has something to do with the search for coherent images of place. Throughout history, public squares, monumental buildings, and processional avenues have served to generate a sense of cosmic and social order. But the decades of the sixties and seventies have not been kind to the symbolic ordering of city spaces. Rockefeller Center, for example, one of the great corporate contributions to city planning, has seen its thirties’ utopian vision undermined through an expansion of utterly banal buildings that overwhelm rather than complement the complex’s original layout. The Empire State Building, once the midtown symbol of New York City, stands now in the shadow of two lower Manhattan competitors—the twin towers of the World Trade Center—which have earned their place on the skyline by dint of brute force rather than style or grace. Moreover, the plaza in which they sit is forbidding not only because of its scale, but because it is windblown, ugly, and devoid of shops and cafes that have traditionally humanized such baroque urban spaces. The corporate city of the 1960s and 1970s was a significant retreatment from the attempts at social engineering through design of earlier decades.

Still, even when city design is overwhelmed by utilitarian concerns, urban cultures have their own way of generating sense of place. According to the urbanologist Lewis Mumford, “The key to the visible city lies in the moving pageant or procession.” Indeed, there are often many physical representations of New York City within the Halloween parade—roach motels, Statues of Liberty, the World Trade Center, Greenwich Village surrounded by encroaching high rises, and even stockbrokers jumping from skyscrapers—each underlining, albeit satirically, the uniqueness of the city and its sense of place.

Eric Mueller, a graphic designer, describes the “subway” costume he designed for the 1989 Halloween parade:

“It was a representation of New York and what New Yorkers are familiar with—a parody on what’s good and bad about New York. The subway was the L line—the Hell line—with destinations instead of going from, like, Dyre Avenue, we spelled it ‘Dye’ Avenue. Instead of going to Bedford Stuyvesant, it went to Deadford Stuyvesant. Slurs and slants on all the stuff. It was kind of cynical, and we wanted to throw a kind of gruesome or grotesque thing in a very Halloween-type costume as well as just this New York thing. One thing that worked out really well with it that we hadn’t planned on, was we had sliding doors on the costume and of course the parade got held up many times so the subway car would stop frequently. We’d slide open the doors and a lot of other people that were just in the parade in various other costumes went in and ‘rode’ the subway with us.

‘I think a lot of people liked it because they could associate themselves with it. It’s something that’s part of their lives here, the subway—all its faults and things like that which we made fun of. It seemed to draw a lot of attention. It was mentioned on local news and I think on national news. When they wrapped up their coverage, they said, ‘The hit of the parade was a working subway complete with malfunctioning lights.’ We had rigged up the lights with flashlight batteries. The batteries would die, and we would replace them. The lights were flickering. So basically it did come off like a malfunctioning subway car that was always being held up, and the lights would go off. We even re-created the effects of sparking tracks with a flash bulb, a little handheld flash bulb which popped off every once in a while. We had someone in there with a ghetto blaster. We really did try to recreate the ambiance, as it were, of being inside a New York City subway car.”

Proportionately, such representations of New York City are only a minor part of the parade. So it is less the actual representation of place that makes a parade “the key to the visible city;” than it is the very act of parading. And it may partly be the ephemerality of a parade that makes it such an efficacious way to represent the city. There is a special poignancy,” writes Kevin Lynch, “in the moment of transition.” Ephemerality may explain why we take notice of such events, but their impact and the reasons for their emergence has much to do with their appeal to the imagination and the increasing role it plays in the modern world of vast population movement and continual economic, social, and cultural change. Given the out-migration of the working class and
ethnics within the postindustrial city, and wrenching dislocations as neighborhoods become ghettos or undergo gentrification, public celebration constitutes one means of generating a sense of place and community among the city’s transient population. Indeed, it is striking how many of those interviewed for this book were born elsewhere and moved to New York as adults to pursue a career in the arts or the design industry. Little wonder, then, that the parade moved so quickly from the margins of New York City’s arts and gay subcultures to become “an East Coast version of Mardi Gras.”

