

Probient Festive Misrule on Del Playa Drive *or* Halloween in Isla Vista: An abbreviated version

Leoda E. Valenzuela

Abstract

This essay examines the celebration of Halloween in the college town of Isla Vista, California through the lense of carnivalesque and English medieval drama. In Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World*, the author examines the main components of the carnivalesque, "briefly liberating events and rituals," in conjunction with Chris Humphrey's book *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England*. With contemporary examples of Isla Vista Halloween in Adrienne Marie MacLain's dissertation on the topics of "performance, youth culture, and the United States' carnivalesque," Valenzuela identifies the college town's celebrations as "probient festive misrule" through their explorations with the key components of the carnivalesque –festive laughter, speech in the marketplace, and grotesque realism. The probients, youths in Isla Vista facing an exploratory period between adolescence and adulthood, expose their community's dominant values through these celebrations. The carnivalesque behaviors during Isla Vista Halloween reveal conformist, skewed ideals in areas such as race, class, gender, and sexual preference. The author argues that the identification of these distorted values within this essay presents an opportunity to reject the destructive reinforcement of these behaviors within Isla Vista and move towards productive societal change.

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Leoda E. Valenzuela

Del Playa Drive is a difficult walk and an impossible drive on Halloween weekend nights in Isla Vista. If one is walking and there is a crowd big enough, one can be squeezed, lifted and whirled around in and out of a sea of bodies. Anonymous scantily or elaborately dressed princesses, firefighters, mummies and sexy black cats flirt, shout from balconies, laugh, and tread on gravel, red cups, costume feathers and horse excrement. The damages that are the result of the liberal spirit of those nights have led apprehensive local law enforcement officials into developing costly crowd control and safety preparations; and have led UCSB to implement strict residence hall policies. Both of these official responses in turn create disgruntled Santa Barbara taxpayers and student resentment. In the dialogue that ensues in the aftermath of Halloween in Isla Vista, taxpayers blame the “party school” UCSB for misusing a significant portion of the county’s resources and students blame out-of-towners for “trashing” their home. It is tradition for news outlets to speedily report the damages of the yearly, unsanctioned event. These conflicts are very real; this essay however, will focus on how the topsy-turvy nature of Halloween in Isla Vista reflects national culture functioning at a local level in this college-town. Modernity, consumerism, local politics, and American youth ideology are cultural factors that are reflected and also heavily explored in the event through humor, speech and the body creating a potential for social change. A close analysis of participant performances based on Carnavalesque and English medieval drama studies provides such insight.

With civilization comes the curtailing of freedom because some degree of subjugation is the price people pay for law and order. Inevitably, cultural factors such as ethnicity, class, and gender generate communal conditions that often render the state of subjects chafing and foment a collective yearning for individual sovereignty; and this in turn creates a demand for the disruption of established ruling systems, whether it be from the dominant cultural norms of a society or the government, the church or the state. Evidence of this cultural phenomenon can be traced to the Roman Empire’s most popular holiday out of the calendar year, the Saturnalia. During this holiday, deities representing harvest, heaven and earth were celebrated with a festival that lasted up to a week and during which “license was the rule. Criminals went unpunished, social rank dissolved” (Shalleck 13) and thus, slaves appropriated the pompous deportment of the rich while the rich rid themselves of quotidian customs and conventions of propriety. Other ruling institutions and forms of suppression have fueled the existence of this communal craving for revelry globally. Within Catholicism for example, feasts were created

for “a moment’s indulgence before the penance of Lent” (Shalleck 12) and in England and America, secular events such as masquerades enabled the “bravado and promiscuous flirtation” (Shalleck 13) that was often shunned by Church morality and patriarchal tradition. Briefly liberating events and rituals like these expose the sources of the repressions of the people they temporarily free and have the potential to bring forth social renewal. Moments of such nature are described as carnivalesque; a term coined in the 20th century by Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin.

Bakhtin recognizes all carnivalesque moments, in both literature and cultural customs (i.e. Lent) as spaces of transgression with the potential to liberate individuals from social norms. In Rabelais and his World he specifically studies popular humor and folk culture from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and he posits three main components of the carnivalesque that can achieve this, namely, festive laughter, speech in the marketplace, and grotesque realism. In Bakhtin’s words “carnival is the people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter,” (Bakhtin 8) a laughter that is “universal” because it is not directed at any one person, is all-inclusive and is all belonging (Bakhtin 11). As a consequence of its inclusivity, it is also non-derisive, unlike the targeted parody comedians and critics often use in modern life. This universal laughter does not chastise or impose ethics the way parody does. Bakhtin explains that carnival rituals of the Middle Ages were often linked to agrarian, biological, or social moments of change or death that people viewed as “moments of crisis” but also as conduits to “renewal” that in the end inspired a “festive perception of the world” (Bakhtin 9). He adds that even customs such as official feasts during that time that asserted all that was continual, authoritative, and hierarchical, could not displace festive laughter. Festive laughter was an important aspect of folk culture that was “turned over to the popular sphere of the marketplace” where unrestricted, more liberal forms of “speech and gesture” developed among those who were “usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age” (Bakhtin 10). In other words, festive laughter was used to temporarily resist authority and social norms and to view the world through a different angle in the face of adversity or death.

