University of Nevada, Reno

Welcome Home to Black Rock City:  
Urban Geography of the Burn

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by

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ABSTRACT

In its short but vibrant history Burning Man evolved from spontaneous bohemian solstice celebration into a global intentional community anchored by ephemeral Black Rock Desert burns. Participants practice Ten Principles to embody an ethos that radically challenges mainstream culture through manifested Black Rock City (re)formation, negotiation, and deconstruction. The resulting paradoxical heterotopia originates from modernist garden city philosophy and is centered annually on a symbolic towering effigy, but the playa canvas provides ample room for communal architecture and services. Citizen engagement occurs do-ocratically in an environment without economic and administrative limitations to encourage creative productions that are interactive and gifted for public enjoyment.

Though Burning Man Project and Bureau of Land Management are organizations that maintain key functional planning roles in Black Rock City by mitigating human environmental impact, examination reveals how participant-built environments freely endeavor to mock, reverse, and reconceptualize external society through unique, sometimes conflicting, but peacefully coexisting self-expressions. As fanatical demand for Black Rock City’s perceived urban counterculture grows, research findings from longitudinal participant-observation suggests that doxic city life is not only present at Burning Man, it trends along an elite postwar suburban trajectory opposed to many guiding principles, and is specifically at odds with the principle of radical inclusivity.
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Dedicated to Chris, Katherine and Noël
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Our intention is to generate society that connects each individual to his or her creative powers, to participate in community, to the larger realm of civic life, and to the even greater world of nature that exists beyond society. We believe that the experience of Burning Man can produce positive spiritual change in the world”

(Burning Man Mission)

Originating in 1986, Burning Man has evolved into an internationally significant year-round creative community anchored by two annual ritual burns in the Nevada desert.¹ With art, community, and city as general Burning Man tenets it remains nearly impossible to create penetrating definition(s) because of diverse, and often contradictory, experiences (Davis, in Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005). Unlike other ticketed festivals or special events, Burning Man provides no stage, but instead offers ephemeral heterotopic spaces for participants, referred to as “burners” to live their true selves by projecting their own show (Foucault 1986, L Harvey 2000).² The dedicated participant is a social performer – a citizen artist – where at Burning Man, art-making, material or performative, is not a precious commodity for sale or approval, but instead a vital aspect of “playa” life (Culpper 2007, Kristen 2006). For some the experience is meaningful enough to provide a preferred reality that participants will long for during the remaining 51-weeks per year (Morehead 2009).

Organically codified foundational and operational “Ten Principles” (Table 1), whether adopted wholesale or reframed, reflect intentional community ethos that challenge normal, “default,” society through annual ephemeral Black Rock City creation,

¹The Burning Man Project condemns referring to Burning Man as event or festival and instead refers to it solely as a “community”. Burning art is “a gesture of freedom, non-attachment and letting go,” as explained by Kristen (2007). The Man effigy burns annually on Saturday night and the Temple burns Sunday night before Labor Day.
²Michel Foucault (1986: 24) explains heterotopias as juxtaposing in a, “single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.”
negotiation, and deconstruction. Those unfamiliar with Burning Man maintain polarized attitudes stemming from either ideological agreement or moral conflict with its guiding principles (BLM 2012).

Table 1. Burning Man – Ten Principles

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Radical Inclusion</td>
<td>Welcomes and respects anyone to, and in, the Burning Man Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifting</td>
<td>Unconditional giving without an expected exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decommodification</td>
<td>Resists consumption in an environment unmediated by commercial sponsorship, transaction, or advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical Self-Reliance</td>
<td>Encourages inner resource discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical Self-Expression</td>
<td>Gives to others while respecting recipient rights and liberties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Effort</td>
<td>Encourages interactive cooperation and collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Responsibility</td>
<td>Values civil society by assuming responsibility for public welfare in accordance with laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave No Trace</td>
<td>Respects the environment by endeavoring to leave places in better condition than found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Achieves ‘being’ through doing where everyone is invited to work and play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediacy</td>
<td>Honoring and overcoming realities that stand between us and our inner self, those around us, society, and the natural world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Northern Nevada gateway communities Reno-Sparks and Fernley have historically held skeptical or critical views, but tensions have eased through realized fiscal gains from sales, tourist, and casino taxes, and agency permit fees. With an estimated $75+ million local economy, Burning Man provides significant regional

