

INTRO

There were four mischief night parades in New Orleans, and then one “distributed mischief night,” a new approach which led to significant creativity and destruction but did not persist.

While no-one can say precisely why mischief night parades began, the police attack on the Krewe of Eris during Mardi Gras 2011 reverberated far outside the boundaries of carnival. It prompted in some ways a deeper splintering of approaches within downtown’s demimonde.

The aging liberals helming Eris shifted it to a watery, wimpy “dawn parade” for a while, and both the harder-rolling queer party kids and more chaotic, antagonistic anarchist goblins created new Carnival-season night parades centering their own priorities. The culture fractured.

So, while any oversimplification is going to miss crucial context, it could be said the (self-)repression of Eris’ more insurrectionary tendencies prompted a broader flowering of anarchist activity across the calendar.

For many years, Halloween was when the snowbirds chased off by the gruelling new orleans summer (aka “the poser disposer”) came flocking back to town. Temperatures started to cool, the languorous citywide fever diminished, and doing anything at all began to again seem possible. Though this pattern, like so many, has since been disrupted, late October marked a change in energy, numbers of warm bodies at events, and therefore potential.

Why a parade? Some of the 2010s more shadowy and cobwebbed philosophers believed fanatically that New Orleans anarchy could and should reflect and emerge from specifically New Orleans history, tradition and culture, so the rowdy, torchlit party/parade (differentiated from a “political” “march” by dancing, music and generally celebratory refulgence) was a go-to form.

CONVOCAION

We request your presence for a joyful parade of mischief. We desire your warm, living presence, not your virtual presence, not your name or data. You needn't even show your face to be present... to the contrary, let us masquerade!

Halloween celebrations come from Samhain, a cosmic & pagan, pre-Christian & mysterious festival marking winter's ominous onset. It was originally a defiant occasion, using humor and ridicule against the daunting power of death. Alas, the Catholic Church, a tremendous historical death-engine, got ahold of the holiday and infected it with earth-estranging Christianity. Thus, Samhain became All Hallow's Eve, rebuilt around the veneration of dead saints (hallows). The secular version of this is Halloween.

We are not, however, seeking to paint a false blush of life on some embalmed neopagan celebration. This parade is not a grave-robber's effort to reanimate a departed tradition. This is a night against death in all the forms it now assumes.

The deceased dissemble. They shamble, zombified, in the guise of events and occasions we once loved. Traditions are dough-masticated, then return from the grave stinking of spectacle. These dead things are dangerous. Insatiably hungry, they seek to spread their contamination and gorge on our vitality.

We living who remain must dissemble as well. Through masquing and mummery we may pass like a fog through the midst of the nonliving.

Samhain is long gone, but the need to confront putrefaction persists. Winter is coming: a long winter that is the cold, sterile commodification of everything we know, a looming, indefinite season of death. Coins are placed over our eyes, and the weight holds them shut: **we can no longer live in New Orleans.**

Together let us trample down the fear that chills our blood. With (mostly) harmless pranks, noisemakers and foolery, we will push back against the icy tide. Shit on their mortifying death-culture and throw off that private weight of death, the alone-death that each of us carries. Get that corpse off you! Get out from under it!

Come and play. Fool the enervated enemy with your most ghastly song and dance macabre. Be saucy. Enjoy without constraint. Laugh off death. Reveal the stupidity, the total lack of seriousness behind this world's solemnities. We defy death by unleashing our will to live.



2014

The various decomposing liches consulted for this brief history can barely remember the first mischief night parade. It launched from the same Royal & Press Streets location that Eris had for many years. It was a rowdy parade; there were torches and a sound cart, fireworks, graffiti. Some participants still treasure the opportunity this parade offered them to attack their then-places of employment. A uniquely despised “blogstaurant” named Booty’s got a splendid smashing. When the parade emerged from the narrower neighborhoods onto the relatively wide and open St. Claude Ave and began interfering with vehicle traffic there, it drew the attention of cops and was dispersed.