The speech of the marketplace works simultaneously with festive laughter to foster other carnivalesque inversions in texts or social events. The way it works is by leveling people of all ranks and lineages to one equal status. People speak to one another without restraint in the speech of the marketplace through “inappropriate” language, that is to say, language that is “appropriate” for the carnival space as well as mockery that can either debase those of high ranks or exalt those from the lower ones; Bakhtin illustrates the leveling effects for us:

When two people establish friendly relations, the form of their verbal intercourse also changes abruptly; they address each other informally, abusive words are used affectionately, and mutual mockery is permitted. The two friends may pat each other on the shoulder and even on the belly. Verbal etiquette and

discipline are relaxed and indecent words and expressions may be used (Bakhtin 16).

This type of uninhibited interaction and the suspension of “verbal etiquette” have the power to uncrown the most powerful, authoritarian figures of regular, daily life as well as to crown the weakest and poorest fool.

Finally, the bodily themes of “aging, copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, disintegration and dismemberment” (Bakhtin 25) operate within Bakhtin’s definition of grotesque realism together with contradiction, overemphasis, hyperbolicism and immoderateness to create powerful images of “the living sense that each man belongs to the *immortal* people who create history” (Dentith 253). An exaggerated image of those themes that show humanity’s immortality through the regenerative essence of the body is for example an old hag¹ giving birth, symbolizing death and birth. Another is that of mouths wide open, alluding to swallowing, a symbol of death and destruction yet also reminiscent of indulgence in food a form of sustenance. Finally, a third example is that of birth and death as the “gaping jaws of the earth”, which means Mother Earth both acts as a womb that gives us life and nourishment and then as a mouth that swallows us in death through burial. Based on this line of thinking, to humiliate or degrade the body or an object cannot simply be negative, destructive or damaging but also restoring because humans are not complete, closed entities but unfinished and open to the processes of “death-renewal-fertility” (Dentith 235) through the “convexities and orifices of the body” (Dentith 226) where acts such as “eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination” processes of the body take place (Dentith 227). All of these orifices and images interweave the “beginning and end of life” (Dentith 227) to create Bakhtin’s grotesque realism, the part of the carnivalesque that exaggerates bodily life to assert “fertility, growth and abundance” (Bakhtin 19).

Renewal is still the key term. All the concepts involved in Bakhtin’s carnival are linked by the concept of renewal. Fundamental to Bakhtin’s method of inquiry in Rabaleis and His World was the conviction that there was significant meaning behind the exaggerated, grotesque and caricaturist writing of Rabelais. The same should be thought of the carnivalesque in contemporary culture. However, critics of carnivalesque theory argue about its power to generate any lasting or traceable change. That can be seen argued about Halloween as well. The collective revelry of the night reflects in great part, very conformist behaviors and as a result revelers and observers alike remain disconnected from the progressive *potential* of the event. In The Politics of Carnival, Humphrey communicates the idea that “the most ‘successful’ kind of direct action is that which deliberately explodes for a brief moment and then allows its perpetrators to slip away” (Humphrey 57). This can be easily understood to be the result of “perpetrators” or revelers’ ability to act more freely, with less fear of repercussions within the temporarily relaxed space of carnivalesque events. Such a spirit is not usually embraced

¹ An evil spirit, demon, or infernal being, in female form (OED online).

however, because the carnivalesque quality of writings and events creates a festive façade that is either solely attractive to willing participants or strongly repulsive to spectators depending on each person's role and identity in the community. As a result of those ways of viewing carnivalesque spaces, participants and spectators of Isla Vista's Halloween focus on contentions over the responsibility for financial, environmental and personal damages of Halloween in Isla Vista. This lessens the meaning of the annual tradition as a carnivalesque moment by limiting the interpretation of it to that of an exorbitant party space for youth and especially, UCSB college students. It is not to say that the efficacy of Halloween in Isla Vista as a carnivalesque moment requires that participants and onlookers be aware of the social role the event has because many of the carnivalesque performances during the event are individual, unconscious processes. It is necessary to interpret those performances and the effects of the event in a specific way—in a way that conservative underlying themes of youth sexuality, nostalgia, consumerist attitudes and national ideologies can be recognized amidst that deception of purely anti-authoritarian chaos. In this essay, the *potential* change-generating essence of the carnivalesque within Halloween will be demonstrated, but first, I shall establish the definitions of terms that make the best use of the carnivalesque components and allow for an empirically based analysis of Halloween in Isla Vista.