Over time, of course, an event can become a totemic representation of place. The process by which this happens is generally not accidental since state agencies and private developers are ever eager to market local color. Not so this event whose funding, indeed its continued existence, comes about entirely through the efforts of its organizers to secure new grants each year from private and public foundations. Also, unlike civic or corporate events (most of which are scoffed at if not entirely ignored by New Yorkers not otherwise directly involved), the Halloween parade is largely improvisational and requires no membership to participate. The parade’s appeal is therefore partly its openness. Although such openness makes the parade vulnerable to appropriation, competition for public attention underlines in a positive sense the very multivocality of urban culture that the parade seeks to celebrate.

Moreover, the processional nature of a parade generates an illusion of coherence, despite a vast array of contradictory images. Ultimately, people accept the parade as a faithful representation of their city and its culture, less because they carefully examine and agree with all its content than because they can see enough of themselves and their sense of the city within it. This is why straight middle-class New Yorkers participate in a parade that many have long seen as closely tied to the gay community. Indeed, this is why they continue to enjoy an event that some long-term gay parade goes no longer do. Take, for example, the following interview with Henry and Rebecca Packer. The couple struck me as quintessential New Yorkers—an arts background, eternal students, sympathetic to the city’s and the Village’s bohemian traditions, prosperous yet contemptuous of the price paid for financial success. Rebecca is a doctoral candidate in English Education. Henry is a Wall Street systems analyst. The couple, in their late thirties and early forties, reside in Greenwich Village. They have been in the parade six times—Rebecca most recently as a witch, Henry as “Death Yuppie” complete with skull mask, a three-piece suit, and an attaché case.

Henry: “I remember hearing about the parade more than seeing it. And then seeing it on TV, and then I decided I wanted to be in it. They said anyone could join so in the mid-1980s I just decided one day to put on a costume and go down. It was great. I was an actor once many years ago. I never quite got over the thrill of being in front of an audience. The parade has a lot of energy. The other thing I enjoyed about the parade is that it wasn’t preprogrammed. It’s sort of a spontaneous combustion.”

Rebecca: “Can I make a suggestion about your motives? I think there’s a connection between the work you do and the roles you play in the Halloween Parade.”

Henry: “Yeah, playing ‘Death Yuppie’—an inverse of what I am in real life. There’s something great about having that skull mask on because no one can recognize me. It’s very anonymous.”

Rebecca: “The reason I like to come is kind of similar. I like to play. And I love to dress up and I think of myself a little bit in the way I dress, so this gives me the perfect excuse to go maybe five steps further in the way that I present myself. I just love the fact that I can dress up and that I don’t have to feel self-conscious. It’s not an act of vanity. It’s an act of creativity. I can be a peacock, and everybody else is acting like that, too.”

Henry: “I always think the drag queens are the best.”

Rebecca: “Yeah. I think they’re also the best because they really invest so much. Well, because between life and art for them there’s a very thin margin there, because they’re always putting on a costume anyway to be something they’re not quite. Maybe they are on the inside but not quite on the outside. So they’re endowing themselves. In past years I’ve asked myself about the costumes I wear, and I often go as sort of an aspiring generic movie-star prostitute type. I’m always wearing too much makeup, and lots of hair, and glitter. But it’s also a part of me that wants to be sort of a fairy princess too. It’s sort of all merged.

“When I was a child, Halloween was my absolute favorite holiday. Even though I’m a New Yorker, as a child I lived for five years on Nantucket Island. And for reasons that I won’t go into, I was called ‘witch’ by a lot of students. I was sort of ostracized. I was a bookworm. My parents
were sort of arty—my mother was an actress and I was in a very conservative community in the 1950s. So I was called witchy all the time, and I was beaten up. On Halloween I would never be a witch. I would be a princess. It was my time to shine and nobody could make fun of me because everybody was dressing weird, so I didn’t stick out.

“I really think I can trace back my love for Halloween into my early love of atmosphere. The moon I remember in this seacoast town used to be very orange, and it really appealed to my sense of aesthetics and beauty. And I got a chance to be part of that beauty instead of being the witch.”

**Henry:** “I honestly don’t know what the parade does for New York City as a whole. It’s a big tourist thing, I imagine. It looks like that. It’s kind of well known, and I have noticed that some people will come up and say, ‘Excuse me, sir, do you mind if I take a picture of you?’ That means they’re not from New York. A New Yorker will just come up and take a picture of you. I have a certain sense of solidarity with this neighborhood when I do it. I honestly wonder if that’s a common feeling. A lot of people are coming down from other neighborhoods to be in it, but to me it is a Greenwich Village thing.