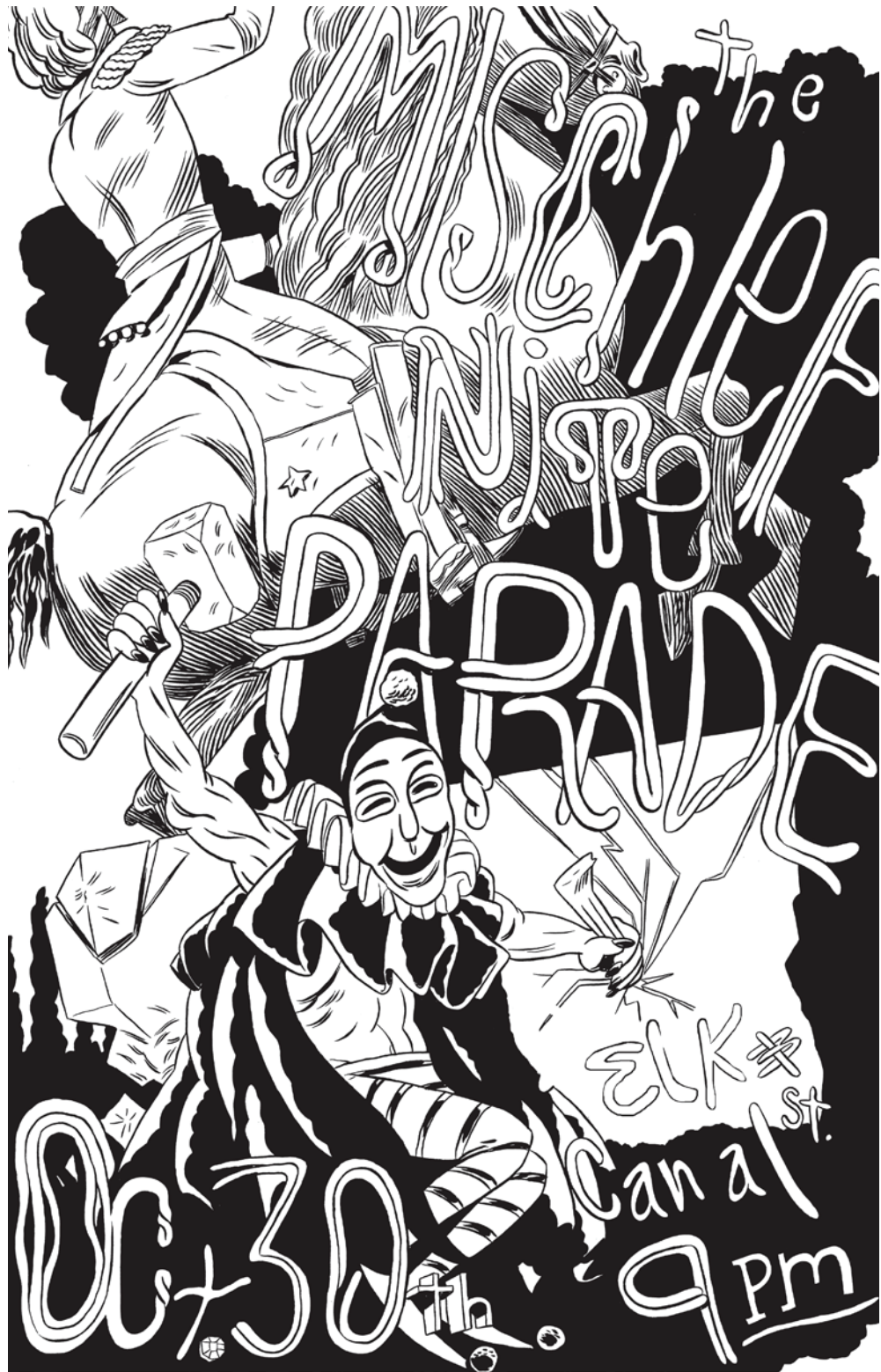
One recent transplant contributed to the inaugural parade by defacing a historical marker that happened to be about Homer Plessy defying segregation. The rowdy parade is not a precise instrument; messiness and chaos are key to the opportunities and potentials it opens. A few other people snuck back afterwards and cleaned the marker off. While it’s humiliating and arguably bad to perform this kind of recuperative anti-action, those who did so were trying to head off a potential liberal shitstorm that they felt might suffocate mischief night in its cradle.

2015

This mischief night parade was longer-planned, more ambitious, more sophisticated, more dangerous, had more floats, more tricks up its sleeve, more people, and was shut down by the cops almost immediately.

The parade rolled barely a block from its Royal & Press origins before a cop car tried to block its path. A shopping cart was set alight and pushed into the police cruiser as inducement for it to move, which it did not. The car was confronted from multiple angles and its window got broken but before anything even more mischievous could occur a truly plague-of-locusts quantity of police reinforcements came and swarmed everyone.

There were no arrests, miraculously. One elegant parader massaging her ankles on the steps of Cap’n Sal’s was heard to say, “I’ll never be too old to run from the cops, but I might be getting too old to run from the cops in heels.”