Chris Humphrey's book *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* discusses the arguments about the social function of the carnivalesque as previously explained, but Humphrey replaces the term carnivalesque with the term "festive misrule" in his analysis of events in medieval England in order to examine them with accuracy. The association of the word carnival to the season before Lent overpowers the meaning of the word carnivalesque and the different components of the carnivalesque (e.g. festive laughter, the speech of the marketplace and grotesque realism). Also, that same association has led to a wide and ambiguous use of the term so that it is often used to refer to "*any* season or course of feasting, riotous revelry, or indulgence" (emphasis mine; definition from OED online), a usage that is too inclusive and turns the term carnivalesque into a heading that "lumps together" (Humphrey 43) unruly cultural activities. This makes it difficult to distinguish festive misrule from other cultural activities such as charivari, which were "ritualized forms of punishment" (Humphrey 43) during which people were punished for breaking social norms or laws. There are stark differences between these types of misrule activities, one of them being that the punished were not willing participants, another being that the laughter involved in charivari was extremely chastising and derisive. Humphrey offers an example of the "imaginative humiliation" (Humphrey 43) suffered by a couple in the city of York during the year 1536. They were punished because they admitted to distributing defamatory papers around their town and their punishment was to be placed "on horseback and parad[ed] about the local area facing toward the tail-end of [a] beast" (Humphrey 43). This activity would fall under the broadly encompassing heading "carnivalesque", but not under the term festive misrule. The term festive misrule has not been applied to analysis of events to the extent

that the term carnivalesque has, and in order to retain the meaning of the word, only activities such as Halloween in Isla Vista in which willing participants' rowdy behaviors are analyzed through empirical evidence with the end of discovering where transgressions "derive from, [what their] nature and scale is and the reasons and interests motivating them" (Humphrey 42). Furthermore, those transgressions should be analyzed without any preconceived expectations, but because the carnivalesque has been analyzed in terms of the safety valve and social protest theories, words such as "subversion" or "disorder...load interpretations in advance" (Humphrey 42) with conclusions about political changes under creation within the space of the carnivalesque. In festive misrule, the word "transgression" has a neutral definition however; it "captures[s] what both misrule and charivari share [topsy-turvy elements], while avoiding any implication that they were closely related kinds of activity" (Humphrey 43). Let us conclude with the definition of festive misrule as a "genre performance which makes strong use of the theme of transgression [which] captures what all instances have in common, while leaving us room to consider the use to which it is put in particular cases" (Humphrey 42).

Therefore, the term *carnivalesque* will not be used interchangeably with other terms in this continuing analysis of Halloween in Isla Vista; the term that *will* be used along with other words such as "celebration", "festival", "ritual" and "performance" will be *probiest festive misrule*. This hybrid term has stemmed from Adrienne Marie MacLain's dissertation and Chris Humphrey's The Politics of Carnival; and it represents the Isla Vista Halloween community most accurately. Halloween in Isla Vista is a carnivalesque space unrelated to the season of Lent and therefore the ambiguity of the "catch-all term" (Humphrey 3) *carnival* shall be avoided. Festive misrule encompasses both *carnival ritual* (i.e. Halloween in Isla Vista) and "*carnivalized writing*" (i.e. *The York Play of the Crucifixion*) (Dentith 67) or, in other words, it spans the division in this research project between text and event. I use festive misrule to analyze ethnographic evidence about a specific contemporary community, as well as literary analyses of writing and research that "describe art or activities" that involve "copiousness, abundance or transgression, from ancient times through to the present day" (Humphrey 3) and especially within youth culture. The term "festive misrule" allows for those carnivalesque characteristics of "copiousness" and "abundance" to be analyzed independently of all other carnivalesque moments and allows for the focus to be placed solely on the *probiest* community in Isla Vista.

Probiest, a term coined by Adrienne Marie MacLain "referring to those individuals experiencing... the life-phase between adolescence and adulthood" will be used to form the term "probiest festive misrule". *Probiest* "with the root "prob" from the Latin probare meaning to test or prove worthy" (MacLain 15) communicates that the participants of this event are highly engaged in identity formation and exploration. It is the term that best represents the majority of the Halloween in Isla Vista participants because it is not biased in a way that implies that the individual is getting closer to adulthood and farther away from

adolescence, but rather, it focuses on the in-between state that renown psychology research Professor Jeffrey Jensen Arnett acknowledges within the definition of what he calls “emerging adulthood” or the “period from roughly ages 18 to 25 in industrialized countries during which young people become more independent from parents and explore various life possibilities before making enduring commitments” (Arnett 8). According to Arnett, both adolescents and emerging adults are a part of a youth culture that is “based on the subterranean values such as hedonism, excitement and adventure” (Arnett 234) or in other words, the pleasure seeking and explorative personality characteristics that are heightened during misrule events and that MacIain wishes to emphasize through her term “probience”. Furthermore, Arnett communicates that within youth culture it has been proposed, “there are three essential components to the style of youth culture,” (Arnett, 235) which are: image, demeanor and argot. Image is defined in Arnett’s text as “dress, hairstyle, jewelry and other aspects of appearance” and (un-surprisingly) the example given is that of “rings worn in the nose, navel or eyebrow” all that are orifices or places near the orifices of which the hyperbolized images of grotesque realism subsist. In addition, demeanor and argot as the other two components of the style of youth culture, show how probients are predisposed to engage in behaviors that can forge meaningful reflections about specific communities. Demeanor refers to “distinctive forms of gesture, gait and posture, for example certain ways of shaking hands” and argot is defined as “a certain vocabulary and a certain way of speaking [such as] the word “cool” to refer to something desirable and “chill out” to mean to relax or calm down” (Arnett 236); these two components of the style of youth suggest that youth make use of behaviors within quotidian spaces that are in line with those that form the speech of the marketplace that belong to the spaces of misrule and that challenge societal norms or parental expectations. In summary, the in-between state found within youth culture is more accurately represented through the term “probience”, which does not allude to any progression toward adulthood, but a strong sense of exploration that consists of behaviors that are further enabled in misrule spaces. Sociologists argue that “youth culture is a way of constructing a coherent and meaningful worldview” when society “fails to provide one” due to diversity and increasing individualism in modern communities; having drawn the parallels between youth culture style and festive misrule images and behaviors, I argue in turn that probient festive misrule is a way of constructing a convoluted, mirror image of the dominant values present within local communities despite the diversity (to any extent) and individualism that exists among the probients involved, and in this case, in the United States college-town of Isla Vista. Politics of race, gender and sexual preference are three of the themes represented in that convoluted image. The following first person, research and footage-based narratives will show how such an image can result from the “individual, [and] socio-cultural experimentation and exploration” (MacIain 18) probients experience during Halloween in Isla Vista.

