

Pratt Institute; School of Information

# Halloween: An Eerie Reflection of our Reality

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INFO-647

Visual Resource Management

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December 10, 2024

For my Visual Resource Management class, we were tasked with a project to create a digital collection of at least 30 records. We would digitize objects and create their relative metadata. My collection, *Halloween: An Eerie Reflection of our Reality*, took form when I discovered a rare copy of Stephen King's *The Shining* at a bookstore in Manhattan. It was a Cemetery Dance Publication Edition with 8 prints designed by Don Maitz and a one of a kind drawing by Glenn Chadbourne. After visiting the New York Public Library (NYPL) Picture Collection, I chose to supplement *The Shining* images with 11 covers of The New Yorker magazine Halloween editions and 24 photographs of vintage Halloween costumes.

With a Google Image search, I discovered the vintage costume photographs were taken by a photographer named Phyllis Galembo and published in her book, *Dressed for Thrills: 100 Years of Halloween Costumes and Masquerade*. The Pratt Brooklyn Libraries had a copy which not only had all of the images I had found at the NYPL Picture Collection, but more and identifying captions including titles, material makeup, year made, manufacturer, and where that particular costume was found. I decided to only scan one image from the actual book which was just a supplemental second photograph of one of the costumes I decided to use from the NYPL collection.

In order to start digitizing all of my images, I went to the Pratt Manhattan Campus to use their equipment. I used an Epson Expression 10000 XL in order to digitize the images from the NYPL Picture Collection. I planned to use the book scanner there as well for *The Shining*, but it was out of service and I was told it would be out of commission for at least the entire semester. I ended up using the book scanner at the Pratt Brooklyn Campus Library, the Bookeye 4 Book Scanner, in order to digitize the illustrations in *The Shining* Cemetery Dance Edition. Their scanner though was not as advanced as the one that was not working at the Manhattan campus,

so I had to really tinker with the system to get the images I needed. I ended up taking multiple scans of every image and having to do some creative cropping to get the images right.

After getting all of the images digitized, I went forward with photoshopping them to accurately represent the actual image. I cropped every image and added the high pass filter. Some of the images required some color correction, especially the ones taken on the Bookeye Scanner. I also had to adjust the vibrance of multiple images. I did dust correction on few photographs, mostly *The Shining* images. After I was satisfied with the editing of the images, I went forward with working on the metadata for each image using Adobe Bridge.

I started with *The Shining* images. In order to properly work through all of the metadata for these images, I had to go on a deeper dive into my research on this book, especially this edition. This was all done through Google searches. I was able to learn more about the artist, Glenn Chadbourne through his website but was not able to find anything about the drawing in the book specifically since it was an original. I was, however, able to find a little more information on the Don Maitz glossy prints inside via his website. It was here I was able to find all of the creator-given titles and confirm Don Maitz has copyright over the images, and not Cemetery Dance.

Finding the book the images were published in was the most helpful in finding information on the images by Phyllis Galembo. Some of the images still contained their labels from the NYPL Picture Collection, but some did not, and that information was in the book. Because of the costumes being mostly unknown or old manufacturers, it was hard to get more information than what was provided in the book, but Galembo did a good job at providing an estimated creation year, materials, manufacturer when known, and even where she found that specific costume. I do however wish there would have been information on the sizes of the

costumes, not only for my cataloging, but to gauge what age these costumes specifically were aimed at.

The New Yorker Halloween covers were relatively easy to find information on. With a quick search of “The New Yorker” and their date, Google was quickly able to provide me with their artist. Most of them did not have exact titles I could find though, so I named them all based on their date and added alternate titles for the few with creator-given titles. I knew The New Yorker is published by Condé Nast as well, which made the process pretty quick. I did however notice while doing the research on each image, some of them were missing significant parts of the image. Since the New York Public Library Picture Collection was mostly created by cutting images out of other resources, some of them were cut short. I chose to re-crop the images in photoshop to leave white space where significant parts of the illustrations were missing to show how overtime images can lose certain information. Luckily, The New Yorker covers are not only mass produced, but mass re-produced since Condé Nast and others (possibly without copyright permissions) tend to sell prints, but that is not the case with many Visual Resources.