The
Dance
Parade

Oct 30th

Elk St.
Canal
9pm

2016

This mischief night (“the Canal St. one”) is covered adequately elsewhere in the zine. Certain elements thought, based on past experiences, that staging a rowdy parade on the broad and exposed boulevard of Canal St. was tactical folly and that everyone who attended was however knowingly or unknowingly waltzing into a meat grinder. Those elements were mistaken, because the resultant parade was legendary and basically defeated the police.

2017

Back to Press and Royal, like a drunk back to the bottle! Similar to how 2016’s mischief nite was largely concerned with the hot-button issue of racist monuments, 2017’s parade sought to elevate concerns about and resistance to the Bayou Bridge Pipeline being built through Louisiana.

Alliances between mischief night planners & anti-pipeline protesters proved fruitful: this was a big, glorious parade that ended with its floats being ceremonially set alight in the middle of the Marigny. Although there were extensive preparatons, the whole night saw zero police interference. Shit really is random.



2018

A new tactic was tried-- the “distributed mischief night.” This innovation established a loose game-like framework in which people were encouraged to crew up in different parts of the city, then go out and wreak independent, autonomous havoc against the powers that be before convening for a big party in a central-ish location.

While mischief night as an anarchist-founded New Orleans tradition didn’t survive into 2019, this intriguing twist on the mischief night classic resulted in some truly spectacular and hilarious damage to the investments of gentrifiers, including an enormous riverfront rampage and the temporary loss of utilities to empires of carefully pinpointed Tremé AirBnBs. The ‘scavenger hunt’-style vandalism game splattered dayglo mayhem well beyond the parades’ usual range. 2018 mischief night’s tendrils reached even into the manicured hellscape of the City Park Golf Course, bringing full circle (a) grudge dating back to the courageous but ultimately unsuccessful 2015 occupation of Couterie Forest.

2019 AND BEYOND...

All traditions are born, flower for a while, then die. Some persist across generations, some fall into quiescence and later rebloom anew, but most simply wither and are gone. It’s ok for things to die; in fact, it’s inevitable. The best and most beautiful traditions arise out of some shared desire or need, and are joyful to their practitioners. When they cease to be beautiful or joyful-- if they threaten to become mere obligations, or drudgery-- then they must transform or be abandoned.

To lift a sentiment from the 2014 mischief night flyer, none of us can carry dead traditions on our backs. There are worthier burdens.

Whatever the future of mischief night in new orleans, it was, in its time, great fun.



The following was published on *It's Going Down* on Nov. 5 2016, as “New Orleans Mischief Night Parade Breaks History”

For the last three years on October 30st, the streets of New Orleans have been lit by the torches, fireworks and burning barricades of paraders on Mischief Night, a holiday of rebellious revelry the night before Halloween. This year’s Mischief Night parade took hold of Canal Street, downtown’s main thoroughfare, for ten blocks before reaching its destination, the white supremacist Battle of Liberty Place Monument.

Swift responses from NOPD and the State Troopers were unsuccessful at stopping a few dozen determined paraders from vandalizing police cruisers before crumbling the front face of the monument with a sledgehammer and painting graffiti in solidarity with Take ‘Em Down NOLA and Standing Rock, ND. When paraders began setting fire to floats and rushing them toward police, one officer retreated in fear, fleeing the scene entirely. In this moment the police as a symbol— all-powerful and untouchable — were reduced to simply material force, unable to maintain control. No arrests were made.

Ancient pagan earth rituals, peasants conspiring against rulers around the bonfires of the Sabbat, workers concealing their identities to steal back from the bosses... the history of Halloween is rich with traditions that have historically functioned as protection and power against the enemies of the living. Now, as the forces of Halloween reawaken from the long sleep of consumerism and recuperation, how they’ll adapt to the uniquely grim times ahead remains to be seen.

For example: how will one of New Orleans’ great cultural forms, the rejuvenatory celebratory procession, support our embattled spirits as we’re obligated to choose sides in the divisions ensuing from chaotic weather, receding shorelines, police brutality and the resurgence of white supremacy?

Will we parade like Day of the Dead did this year, in a compliant straight line cordoned off on all sides by police escorts, while denying ourselves the power to fight for the living? The old argument, that beautiful fatalism is just how we do things in the Big Easy, has been thoroughly discredited: even at the time these pallid paraders were

marching to the End of the World, students at Dillard were battling the cops protecting neo-Nazi David Duke's "right" to speak at an historically black college.

There is no more disavowing what the forces of death are up to. It's a reality that even the most self-obsessed rituals can and must confront— we must attack the forces of oppression directly or else become merely the appealing backdrop against which the enemy celebrates themselves, the very "cultural currency" with which our city is pimped. There is no longer a middle ground; that's been seized for luxury condos. The choice is stark: we either collectively build a more combative spiritual practice or we collude in ceding our ritual spaces of encounter to the oppressors.