Here is the probient image presented in UCSB PhD candidate Adrienne Marie MacIain’s dissertation example. It is an improvised scene that occurred on

“October 31st at approximately 11 pm” during Halloween in Isla Vista. She calls it “Finding Nemo on Del Playa Drive” (MacLain 1). This scene encompasses misrule’s elements and reinforces the instability, in-between state and explorative image of the probient:

“NEMO!” a male voice calls out, “It’s Nemo!” The crowd shifts as a sailor holding a video camera wades over toward where a young man dressed as “Nemo” is facing the opposite direction. The sailor...declares “I have to find Nemo,” partly as an explanation to those he must push out of the way, some of whom turn to follow him, joining the quest. Having arrived he calls out once more, “Nemo!” at which point the orange-and-black fish head turns to face the searching sailor and his camera, revealing an expression of genuine surprise. The newfound Nemo, sporting a loose fitting orange tank top and black jeans, holds up an open container of Jack Daniel’s Tennessee Whiskey... declaring dramatically, “Oh my god, you fuckin’ found me Dude!” The two strangers hug to the tune of a communal “awwww”: a conscious collective parody of so many sentimentalized Hollywood-ending reunions. Having played out their scene, the two unceremoniously part, carried off in opposite directions by the chaotic currents of the chuckling crowd. (MacLain 2).

At the moment the theatrical performance dissolves, the “chuckling” of the “chaotic currents” is not directed at anyone in particular. This is festive laughter working to unify the crowd of probients. It worked in three ways; the first was by confirming that there was shared knowledge or a collective understanding of who was the 2003 Disney, Pixar animation fish character called Nemo. Secondly, the embrace that culminated the performance also created a narrative reminiscent of the sentimental movie endings that abound in everyday American entertainment, making the crowds’ mocking laughter directed at themselves, for being so acquainted with the Hollywood culture and according to MacLain, directed at Hollywood’s happy ending culture; a ridiculing of that common fantasy narrative. Once again, festive laughter transcends the boundaries of performers and spectators, misrule space and everyday life to critique social customs through humor.

The speech of the marketplace also plays its part in this scene. The pushing and shoving, the cursing, the communal “awwww” and the unceremonious parting of the two main actors in this improvisation are all part of the feigned familiarity that enables the participants to partake in the humor of the imitation being performed. As evident, within the carnivalesque festive laughter and the speech of the marketplace often co-exist. Let us not forget the third factor in the study of this misrule however, the grotesque body, which is also simultaneously at work. To reiterate, grotesque realism is the exaggeration of “apertures or convexities [such as] the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly [and] the nose” (Bakhtin 26). In her description of the mini-rendition of “Finding Nemo” put on by the Isla Vista Halloween revelers, Adrienne MacLain notes

Nemo's presumably agape "orange-and-black fish head" adjacent to "an open container of Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey" (MacIain 2). Under close scrutiny grotesque images presented in Isla Vista's Halloween prove to embody the "unfinished metamorphosis" of young individuals caught between the stages of adolescence and adulthood. At the same time, these grotesque images can reflect behaviors that conform to national ideologies about the stage of life they are living, and Nemo's scene is one such example.