“It’s also a kind of mini-Mardi Gras. One of the things that we did this year was we ate at a Japanese restaurant after the parade, and I took off my skull mask and I was in this three-piece suit so I was the straight one and everyone else in the Japanese restaurant was dressed up, including the waiters and all the sushi chefs. One guy was Spider Man. He was in a thong and his whole body was painted.”

**Rebecca:** “It was very risqué.”

**Henry:** “A lot of people are very out of the closet on Halloween, which I think is great.”

**Rebecca:** “Two years ago I was in it with some friends of mine and Henry. My women friends and I went as a group pillow fight. We had met at Oxford, and one night we all had a huge pillow fight. All the people in Oxford were just saying, ‘Will you pipe down there!’ But we had a blast. So we went as the Oxford Champion Pillow Fighting Team. And we bashed each other on the head with pillows and ran around in pajamas.”

**Henry:** “They attacked Freddy Krueger, too.”

**Rebecca:** “Yeah. We attacked Freddy Krueger and all the bad guys. And we went up to a few policemen who looked friendly, and we bopped them on the head with pillows and they cracked up. We were very childishly dressed in curlers and bows. It was the first time I had gone as a team effort. I loved it. I thought it was great, but I was exhausted.”

**Henry:** “And you were on TV.”

**Rebecca:** “I think they liked Henry’s ‘Death Yuppie’—that’s what they were attracted to. It seemed sort of timely.”

**Henry:** “It was more timely in 1990. More people applauded.”

**Rebecca:** “I have a sense of what it might do for the city. I think that aside from being a chance to act out in a safe way because there are children there and people from all walks of life and persuasions and ages, I think that it creates something that a city like New York needs and that’s a sense of community. You know there’s a sense of unified purpose, and there’s no particular ideological reason behind it. So when people come to play there’s going to be less strife, less opportunity for conflict. Just the chance to express oneself creatively. I think that cities like New York are in sore need of a sense of community, and I really don’t think it’s an accident that this developed not that long ago…”

**Henry:** “Nineteen years ago, which I think is very revealing. Most people when they refer to the 1960s, the mythical decade, they’re really talking about the period of time that began with Kennedy’s assassination and ended with Watergate. And I think it’s a very interesting coincidence about when it is that this parade began. Well, there is always a cultural need. Art can be safe if it’s in a museum or if it’s on a stage. When it’s in your face and it’s on the street, it can be dangerous.”

**Rebecca:** “In fact there’s always been a slight sense of risk about this Halloween parade. I mean a little bit of intellectual or cultural shock value. In fact, I think people from other boroughs come for precisely that reason, because it’s a little bit chancy.”

**Henry:** “When I mention at my office that I go to the Halloween parade, a lot of people said, ‘You actually go to that homosexual thing? You actually go there?’ And I said, ‘Yes, I’ve been in it for the last ten years.”

**Rebecca:** “Playing one of you!”

**Henry:** “In fact, I once put on my costume in the office.”

**Rebecca:** “They loved it.”

**Henry:** “Yeah. Everybody applauded me, so I guess the hostility wasn’t so great. What does ‘Death Yuppie’ mean? I wonder. I don’t know.”
I figure that if I could survive the 1980s I can survive anything."

Rebecca: "Your job isn’t something you love."

Henry: "No. It isn’t. I’m not a Yuppie by temperament. I’m a Yuppie pragmatically. I don’t feel I have much other choice. You know you need a job. I’ve gone up the corporate ladder a little bit. If I really tried, I’d be chairman of the board by now I’m sure."

Rebecca: "But your interests have always been artistic."

Henry: "Yes. But the fact is I would be an abject failure as a starving artist. I couldn’t afford to live in this neighborhood. Starving artists could live in this neighborhood in the 1940s. In fact, that’s what made this neighborhood. But if you ever read anything by Max Bodenheim—My Life and Loves in Greenwich Village—it all took place before the 1950s. Before there were beatniks when they didn’t even have a word for it. They just referred to it as a vaguely bohemian term. This city does attract workaholics like you wouldn’t believe. I just saw a TV show on the news about people who have no time for sex. And it was fascinating because they talked about their careers taking up all of their time. And my only reaction to these people was, why let your career take up so much of your time?"