---

3Radziwill and Benton (2013) discuss foundational principles as those that demonstrate shared values and operational principles as being expressed when participants produce art and experience. Foundational: civic responsibility, immediacy, gifting, decommodification, and participation. Operational: radical inclusion, radical self-expression, communal effort, leave no trace, and radical self-reliance.  
4Reviewing definitions of the three “radical” principles begs questioning use of the term.
economic tourism benefits, largely gained by Washoe County but also by Pershing County and the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe (Heller 2012).

As opinions are shifting Burning Man has proven to be fertile ground for academic research, especially in the social sciences (Saillant 2010). Yet, even with emerging scholarship and graduate-level university courses minimal attention has been paid to urban geography. Given this literature scarcity, this dissertation examines urban theory and city planning history as it applies to the Black Rock City ephemopolis (Black 1998).

**AMERICAN CITY PLANNING HISTORY**

Reviewing the hundred year planning historiography, starting with its recognition as a distinct profession, reveals a discipline originally rooted in urban experimentation that swung dramatically toward regulation until midcentury urban crises caused rapid shifts reflecting larger cultural changes in America. During its only pluralist period, scholarly literature reflects conflicting argument and frequently changing dominant paradigms. The profession was slower to adapt, thus trailing behind and diverging from the academy, until communicative theory unified study and practice.

Functional spatial settlements have been integral to city evolutions from basic Mesopotamian land use divisions to Roman forums, Haussmann’s Paris, Levittown, and highly complex megalopoli. Yet, professional planning is considered to be a twentieth century American exceptionalist construct stemming from the World’s Columbian Exposition and comprehensive Plan for Chicago (Hall 2002). Daniel Burnham’s respective successes initiated a fiercely deterministic City Beautiful Movement until post-depression recovery efforts pushed regional experimentation in Tennessee Valley
Authority and Progressive Era New Town resettlement initiatives over grand structures. With the federal government actively involved in housing, revitalization, and economic development, administration became the key practitioner role. Laissez-faire prosperity translated largely into peripheral growth and urban renewal where decision justifications relied heavily upon quantitative empirical evidence.

Rationality persisted relatively unquestioned until incrementalism presented a critical postwar counterpoint; understanding that planning outcomes were piecemealed and politically motivated was an abrupt diametric shift in theoretical scholarship, which was quickly superseded by the more palatable rationally pragmatic mixed scanning intermediary. Growing political distrust and activist momentum drove reformist pluralism with radical progressivism, transactive planning, and advocacy theory to create an empowerment arm. Respective merits were contested until John Forester (1989) published communicative theory outlining a proactive postmodernist framework for working within an unbalanced power system (Legates and Stout 2011).

Practice tests theory, though, and difficulty remains as actionable outcomes occur entirely in future terms (Wachs 2001). Inherently pragmatic, plans span multiple decades and construction can take several years, so consequences are rarely immediately evident, as in the case of the ill-conceived but well-intentioned Euclidian zoning policy that redefined most American cities. Exclusive by nature, rationally separating desired uses into designated locations erased juxtaposed heavy industrial and sensitive land incompatibility cases, but inadvertently fueled market segregation by increasing peripheral large-lot property value through multi-tenant and small single-family residential parcel restrictions. Environmentalists first elucidated impacts associated with
outward, not upward, growth based on cumulative auto-laden highways and sprawling suburban expansions, but inaction remains as debate over future population need versus greenfield preservation continues. Boulder, Colorado is one of the few examples where enforced, regionally-defined urban growth boundaries are combined with mixed-use, transit-oriented development corridors and neotraditional design strategies essential for achieving desired compact infill and maximized infrastructure efficiency.