Nemo's drinking is an image of death and renewal. The act of swallowing is an action that symbolizes death and destruction (as previously discussed) and the swallowing of alcohol portrays the culturally derived idea of happiness within the probiert life stage. There are many costumes worn during Halloween that reinforce the expectation that probierers partake widely in substance abuse such as a human-sized walking breathalyzer, human sized beer cans and t-shirts with messages like "Life is a Bitch, Flirt with Death". MacIain states that Halloween in Isla Vista is "an emblematic expression of what are commonly regarded to be "the best years" of a Westerner's life, performed by those who are assumed to be in a prime position to enjoy those years to the fullest" (MacIain 4). That enjoyment turns out to have a conformist end even though it is misrule and even though it may seem, on the one hand, to be purely rebellious. The performances of the night conform to ideologies or expectations of how the young community is told to "live" through celebration: in this case, that of over-indulging in alcohol, even breaking the law and drinking on a public street because "the attainment of individual happiness via consumption is the sacred goal upon which postmodern capitalist culture is based; [and] it therefore stands to reason that our (culturally-determined) desires have become the ultimate authority" (MacIain 44), an authority above law enforcement. Probiert festive misrule at Halloween in Isla Vista is ultimately safety valve behavior, but it does not fail to offer the opportunity for renewal however. The orange fish head ultimately hyperbolizes life at its prime in a destructive moment to magnify the beliefs that exist in the college town community and perhaps even in the nation. Nemo (from MacIain's passage) is participating in the destructive and conformist action of drinking but at the same time, through that action, he is giving life to a powerful image. Drinking in public during Halloween in Isla Vista is behavior that is in line with the conformist views about growing up in college in United States, and those beliefs are magnified through his costume choice of the Bildungsroman, Disney character Nemo. The mixed images of a Disney cartoon and the consumption of alcohol reflect the ongoing process of metamorphosis into adulthood—the in-between state that came with the newfound independence of college life and a past of dependence. The grotesque image of Nemo drinking alcohol, the substance that "disappears with what it burns [and] is the communion of life and of fire" and that "incorporates itself within that which is striving to express itself" (*Dictionary of Symbols* 15) in this case magnifies the state of the probiert, that is, performing two polar opposite behaviors, acting both as kid and as an adult, donning a children's animation costume and drinking whiskey.

The elements of probient festive misrule (festive laughter, speech of the marketplace and grotesque realism) are undoubtedly at work in Halloween in Isla Vista as shown through the Nemo scene. Besides depicting the continual in-between state of the probient community in the college town of Isla Vista, ideologies about youth happiness in the United States and offering a critique about Hollywood entertainment, other performances I witnessed in person or found through online footage research, accord with other themes established in MacIain's analysis, particularly her insight that "racial and/or class privilege [is defended] through the practice of ethnic stereotyping and mimicry" (MacIain 288) during Halloween in Isla Vista, and that it is sexually charged and "aggressively heterosexual" (MacIain 274). The following passage shares examples of probient performances that show dominant cultural norms related to race and class. She mentions how it is common that Caucasian probients dress in stereotypical costumes of international ethnicities, and minorities within the United States to assert class and race privilege as well as to appropriate certain parts of others' cultures that white probients deem lacking in their lives:

Caucasian men seem particularly predisposed to don, for example, an exaggerated sombrero and poncho, Japanese "Ninja" gear, a Hawaiian shirt with fake grass skirt and plastic lei... In 2004, the streets of Isla Vista were awash with Caucasian boys dressed as jive-talking "Homeys," Chicano gangsters, and blaxploitation-style, Afrosporting pimps. Another fairly ubiquitous costume piece, for both men and women, was a Bob Marley style hat, complete with attached dreadlocks... One apparent point of fixation is potency: many of the ethnic stereotypes presented by the Halloween revelers hinge upon sexual, physical, or financial prowess. The Latin lover, the Indian warrior, the black athlete or rap star, the Saudi oil millionaire: all of these express what is most attractive, and most threatening, about the imagined Other. Another common theme is serenity: the peace-loving, ganja smoking Rasta, the laid-back tropical beach dweller, the wise Yogi, and so forth. These identities have come to represent those things that Euro-Americans view as lacking in their lives: balance, harmony, and calm. The portrait of the Other painted by these revelers is an ambivalent one: representations of strength are often accompanied by the insinuation of unscrupulous or sinister behavior, and peaceful portrayals tend to include an implied laziness and/or lack of intelligence. In this way, stereotype allows maskers to simultaneously transcend, and implicitly reaffirm the superiority of, their racial subject-position (MacIain 288-290).

She also adds that white female probients tend to wear costumes that are "of exoticized portrayals of non-white sexual stereotypes: Middle-Eastern Belly dancers, Japanese Geishas, Indian Princesses [and] Chinese Concubines" while non-white female probients often wear United States "icons of femininity" such as "Madonna, Marilyn Monroe

and the Disney Princesses” (291). Ultimately, MacIain believes “the act of masquerading as the Other contains simultaneously a fear of, and a desire for, that Other” (289). In MacIain’s opinion this shows that stereotypes can be used to facilitate colonial relations. These relations do not challenge the established social norms however because “mimicry and mockery [of] the Euro-American male remains more or less untouchable territory” (MacIain 292) and this is seen in how probients react to “white” masking or costumes. She gives one example:

...one black reveler who was dressed in a suit and tie was repeatedly asked by a group of white males “Are you supposed to be a Mormon or something?” When he declined to reply, the group taunted him loudly, and made rude gestures behind his back. Yet the same group greeted a white man in fake dreadlocks with an enthusiastic high-five, saying, “What up, my brotha?”...From all this I conclude that the white male is still considered the invisible, unspoken “norm” in Isla Vista. Therefore, to dress as a “white guy” is not to be dressed up at all. (MacIain 292-293).