This city is full of that kind of super professional. I mean that’s the problem we had at the Halloween party we used to go to. Everyone wanted to talk to us about their careers. We wanted to dance."

Rebecca: "And play. I think we’re both pretty serious. I don’t think it’s a matter that we’re not grave individuals. In fact, I think that one of the reasons I love the parade is that I am so serious, and I often feel burdened by worries and anxieties, or interests that I have. So this parade really is a release. I don’t drink, I don’t do drugs, and I really never did, so I don’t think I really fit in with some of the colleagues. I’ve always gotten my high from playing, from dancing. And one thing I do during the parade is that I always position myself next to the band. And Henry works the crowd."

Henry: "Yeah, I shake people’s hands."

Rebecca (teasing): "Kiss the ladies hands."

Henry: "There’s nothing quite like having a skull mask kiss your hand."

Rebecca (laughing): "Yeah. All the women scream, ‘Come on! Come on!’ They love it. And I always just dance. I love to dance and to be able to dance without dancing with anyone in particular. I really love it. You know, I wish I could do it more often. And you asked a question earlier, you asked, ‘What do you think it does for the city?’ And I said, ‘A sense of community.’ Also I think that when people are in costume it’s an exaggeration of their inner selves, and so I think all these people come together as the sort of multicultural, sort of almost an aberrant exaggeration of what New York City is anyway. It’s made up of all these different types of people, and this is sort of an acknowledgment of it."

Henry: "You know something that is very common in this city is to talk about how much better things used to be. So everyone will tell you that the parade isn’t what it used to be. People will say that about Greenwich Village, too. In fact, they were saying that in Max Bodenheim’s day. They were probably saying that when Edgar Allan Poe lived in this neighborhood."
To Be a Part of It

As the entry point for millions of immigrants, New York City's historic role in American society has long been that of a great borderland—the site of an intense intermingling of cultures. Borderlands are frequently sites of intergroup conflict, but they also foster hybrid cultures that typically lack discrete boundaries. Constant contact with strangers creates excitement as well as danger, and the Halloween parade puts a distinctly positive spin on such encounters, presenting New York's diversity in dreamlike rather than nightmarish terms. Indeed, dream is a particularly suitable metaphor here: the event takes place at night, an unusual time for a parade, but an appropriate time for fantasy and seduction; it makes a dreamlike journey by violating the most logical and sought-after venue for New York City (processions marching up or down Fifth Avenue), meandering instead chaotically crosstown through various streets of Greenwich Village, and it envisions the city as a place of pleasurable transgression, where identities are unmoored and otherness can be tried on like a costume, rehearsed, experimented with—thus enabling, if only temporarily, an expansion of the threshold of the self. The idea of rehearsal permits us to see this event as street theater, albeit on a grand scale, where both actors and audience are continually playing at the border between self and other.

For the actors in this event, the process is quite intentional. The great attraction of the cosmopolitan city, its very claim to legitimacy as a world center, is partly the fact that it permits a wide range of possible lifestyles for its inhabitants, and it does so increasingly as traditional class and ethnic communities give way to new neighborhoods of choice. The Halloween parade legitimizes that claim. But it also allows the city's population to reclaim streets and neighborhoods albeit symbolically, and in so doing to experience themselves as active agents in the creation of their "imagined community."

The Greenwich Village Halloween Parade may have lost its former intimacy as a local neighborhood celebration, but in expanding beyond the borders of its own community it has managed to do what no other public celebration in the city does—provide a public space for large numbers of people to experience a sense of relatedness to the social and the physical fabric of the whole city. The sociality of meeting and interacting with, and even assuming the identity of, the other transforms the city into a place
of pleasure and exchange across broad discontinuities of class, ethnicity, race, and gender. In doing so, the parade eroticizes the city. It reclaims urban life from its corporate owners and reasserts the diversity of the city, its streets and its people.