In larger cities, zoning isolated urban cores and indirectly reinforced rational urban renewal attempts to solve poverty and blight. Resident displacement and extensive neighborhood destruction in favor of new mega-scale apartment block buildings were justified. Disadvantaged, poorly educated, and unorganized citizens proved powerless by posing minimal opposition to these unethical politically motivated housing redevelopments, along with disproportional landfill and freeway siting that inequitably served distant middle and upper class needs. With damage done, most agencies now provide incentives for affordable, workforce, and market rate housing mixes to be constructed together, and advocacy responses to economic polarization now mandate environmental justice by ordinance to ensure fairer treatment and meaningful planning involvement regardless of race, color, origin, or income.

Yet, democratized planning is both bureaucratic and hierarchical; municipal, county, region, state, and federal agencies each administer their own policies, which are often inconsistent and sometimes conflicting. Policies that often employ vague objective terminology including sustainable, equal, efficient, affordable, and/or compact further complicate consistent interpretation. Planners, as integrated practitioners across subdisciplines (environmental, urban, rural, economic, and transportation), are implored
to work together as post-positivist facilitators charged with achieving desired results while weighing project feasibility, public policy, physical constraints, potential human environmental and economic impacts, disparate stakeholder interests, public uncertainty, agency structure(s), and elected political will (Allmendinger 2009). Decisions must be made even when an agreement is unreachable, insuring an undesirable future outcome for at least some individuals so as much emphasis is placed on consensus building as is on overall vision and plan development (Innes and Booher 2010). Given that no single plan can reflect all achievable goals, drafting desired future alternatives for equal consideration remains prudent, but even with germane options legal selection is bound by process, thus reinforcing the establishment.

Effects on the built environment are evident, higher income citizens benefit from rising incomes and adopted policies such as the federal mortgage interest deduction and freeway expansions. Empirically supported, capitalization on perceived housing appreciation, traffic dilution, public safety, better schools and lower property tax benefits allows demand for larger housing quantity found near, or at, the city periphery (Burchell 1997). Thus, greater demand for housing and private spaces naturally causes spatial expansion but is further reinforced by a desire to carry out greater housing consumption in locations where per square foot housing is inexpensive and minimum residential parcel sizes are large (Brueckner 2000). When permitted, this piecemealed growth form often results in suburban sprawl, a characteristically bland built out landscape comprised of monotonous, low-density leapfrog residential and strip-style commercial developments lacking the aesthetic value to foster a sense of place or belonging that engages neighborhood interaction (Brueckner 2000, Ewing 1997). In addition to citizen
fragmentation, societal impacts are inequitably foisted on the young and old, help concentrate the poor in blighted urban cores, exacerbate affordable housing and labor shortages, and can be linked to obesity and asthma illness (Ewing 1997). Environmental impacts are more clearly quantifiable - increased air pollution, carbon emissions, traffic congestion, energy consumption, infrastructure demand, and urban heat islands coupled with loss of prime agricultural soil and water quantity and quality degradation. To curb sprawl, understanding areal morphological trends, spatial patterns, and socio-demographics can shape policy to adaptively manage desired future growth. Compact city forms like the concentric central zone model, when implemented effectively, promote high-density mixed uses within an efficient transportation network and encourage pedestrian, bicycle, and transit modalities (Dantzig and Saaty 1973). With large residential populations living in close proximity, these smart growth initiatives improve public safety and encourage greater community social interaction (Jacobs 1961).

**Research Methods**

Study methods included ongoing literature review, participant-observation and ethnography conducted between August 2007 and May 2013. Background information and data from scholarly literature, annual AfterBurn reports, newspapers, online fora, maps, popular and social media, documentary films, and permit applications were collected. Onsite participant-observation and photography at four Burning Man events included field notes, photographs, and personal interviews. Additional interviews were

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5Fieldwork occurred during four seasons at Black Rock City: Green Man - 2007, Metropolis - 2010, Rites of Passage - 2011, and Fertility2.0 – 2012.
conducted off-site with organizers, agency stakeholders, and scholars because working in a pseudonymic, theatrical, and costumed environment proved to be constraining.