No matter how many veils of pretty lace you drape over your pretty face, you can't help but see and know that the subdued bread and circus culture of New Orleans is being crushed. Today, all non-confrontational aesthetic spectacle serves to reinforce this exploitation. Time has run out.

Let's not be demoralized by the crisis, though. Let's instead let urgency give new life to our holidays, to our memorials, to the carnivalesque — a life that knows how to fight as much as it knows how to live.

For the iconoclasts and the water protectors

All power to the parades



The following interview was published on *It's Going Down* on Dec. 7 2017, as “New Orleans Mischief Night: An Interview With Revelers”

This year marked the fourth annual New Orleans Mischief Night Parade. Last year's rowdy and daring procession down Canal Street ended in a bonfire and the defacement of a racist artifact (rest in pieces). The theme this year was the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, and the parade ended in a large black snake float burning in effigy on Frenchmen Street. Following Halloween, we caught up with some true Mischief Night revelers for an interview. Here's what they had to say...

Why did you guys take the time to make another parade specifically for Halloween, especially such an involved and risky production? What is the relation of Mischief Night to this particular holiday?

Orca Chomp: If you're not familiar with the history of Halloween or how its customs have evolved in different eras, it's worth looking into. But in the present tense, commercial holidays—all of them—flatten the most powerful affects—stuff like Fear, Love, Hope, Grief, Community (I could go on...) into safe units with safe and usually passive public traditions.

But all that stuff is important to us, not symbolically but actually important, vital, so we want to engage them in a different way. Actually, we need to. Especially fear. The world we live in has become a nightmare. It's endless. The places we live are crammed with the most horrible bullshit and then it gets normalized in just a couple years. None of these things were being confronted to our satisfaction in other Halloween traditions like costume parties and big dazzling spectacles, so we had to make the Halloween that we need to exist right now.

Right, you've described elsewhere a sense of an imperative to “collectively build a more combative spiritual practice.” But why bother?

OC: If public traditions matter at all or have any consequences for the people who are in them or who see them, then they need to reflect

what we actually feel and want. Being pretty isn't enough for a lot of people. A halloween costume that's a cynical joke about Trump or whatever is more sad than funny. To be stuck in that kind of flat, empty mode of passing through the morbid death holiday just bums us out even more. If we're going to be out in public, we want to be out as ourselves—people who don't want to put up with the way things are or the way things are going.

It's crucial and non-negotiable for us to have public traditions that are beautiful, that make us happy and where we get together and move through the real world actually confronting the things that actually scare us, and confronting them in the way that's intuitive for us. Passively respecting the nightmare world around us as it stands... isn't intuitive for us.



What was this year's theme? How is the theme determined each year?

OC: I said earlier that Mischief Night is about confronting fear and confronting the things that scare us. We haven't come up short yet thinking of something disturbing—maybe it's been hard to know where to start. For instance, so there's this project going on where these nihilist lunatics are trying to build an oil pipeline to connect Louisiana to this certain other oil pipeline built last year up north... Which has already leaked how many times? Three to date? Crossing 700 bodies of water and eminent-domaining people out of their land and for what? We all know where this is going. We all know what's about to happen here. In spite of all different kinds of people fighting it in all these different ways, we've all seen what tends to happen. What it will probably come down to. Everyone knows... And in the back of our minds we're partly thinking about it all the time. Those are the types of things that come up when we pick a theme.

But why a parade?

Flamingo Pox: Being in the streets gives people a sense of power over their lives and community. Being in the streets isn't always enough, though. Protests and marches often fall short in terms of the connectedness, vitality, and collective strength we're looking for and need. This is part of the sad amputation of politics from the rest of life. Whether or not it's intentional, in most activist circles we've known, things such as resistance, strength and joy can only overlap in the most contrived ways, if at all. But we need the overlap of all these things in order to have a chance of developing any substantial counter-power.

Lots of traditions, too many to name, have always known this. In New Orleans, we've found the strength-joy overlap is more often found in parades than marches. Dancing atop buildings and cars, chasing off the police with bottles for trying to arrest someone, torching someone's four-wheeler because they recklessly drove through the crowd and could've killed someone, all while dancing, singing and partying—basically until the Ferguson solidarity marches in 2014, such instances of real agency and happiness were things we'd only ever witnessed here in parades.

How do you see your parade in context with Carnival's history or traditions?