Of course, to limit this analysis of the meaning of the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade to New York City would be to overlook a phenomenon that is national in character. The 1970s saw the widespread development of what one observer has referred to as "counterfestivals," and their emergence points to much broader national, if not global, social and cultural transformations. This phenomenon, and the increasing significance of Halloween within the pantheon of American holidays, suggest a cultural transformation with substantial impact on the individual sense of self. If the 1950s enshrined the nuclear family as the hedge against world apocalypse, and the 1960s gave rise to oppositional youth culture, the 1970s witnessed the increasing severance of the self from conventional social obligations. As a result, marital ties have become increasingly brittle, while sexuality has become a matter of choice and lifestyle. At the same time, the politics of gender has contributed to a degree of tension between the sexes, generating a certain tendency to explore identities outside of culturally prescribed roles. Religious beliefs and practices have been affected in a similar way with a marked expansion of various cults and practices. Perhaps, then, the recent popularity of Halloween celebrations has something to do with the increasing emergence of a self free from social and cultural restrictions of an earlier time. Its neopagan quality offers, if not a world without limits, then at least a cultural "border zone" in constant motion, one that can be explored and developed according to personally chosen rather than socially prescribed interests and needs. Little wonder that parallel to the upsurge in Halloween celebrations has been a fluorescence of "New Age" beliefs and practices which, like Halloween, are highly focused on the self and the search for individual and group-of-choice validation. Indeed, it may very well be the case that we will need to place Halloween within the framework of an emerging "New Age" culture to fully understand the position it is assuming nationally and perhaps internationally as well. If this is so, one can easily predict the increasing significance of this holiday as New Age sensibilities make their way into mainstream American, European, and perhaps global culture, reflecting a widespread disenchantment with civil religion and the observances connected to it.

Clearly, then, the success of this festival is only partly a result of its ability to affirm local identity through public performance. It competes successfully with more established celebrations because unlike them it addresses through popular idiom rather than state ritual or church dictum, universal concerns about social and cultural continuity, and for at least some of its most devoted participants about life in the face of death.

David Sinkler is a member of the Fashion Police. I met him in 1987 after he ticketed me for wearing a "60s retro" buckskin fringe jacket. He wore a white paper costume and fireman's helmet topped by a flashing siren. Unlike most participants, Sinkler appears sporadically in the parade—twice so far (in 1991 I had to ask to be ticketed)—and each time with a different partner.

"The idea of giving tickets in 1987 was to see how far we could go without getting killed. We gave bald-headed men fashion awards for their wig.

We arrested a number of women for LSD—'let the sixties die'—or because their loop earrings were too big. We were ticketing things out of style or things that didn't go together. That year we gave out very few awards. This year we gave out maybe sixty. The awards are small 3-D stickers with a hologram of a pumpkin in the center."

Unlike his 1987 performance, Sinkler's decision to do the Fashion Police in 1991 was a response to the evidence of decline in Greenwich Village caused, in part, by a changing economy, but largely by the plague that is wasting so many of its inhabitants.
"The Village has changed. Christopher Street has changed. So many of the buildings’ street-level stores are shut and for rent. Their original proprietors may have died of AIDS. Or they closed because of rising rent. There used to be people, people, people all the time. Now it’s pretty dark and pretty forbidding. It’s not pleasant to go there. I went there with some out-of-town friends and saw some guys who looked like they were from the suburbs smoking crack in their truck in broad daylight.

"In the 1970s the parade’s politics was the politics of sex. It was to make the most alluring and arresting statement. The boys in the spider web [a group of nearly nude men wearing black webbing masks and G-strings] were the only ones like that this year. It was much more like that in the late 1970s. Other years there were very alluring and highly sexual things, but very little of that this year. It's conservatism. It takes a lot of guts and a lot of time. With so much death going on, that's a luxury in people's lives. Even with death going on in my life, I made it a real point to get somebody and be the Fashion Police. It's a very important thing for me that I do this. I equate this with feeding the homeless and giving enjoyment to other people.

**Normally, I'm a pretty conservative guy**

and going out into the community and physically doing something to create this persona and creating surprise on Halloween—it's so out of the ordinary for me. And it's fulfilling—it happens too rarely in my life. I usually go down to the Church of the Good Shepherd on Christmas and help feed the homeless. I feel that's a better use of my time than sitting home. On Halloween, to sit at home when something as great as this is happening in the city makes no sense. It makes no sense not to be a part of it."