**Dissertation Overview**

Contemporary Black Rock City accommodates 56,149-participants and fanatical demand for dwelling in Black Rock City’s perceived urban counterculture continues to grow, raising many question as to whether ‘default’ city life is not only present at Burning Man, but that it is tracking along a suburban trajectory opposed to its guiding principles. The following three chapters address the trend by framing Black Rock City as a place of antecedent, sociocultural, and material paradoxes, and in doing so:

- “The Black Rock City Mirage” presents similarities to Ebenezer Howard’s modernist utopian garden city and identifies manifest challenges emblematic of exclusivity and suburbanization.
- “Plotting in the Desert” connects Burning Man as an intentional transitory happening with larger conceptions of who we are, what we do, and why we do it from a historical cultural need to seek clarity, the liberating value of urban dwelling in tight communal quarters, the utopian possibilities of closely concerted action, and the value of participation.
- “Welcome to Black Rock City” applies Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and doxa to explain participant negotiation through ideological and pragmatic lenses in transformation from desert to heterotopic space and suggests portable lessons for other spaces of insurgency.
REFERENCES


CHAPTER 2: THE BLACK ROCK CITY MIRAGE

ABSTRACT

Burning Man has evolved from a spontaneous solstice celebration into the world’s largest intentional community. Principle discourse philosophically implores participants to radically challenge society through internal ephemeral city creation, negotiation, and deconstruction. Applying garden city infrastructure as its regional scale framework might seem ironic given the site’s desert geography, but basic order allows resident masses to effectively collaborate in the development of a fleeting instant city comprising varied structures, monuments, and volunteer-based public services. Further pragmatic innovation occurs largely do-cratically at villages and themed camps, allowing most participants to engage in creative communal construction free from prescribed regulatory codes and/or administrative oversight. While the built environment is annually rebult, each version is original in mocking, reversing, and reconceptualizing ‘default’ city landscapes. Field observations, however, reveal ideological rifts at sub-community scales, where spatial privatization is demonstrated through elite and isolating turnkey residential camping experiences. Burning Man Project, as an organization, adaptively mitigates these potentially critical suburbanization impacts without limiting principled self-expression. Yet, added population demands and expenses for dwelling at Black Rock City are furthering it along the utopian garden city evolutionary path upon which it is theoretically modeled upon.

“Burning Man is an incredible canvas for self expression, but don’t limit yourself. The place where you are right now is even more hungry for creativity, joy and change.”
(Cash 2011)

INTRODUCTION

Instant cities are as historically diverse as the motivated, self-reliant settlers who fought wilderness to build them. Isolation and greed sparked a rapid pace, resulting in a flourish of two unique permanent cities - San Francisco and Anaheim -- growing a northern seaport from 400 to several thousand within months of precious gold discovery and generating a common-ownership agricultural utopia in the south, respectively (Barth 1975, Hein 1953, Wright 2008). These cities’ success relied, in part, on the disparate immigrants immediately forming customs and traditions until wealth, technology, and
creativity could establish mature societies (Barth 1975). These rapidly growing, autonomous places evolved organically, often resulting in chaotic regional morphologies. Yet, having recently reached maximum permitted population size, Burning Man’s annual instant city in the Black Rock Desert represents unexpectedly strong aspects of opposition, and paradoxical cases, to this trend. Now in its second decade since relocating to the desert, an exploration of Black Rock City origins, functions, and purposes reveals ideological transformations and physical manifestations similar to the original garden city as proposed by Ebenezer Howard at the turn of the twentieth century.

Fervent demand for Black Rock City’s gated utopia makes relevant a reexamination of the link between urban theory and workable design, generating debate over the organic and anarchistic versus control and the engineered. Given that visionary ideology dictates experimentation within physical constraints, the regional result is fundamentally similar to Letchworth Garden City with a distinctly bohemian San Francisco flavor. Within paradigmatic ‘postmodern’ planning moving toward greater equitable inclusivity it is important to remember the disciplinary arc founded in deterministic roots – with a long tradition of the idea that what is built shapes behavior. In an important theoretical leap forward, though, planning in practice has generally replaced promoting the conceptual ‘ideal’ with greater procedural regulatory compliance. In contrast, Burning Man Project (referred to as Project) operating as a private organization, is able to easily implement modern era infrastructure and social engineering