YouTube sensation and California On’s host, Kassem G experiences that untouchableness of the white Other when he introduces Halloween in Isla Vista during 2013 as a land of dangerous experimentation. Kassem and his film crew begin their video with the arrival of adventurers on a helicopter onto the Jurassic Park island, except the helicopter lands in Isla Vista, as a sign that dangles amid the mystic greenery of the island suggests while the theme song of the American science fiction film plays in the background. Sporting a black leather jacket and a curly, dark haired wig, Kassem professes at first to be Dr. Ian Malcolm. Later however he explains to the camera his need to change his character to Lionel Richie due to other costumed revelers’ failure to identify him as the former. What made the difference between Dr. Ian Malcolm from Jurassic Park and the singer Lionel Richie? Skin color. Both characters shared the same essential characteristics, which were the dark curly hair and the black leather jacket, but Kassem could not pass off as Dr. Ian Malcom because the actor Jeff Goldblum was White and therefore Kassem’s choice of costume was not recognized. Although Kassem pointing out that he must change his costume is a conformist behavior, one that conforms to the expectation of dressing up as a non-white Other, his action also serves as an opportunity for social critique as it exposes the White male to be an “off limits” costume.

The rest of his Jurassic Park themed filming crew consisted of the perhaps less recognizable fictional pioneers John Hammond (Jurassic Park’s owner in the film) in a beige jacket and hat and Dr. Alan Grant (a paleontologist) in a blue, button-down long-sleeve, white hat and a red bandana around the neck as well as two dinosaurs, one in a white t-shirt with “T-Rex” written in black permanent marker and the other in a

bright green and orange, neon dinosaur costume. The five of them walked down Isla Vista's Del Playa Drive to show their online audience what the beachside attraction was like. Dr. Ian Malcolm in one last attempt to claim his initial identity asks a male probiert in a dark, low V-neck and kitty ears whether he is into "uh, chaos theory? Non-linear equations? Strange attractions?" To which the male feline probiert replies, "That's what I major in". Kassem's insistence here provides an example of the possibility that one may be able to dress as a White fictional character from the land of science fiction, but it also reinforces the idea that MacLain projects through her narrative and analysis about the generic white businessman who remains untouchable. The YouTube clip later moves on to other small performances and interactions between Kassem G and other costumed participants of the night.

One of those later interactions is between him and "North West". Kassem asks the Latino probiert, "every other day of the year what are you?" to which he replies "Any other day I am just a regular beaner walking down campus". To this Kassem comments "but not today" and North West replies, smiling at the camera and saying "not today, today I am North West". His costume is the sign of a compass on a pink shirt. He is wearing white-framed sunglasses, an adult sized diaper and a pink bow in his hair; he is North West the daughter of reality show star Kim Kardashian and the musician Kanye West. Through this costume the Latino probiert expresses his desire to be the celebrity baby born into fame and wealth and at the same time with a very simple part of his costume, the paper compass pointing to the north and the west, he mocks the odd name of the celebrity baby. The social inversion of class that is permitted within probiert festive misrule is highlighted when the male probiert refers to himself as a "regular beaner" or in other words, a Latino of humble (or non-wealthy) background who gets to be a rich baby for one night. Ironically, festive laughter is at work because his costume invites spectators to laugh at the absurdity of being born into fame and wealth at the cost of satisfying a consumerist, media-absorbing nation with an ongoing, filmed representation of the what the ultimate pleasures of their American dreams could be like.

Other interactions and footage by Kassem's film crew demonstrate the sexually charged and "aggressively heterosexual" (MacLain 274) nature of the misrule in Isla Vistas' Halloween. They ask girls to kiss or twerk (dance sexually) and suggest that all the girls dressed as Miley Cyrus "assemble and create a giant whore voltron". The definition of the word voltron cannot be found in the Oxford English Dictionary, but the following is an entry from Urban Dictionary Online, a dictionary for unstandardized words that are trending in popular culture:

"Also known as a "Whore-nado," A Drunk Bitch Voltron is the result of 3-5 inebriated females at a social event linking

together. This usually begins as a group hug of sorts, and then is used in order to keep balance. A Drunk Bitch Voltron can last from anywhere from five to forty minutes, but can occasionally result in skin grafting, which is referred to as a Drunk Bitch Voltron King. Drunk Bitch Voltrons are notorious for knocking over drinks, crying, and collectively screaming.

Causes of a Drunk Bitch Voltron include but are not limited to; "their song" coming on, a group talk about boys, general drunk affection, and the completion of a social shot.

Sometimes one member of a Drunk Bitch Voltron will lose stability, resulting erratic swaying or even a complete structural collapse (odds are increased when heels are involved).

DBV's cannot be reasoned with, because when forming Drunk Bitch Voltron each member sacrifices their individual hearing to become one being. It's like.... science or something" (Urban Dictionary Online).