This collection can be viewed through many different viewpoints. *The Shining* by Stephen King is one of the best known horror novels by one of the best known horror authors. It was widely popularized by Stanley Kubrik’s 1980 film starring Jack Nicholson. The Shining movie is now a Halloween favorite. We as human beings find joy in the dark and scary, possibly one of the reasons we have this holiday yearly celebrating this. Many may ask why we have this inclination towards the dark side of life, and there are many answers. Most of the reasoning is psychoanalytical, claiming we enjoy the genre of horror as a sort of escape from our repressed consciousness (Tudor 2010). Through the lens of Stephen King’s rise to popularity in the horror boom of the 1980’s, scholars have theorized this could have been amplified by the social and

political issues of the time. King's popularity rose directly after the withdrawal from the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal (Cardin 2017). Not only can horror be a commentary on real life, but it can also serve as an escape from our reality. As writer Joyce Carol Oats said, "There is no fiction so horrifying as the horror of actual life" (Cardin 2017, p. 108).

As human beings do, we evolve over time. This can be seen as well through the lens of these halloween costumes. Not only does fashion style change, but also our interests and our biases. Halloween costumes today obviously reflect the fashion of our time, with the recent emergence of corsets with skirts and pop culture references. This is true throughout history. Tying into *The Shining*, horror movies like this and others like *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and Halloween brought back a trend in the midcentury of these scarier costumes after Halloween was rebranded in the 1940's after Halloween pranks became too intense (Reid 2021). In the Phyllis Galembo photographs we can see this kid targeted Halloween tactic based on pop culture through the Mickey Mouse costume from around 1930, a character created in 1928 (*The Birth of a Mouse*) (see Figure 1) and the Clancy the Robot costume from the 1950s, which was around the same time the first industrial robot was created (Gasparetto and Scalera 2019).



Fig. 1. Phyllis Galembo. (2002). Mickey. [photograph]. *Dressed for Thrills: 100 Years of Halloween Costumes and Masquerade*