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6Organic refers to unplanned settlement patterns and the resulting morphology versus ‘inorganic’ planned, or ordered, settlements which result in more rational, geometric shapes.
applications to promote safe interactions with the vast, unrelenting, harsh physical space, while still simultaneously encouraging city development into diverse theme camps, communal villages, and artworks. Yet, longitudinal observation and interviews with participants suggest the city is a mirage of theoretical fissures between communal ideology and elite residential manifestations. These visible examples coupled with escalating ticket prices and increased population pressures fuel exclusivity, and have the Project working to mitigate negative impact perceptions by rechanneling Burning Man beyond city limits into a global community networked year-round through virtual forums and punctuated by active non/sanctioned global event gatherings. Growth shortfalls and struggles are felt universally by cities, and preserving ideology (particularly at highly localized scales) can be hard-fought battles for intentional places. In reviewing utopian planning tradition, challenges at Black Rock City – with its strong theoretical ties to the model Garden City - appear emblematic of a suburban trajectory.

**Burning Man**

Burning Man began as a summer solstice gathering among friends of Larry Harvey and Jerry James, when they arranged for an eight-foot tall, homemade wooden effigy’s ignition at Baker Beach, San Francisco. With no official purpose, the symbolic burn, intended to be cathartic, proved personally meaningful enough to participants to become worthy of annual tradition. Drawing subsequent exponential growth within four

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7 Bowditch (2010) noted how “tension exists between the idealistic, utopian notion of Burning Man as a solely cultural, social event and the reality of the flourishing for-profit business.” Chen (2009) explains that for profit was originally selected out of concern for an outside nonprofit Board limiting the organization in exercising direct control in decision-making. Black Rock City Limited Liability Corporation, a for-profit enterprise, has filed a three-year legal status update to become the Burning Man Project, a nonprofit 501(c)3 entity, which may improve financial statement credibility and transparency. This transition is more aligned with the mission statement and offers greater financial and decision-making transparency.

8 The first burn took place June 21, 1986.
years, capacity for public safety was exceeded, thus requiring a feasible alternate site.9

John Law along with fellow San Francisco anarchic Cacophonists proposed relocation to Black Rock Desert, Nevada, and, after an anarchic weekend zone trip, the sun-drenched Pleistocene lakebed was solidified as Burning Man’s impermanent annual home (Gilmore 2010).10 Enacting a secular pilgrimage that is significant distance from everyday life over an extended timespan proves sufficient to generate a vibrant heterotopian city anchored by ritual burns (Bowditch 2010).11 Twenty-two cities in total as of 2012, each ephemeral “Black Rock City” (as dubbed by participants) has expressed an avant-garde aesthetic.

Burning Man is a philosophical paradox. Fundamentally, it is a postmodern social experiment where participants independently and autonomously shape their immediate environments per Ten Principles (Table 1), yet the larger bounded city is constructed by an organization having a greater social purpose that is manifested in modernist form (D Harvey 1989). Every participant at Black Rock City is considered to be a citizen. Arrival grants rights not found in “default” places and assumes vertical interpretations of Ten

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9 With 800 attendees present Golden Gate National Recreation Area Park Rangers did not allow a burn out of concern for public safety hazard.
10 Formed from the Suicide Club, an underground secret society beginning 1977 as a course taught by Gary Wayne at Communiversity at San Francisco State University, San Francisco Cacophonists were a random network of free spirits in pursuit of experience beyond mainstream society engaging in playful and subversive dada and Surrealist ethos, according to Bowditch (2010). The Cacophony Society zone trip was inspired by Andrew Tarkovsky’s film Stalker (1979), and refers to entrance into a changing landscape of the post-apocalyptic world (Bowditch 2010). Zone trip further references Hakim Bey’s (1991) guerilla uprising Temporary Autonomous Zones that briefly liberate an area (land, time, or imagination) from engagement with the state before dissolving and reforming elsewhere. Bey, as described by Graham St. John (in Morehead 2009) is an American libertarian-anarchist philosopher and subversive poet and proponent of Islam.
11 Burning Man takes place over eight days and ends on Labor Day each year. Michel Foucault (1986: 24) explains heterotopias as juxtaposing in a, “single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.” The Man effigy burns Saturday night followed by a Burning Man Temple burn Sunday night before Labor Day.
Principle (Table 1) responsibilities (Spitulnik 2008).\textsuperscript{12} The Ten Principles are aspirational and an operational community ethos to be distributed horizontally within the Burning Man community and accepted wholesale or reinterpreted, reframed, added to, amended, and contested (Spitulnik 2008).\textsuperscript{13} Elements of Radical Inclusion, Self Reliance, and Self Expression, Immediacy, Participation, Decommodification, Gifting, Civic Responsibility, Communal Effort, and Leave No Trace blend the event’s artistic, anarchic, and eclectic early influences (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005).