Most of the interaction and dialogue that occurs between Kassem (and his film crew) and women is objectifying and derisive of women. The definition of the word Kassem uses, as well as the sexual nature of his requests highlight a patriarchal and strongly heterosexual ideology. As the YouTube video moves on, he continues using lines like "here's some drunk ones for ya" and at a house party he asks a male to choose a female without the two girls being spoken of even being asked first if they are interested in any sort of flirtation with the opposite sex. The profanity and familiar interaction with strangers that occurs through the facilitated, feigned familiar interaction of the speech of the marketplace does not invert patriarchal and aggressively heterosexual social norms but rather to reinforces them and enables the males involved in these scenarios to automatically perceive women to be available and approachable. These values are so strong within the Isla Vista Halloween participants that even when probient female performances seek to challenge them, they are immediately rebuked with disgust and condescension. MacIain provided an example from her own experience during the last Halloween night of the year 2004 when she decided to "dress as a storybook prince" (MacIain 279):

"The most strongly negative reaction I received came near the end of the night...[A] young man, who was dressed as a "redneck" in roughed-up overalls and boots, approached me with a couple of friends, asking, "Hey Princess, what Kingdom do you come from?" "Prince," I corrected, and showed them my royal "package" to illustrate. The three men began hemming and hawing loudly, one side-kick repeating over and over, "that is fucked up," the other lamenting, "what a waste." Most alarming, however, was the reaction of the "redneck" ringleader. With what appeared to be genuine hurt and anger, he shook his head for a moment before asking me point-blank, "Why'd you have to

go and ruin the mood like that, huh?” The three then turned their backs to me and proceeded to commiserate with the other men at the party about my offensive costume choice. The redneck’s statement, along with his and his friends’ behavior in general, told me a number of things about the expectations placed upon female revelers at Halloween in Isla Vista. As a woman, I was apparently expected to create and maintain a romantic/sexual mood for the benefit of this male audience” (MacLain 279-280).

The grotesque image that MacLain presents by donning a “royal package rivals the normative expectation of the male Prince Charming and the objectified woman. MacLain takes an assertive position against the expectation that she has to please the male audiences by instead “pushing masculinity to a grotesque extreme” (MacLain 281), an image in which the phallus is completely exposed. There are also male probients who cross-dress like MacLain did when she dressed up as a prince, and although not all male probient cross dressers may share one same experience, there is a noticeable trend in how males choose to cross-dress. So what happens when a male decides to cross dress? I shall present a scenario from my own Halloween experience. It was Friday, October 2013. I remember probients walked with their eyes bouncing from the live action on the street to the houses that lined it, looking for a party with alcohol, the occasional costume rating or for the gangs of spectators a-top fences and balconies to interact with. We caught a glimpse of Clifford the Big Red Dog² with some pals on top of a wooden fence, inciting brief sporadic gatherings around girls who leaned upside-down against the fence, placing their hands down on the ground and using their toes for support while they twerked³. Out of nowhere, a tall guy came jogging towards us with an awkwardly arched back (presumably accentuating his chest and buttocks), sneakers and a tight-fitted pink floral dress. He didn’t bother to adjust the back of it all the way up; he had a (highly noticeable) bulky athletic build. Pulling one of his loose shoulder straps up with one hand and pushing his blond long hair back with the other, he whined at the top of his lungs “Why won’t anybody kiss me?” I laughed at his whiny desperateness and yelled back at him “Wait, who do you want a kiss from? A girl or a boy?” He briefly scanned through his audience to find me and reply “You.” As he approached me, I hurriedly moved my head back and laughed and hopped nervously with fists in front of me, when much to my relief, my friend Kevin offered a kiss. They tantalized each other with a few very close to being real mouth-to-mouth kisses, tilting and moving their head back and forth, but finally, simultaneously said “Naaaaah!” Kevin laughed saying “Yeah, I don’t roll that way” and they gave each other a pat on the back and parted. We saw seaweed men (or rather stinky

² American canine cartoon character from children’s storybooks and animations by author Norman Bridwell, published since 1963 (About Norman Bridwell in works cited).

¹¹ Twerking: the act of moving/ shaking ones ass/buns/bottom/buttocks/bum-bum in a circular, up-and-down, and side-to-side motion. Basically a slutty dance derived from strip clubs (Urban Dictionary online).

seaweed men with actual seaweed from the beach over them), Drunks 1 and 2, an astronaut, the regular sexy black cats and angels, and even a shower! “That shower is going to get a lot of action,” Kevin said.

The speech of the marketplace, that feigned familiarity between strangers was embraced by the loud, whining, male, cross-dresser, but why? The truth is that it is not possible to establish with certainty the male probients’ motives for choosing to dress as a woman, but there are a couple very viable possibilities. The male probient’s attire was only enough to let him “pass” as a female but in a way that was safely male enough. He did not wear makeup and he wore his dress and blonde wig messily enough so that his “bulky” and unfeminine-like clumsiness remained to assert his masculinity. In this way, the male probient could whine at the top of his lungs about his romantic desires from the safe space that the female costume provided him. In other words, dressing up as the female he wishes to have a kiss from and putting his desires in her mouth created a safe distance between the performed identity and his real male identity to protect him from being ridiculed. Another possibility, would be repressed homosexual desires that would place the male probient at the same risk of being ridiculed within the aggressively heterosexual space of Halloween in Isla Vista. Based on the following testimony which was given after the speaker was called a “hag” and threatened by another male probient who was offended by the speaker “grabbing him”, it can be deduced that male probients who do dare embrace femininity in gender traversing costumes are strongly antagonized by other males:

“A boy can walk around with his dick hanging out of a mini skirt, no problem. But if you actually have the balls to shave your legs and really [...] look the part, you’re asking to have your ass handed to you, apparently” (276).