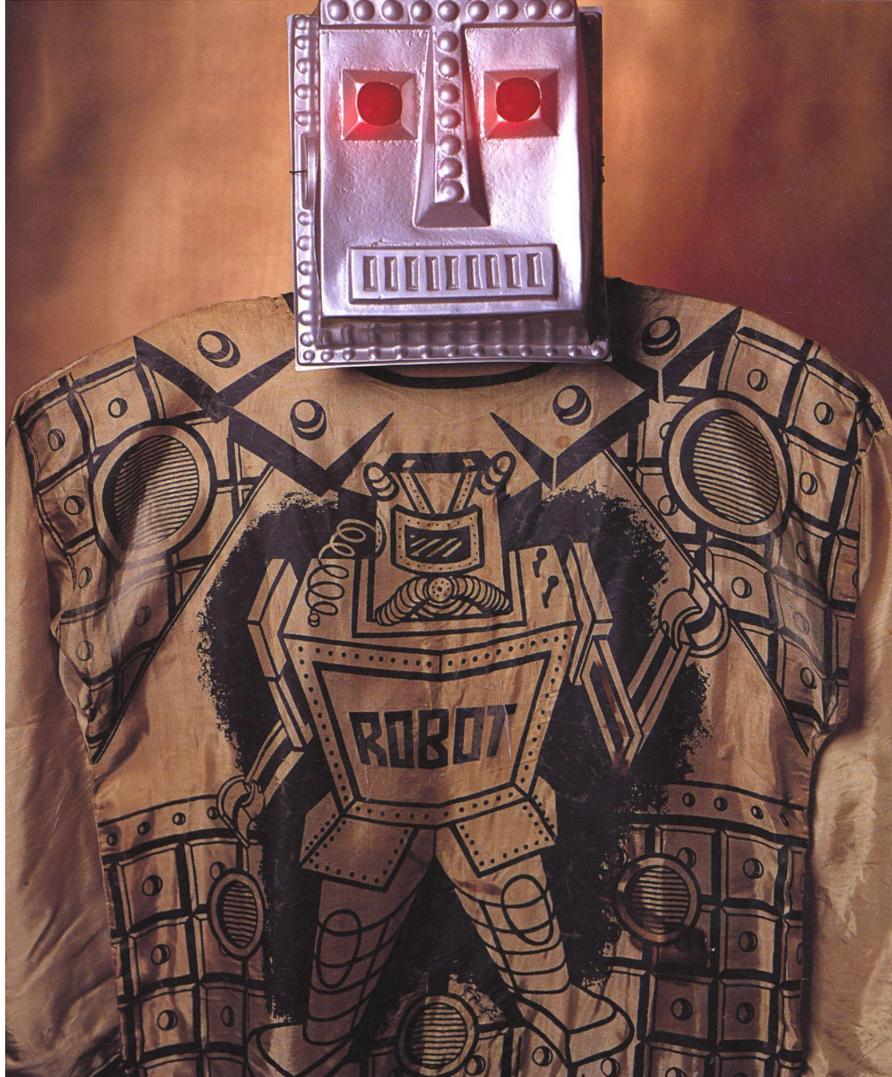


Fig. 2. Phyllis Galembo. (2002). Clancy the Robot. [photograph]. *Dressed for Thrills: 100 Years of Halloween Costumes and Masquerade*

Our bias shows through our costumes as well, especially when looking historically. Most of us today understand the concepts of cultural appropriation, sexism, and other forms of improper representation, but is not always the case. For example, even recently in 2013, supermarkets in the UK were selling costumes on the theme of “‘escaped mental patient’ and ‘psycho-ward’” in which they depicted blood covered clothing, straight jackets, and accessories like syringes and knives (Kelly and Riach, 2018). Through the image collection, we can see this through costumes

like the Witch Doctor costume from the 1950s created by an American company (see Figure 3) or Miss Eye-Full Tower with the rather boisterous rubber chest (see Figure 4). We still struggle with representation today as well, but it is clear we must continue to acknowledge this around Halloween.



Fig. 3. Phyllis Galembo. (2002). Witch Doctor. [photograph]. *Dressed for Thrills: 100 Years of Halloween Costumes and Masquerade*



Fig. 4. Phyllis Galembo. (2002). Miss Eye-Full Tower. [photograph]. *Dressed for Thrills: 100 Years of Halloween Costumes and Masquerade*

I found interest in the New Yorker covers because the illustrations are so enticing. I noticed however in the span of less than 70 years, the price of a New Yorker Magazine had gone from 20 cents to 7 dollars, and that was only from 1947 to 2016 based on the editions found at the NYPL. Using The New Yorker Archives, which is available online to subscribers, I was able to look at every edition ever published and noticed the first edition was sold for 15 cents in 1925,

to the most recent edition sold for 9 dollars in 2024 at an inflation rate of 5900% in just 100 years. Stephen G. Cecchetti at NYU did a study on newsstand prices from 1953-1979 where he claims some magazine price changes fit in the “monopolistic sticky price model” where basically the prices change frequently due to being a monopolistic institution and due to this are difficult to predict (Cecchetti 1986).

The New Yorker covers are also informative artworks reflecting the state of the world at their time. For example, the October 29th, 2001 cover, Local Heroes, features children trick or treating in costumes resembling first responders (see Figure 5). This was less than two months after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. This cover’s illustration was in honor of the fire and police personnel who were a part of the recovery of this attack. The 9/11 Memorial and Museum even featured the cover in an exhibit in 2017 called “Cover Stories: Remembering the Twin Towers on The New Yorker” (Sixteen Years Ago, the New Yorker Published “Local Heroes”).



Fig. 5. Peter de Sève. (2001). Local Heroes. [illustration]. The New Yorker.

This collection not only allowed me to explore horror and halloween through these images, but to experience this digitization boom in GLAM institutions. It really made me consider the difficulties faced by small institutions in trying to be on the forefront of the digital world. I was almost unable to digitize the illustrations in *The Shining* because my academic institution's equipment was out of order, but not every institution can afford outsourcing or their

own digitization equipment. The average small institution has just two employees and a budget of \$90,000 (Avgousti and Papaioannou 2023). That is not enough money to support digitization projects and that few employees would not have enough time. I am a single person, but it took me 3 months to digitize and complete metadata of 45 materials with no other museum duties to focus on. I was also provided with sufficient training on these complex systems many small institutions may not be able to support. Expanding access to visual resources with democratization through digitization is becoming essential in this day and age. I hope as the current generation of GLAM professionals are being trained in our education, projects like this persist to supply us with the skill set to work towards this in whatever institution we end up in.

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