*"Boys should collect alms for the respectable poor, instead of mad pranks, throwing stones and making floats."
– Crusading Monk of Florence, 1490.*

FP: Mischief Night is a breakaway of breakaway, but we recognize a concrete history that dates back centuries. Our Carnival traditions are those that actually want to "turn the world upside down." There's always been a push and pull between popular ways of celebrating and ways that established powers would like us to party and parade. For instance, the emergence of the Grand Krewe was an explicit reaction to elite fear of popular revolutionary violence on the eve of the Civil War. Walking parades are different than spectacular parades for a reason.



So what are the modern incarnations of this form of holiday?

FP: It is the dirt bike gang doing wheelies light after light down Canal Street with no license plates on a Sunday morning. It is an impromptu post-parade kegger throwing furniture off the roof of an evicted social center turned into luxury condos before pulling the fire alarm. It is launching from the sideline of Muses a full daiquiri through the half-opened window of an NOPD mobile command center as it drives by. It is tipping over those top-heavy “Mr. Tippy” spotlights the cops are trying to make ubiquitous during Carnival. It is thinking your parade is the only celebration on Mischief Night, only to find out on the 5 o’clock news the next day that apparently somebody else was out there setting dozens of dumpster fires.

Despite the completely insane extremes of control infiltrating every last corner of the world, our form of holiday, the kind repressed by Grand Krewes, has still never left the scene. Even broken up, these instances have never stopped occurring in the interstices of our otherwise commercially sanitized holidays and traditions. They’re rarely recorded as anything but aberrations, because they do not happen within the historical continuum of this runaway train we call progress. As Walter Benjamin watched fascism sweep Europe in the 30s, he put it well:

The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their action. The great revolution introduced a new calendar. The initial day of a calendar serves as a historical time-lapse camera. And, basically, it is the same day that keeps recurring in the guise of holidays, which are days of remembrance.

What are some particular intentions of Mischief Night regarding this pipeline situation or a general trend of “resistance”?

OC: For lots of people, it’s not enough anymore to “demonstrate” being “against” something. It’s pretty clear at this point that it matters little to powerful parties how many people simply show up to “demonstrate” their opinion, as long as they keep it orderly. Case in point, the climate march, the women’s march...

FP: These were to the fossil fuels industry and the emergence of Trump what the anti-war marches were to Bush: not even a bump in the road.

OC: But on the other hand, if anything, one of the major valuable things about those kinds of situations is for people to get together and act together. That's a vital thing regardless of the practical irrelevance of your "message" to your enemies. Parading together and confronting the horror that is our transforming world and the city that's already been transformed, this isn't the end-all, but it is just necessary.

Why this year's route and why do things get broken and trashed? What do you say to those who lost business or had to clean up after Mischief Night? How Dare You??

OC: Trash? Trash? Did somebody say trash?

FP: More trashing is what the world needs—there's so much trashing to be done! We need judicious trashing, and more bonfires too. What we don't need is more business. Reality is not a set of economic relations, no matter how many apps and entrepreneurs find ever more subtle ways to valorize the human experience. And insofar as economic relations now account for a lot of what passes for human connectedness, it is always at our expense, forced upon us over of centuries of the most extreme dispossession. All economy is manufactured scarcity. All economic relations are separation. And separation is the reason this world is shit. The only way to head off this disaster is with disruption—that is why more trashing needs to happen.

Sorry-not-sorry to the business owners and their admirers on Frenchmen. We recognize the necessity of doing business just to survive in this world—but when another world roars into existence just feet away and for a moment wrests space from the market, we recommend moving towards and not away from its warmth.

Like other walking parades, Mischief Night entails an informal flow of people jumping in and out of the procession. How do you envision the relation of participants to spectators? Is this even important to you?

OC: It goes without saying that the parade is the people who bring the parade. That's the old-old form of parade. What's a little more uncommon in this time of big "protest" marches is being able to open up something that isn't like a march or demonstration, and also isn't entertainment or intended to be symbolic or cathartic. Instead you have the bulk of people making choices about what they want to happen, and shaping what happens, so that anything can happen. Of course everyone gets to be in the street, that's just basic, but what we love about Mischief Night is that each of us picks our own mischief.

Of course, there are lots of people around these days who would rather stand aside and film instead of parading. If that isn't you, come party with us next time.





this zine was produced by Make Total Distro in 2021
betwixt Hurricanes Ida and Nicholas

maketotaldistro@protonmail.com
[@totaldistro504 \(twutz\)](https://twitter.com/totaldistro504) [@maketotaldistro \(gram\)](https://www.instagram.com/maketotaldistro)

thank you, various dusty skellingtons who contributed flyers,
images &/or recollections

Make Total
DISTRO 