MacIain argues that had the speaker’s female costume been less convincing, the other male probient may have not reacted so aggressively because he would not have felt his own masculinity threatened and therefore might have even played along. These are of course conjectures, but thus far, these conformist, heterosexually aggressive, and patriarchal values have been identified within the space of probient festive misrule and its elements of festive laughter, speech of the marketplace and grotesque realism have mainly worked in a way that reinforces those values or that has been met with displeasure (e.g. MacIain’s “package”).

From this analysis, I have arrived at the conclusion that social change happens a different way in the community if it happens because of Halloween in Isla Vista. It starts with onlooker curiosity and anger. Poor infrastructure, university communication, and relationships with law enforcement are annually repeated discussions amongst community members in the aftermath of Halloween in Isla Vista. The probient community itself begins to question misrule. “Why are we fighting for the right to party, we shouldn’t be doing that, people used to have riots for political causes” said a graduate student during a Deltopia aftermath forum this year; an event that is growing to be very much like Halloween. We

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wear what we see on TV and magazines and social media etc. and we play out the role of the party student or party-goers, which just reinforces the opinions that we are the product of mechanized education and Western youth ideologies: that we are stressed out college students that “need to blow off steam” and that we are young and therefore party and drink on weekends. “Indeed...the extreme, excessive, decadent, self-indulgent behavior witnessed at carnival time is precisely not a reversal of capitalist culture, but rather its ultimate outcome” (MacLain 44). So there is an illusion of wild freedom during Halloween on Del Playa Drive, but in reality, most behaviors of that night fall within the safety valve theory. There are some cultural boundaries and ideologies being challenged by probient performers, but mostly in a limited, temporal way. The rich can pretend to be poor, the poor to be rich, males to be females and vice versa, but the patriarchal, heterosexual and sexually charged values of everyday life never leave and status quo returns after Halloween is over.

I am not arguing that Halloween in itself is a socially transformative event, the case studies presented have shown quite the opposite, that Halloween functions as a safety valve at best. I am however emphasizing how the malleable, explorative nature of the participants of Halloween in Isla Vista creates probient festive misrule; an unfiltered image of a part of the culture of our nation, the college town probient festive misrule of Halloween in Isla Vista which both participants and outsiders should understand for what it is—an event that appears to be, in a way purely rebellious but which is in fact very conformist and that fails to challenge the status quo in a lasting way. It reinforces patriarchy, skewed beauty aesthetics, consumerism, class and race privilege, female objectification and a dominantly heterosexual culture. Because of this, the way we see these things has to change.

As eager consumers of the national culture and participants of the intense festive misrule space of Halloween, probients explore, challenge (in a limited way) and magnify local cultural values in a way that other age groups are not allowed to because of the committed lifestyles they live and that other probients in other locations cannot (for this specific, local, college-town community). If national and foreign ideologies about the prime moment in young people’s lives in the west coast is about partying and sexual liberation because of the larger cultural forces that have helped to construct this image, then that is what Kassem and his film crew will capture. If patriarchal tradition is still dominant in our nation, the guy in the dress will whine and portray a romantically starved woman, instead of his own romantically starved male image, and his female costume will be as masculine as possible to ensure that the lines are blurred in a way that does not threaten his male identity. Cultural themes present themselves in Halloween in Isla Vista through probient misrule. The image reflected thus far is a grim one. This does not mean that Halloween can only function for the community by reminding us of the problems we need to face, it also holds the potential to be a space of real social transgression and social change. At the moment I have failed to find any positive change-bringing performances from the annual tradition. However,

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probient festive misrule on Del Playa Drive is the closest we can get to a mirror reflection of our local, college-town culture.

I have been writing this paper to the sound of sirens, amidst the Isla Vista Deltopia riots in February and a recent massacre in late May. The reasons for which those things happen in our community are difficult and complex, perhaps even impossible to attain, but I know one thing, that probient misrule in Isla Vista makes the problems in our culture visible so that we can name and address them and also so that we can understand what contributed to those tragic incidents. I invite all of us to get a better understanding of the probient community. We are much like kids yet we are very powerful. What we come to value or want will make the difference in what happens in our community. So Halloween is at the moment a safety valve, with the potential to show us who we are. It can turn into social protest, and although I have not seen any traceable positive changes I still think it can happen. It begins with those questions, why the right to party? Why the riots? And then noticing, oh we are patriarchal, we are consumerists and this leads us to harmful ways of thinking. Whether Halloween will merely reflect forever or whether an improvement starts within it, I do not know but I believe both things are possible. I would argue even that this paper is already a brake away from it just being safety valve, now at least Halloween in Isla Vista has been studied twice, but there is much more work to be done.

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