Principles describe and suggest, not enforce, participant behavior and generally dispute individualist American culture by intermingling and uniting divergent heterodoxic identitarian tendencies (Bowditch 2010, Doherty 2004, Wray 2005).\textsuperscript{14} Through chance encounter and creativity, participants use space to play with and perform alternative experiences, identities, and spiritualties (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005). The Project is not democratic, it is consensus-based; but its do-o-cratic and cooperative approach infuses the event.\textsuperscript{15} Ticket-purchased citizenship guarantees no one a decision-making stake, and instead:

\textit{You have to do something. If you see a civic need, and begin doing something to supply it, you get incorporated into the project — the project is different from the}

\textsuperscript{12}Default, or default world, is a term participants use to refer to the world outside Black Rock City limits. Burning Man Project engages in vertical discourse of the guiding Ten Principles by offering direct, explicit, coherent definitions with the intent of passing down information for wholesale adoption.

\textsuperscript{13}The participant community horizontally engages in discourse as they reshape, reframe or reject their own interpretations of applying the Ten Principles.

\textsuperscript{14}Numerous subcultures coexist— participants represent one or more identities, including desert survivalist, urban primitives, artists, rocketeers, Deadheads, queers, pyromaniacs, cybernauts, ranters, eco-freaks, acidheads, breeders, gun lovers, S&M and bondage enthusiasts, anarchists, New Age spiritualists, ravers, hippy, punk, hardcore grunge, techno-raver, techno-pagan, geek, circus or fire performer, intellectuals and/or journalists. Quaak (2012) documented only two cases where self expression was ejected: Capitalist Pig theme camp blaring racial slurs and a large motion billboard Jiffy Lube Camp depicting intercourse.

\textsuperscript{15}Do-o-cracy is a community organizational structure that implores participants to select their own roles or tasks and to execute them without any formalized approval process. At Burning Man, do-o-cratic participation is by means of grass roots action, allowing participants to freely launch an activity or project that answered civic need (Chen 2009).
event — you get incorporated into our organization. We absorb resources that way. And when that happens, at every level of this endeavor, we work by consensus. That means you have a voice, and if you know what you're talking about, and you actually do something, then you will acquire an authentic voice. If you accomplish much, then you'll gain a greater voice. (Harvey 2000)

By doing, individual participants, theme campers, and village residents engage in creative communal construction free from administrative limitations and cumulatively manifest Larry Harvey’s vision for the world’s largest intentional community.  

**Radical Regional Designs**

Larry Harvey is not the first man to achieve lofty urban ideological aspirations; Ebenezer Howard devoted his life a century prior to making his Garden City vision a reality (Hall 2002, Hall and Ward 1998). In creating one of the first modern new towns as an antidote to London slum, Howard aimed liberal humanist reform for London’s contemporary social disorder through balanced utopianism and pragmatism (Schubert 2004). In a time before planning legislation or professionals, Howard reasoned inductively, but was influenced heavily by his early adult life spent in America (Bonham-Carter 1951). Daniel Burnham’s monumental Beaux-Arts *Plan for Chicago* and World’s Columbia Exposition along with the green belted Riverside suburb heavily influenced Howard. Returning to industrialized London, Howard adapted a morally virtuous yet deterministic City Beautiful plan to marry urban employment opportunities with pristine rural beauty and healthy living conditions. Through transportation axes and monumental, inspiring focal points, he envisioned a reformist new hope, life, and civilization (Howard

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16 According to BLM (2012) Black Rock population as measured each event day at noon, reached its maximum-recorded population of 56,149 on August 31, 2012. Black Rock City has plans to grow to 70,000 by 2016. Global participant population ranges are estimated between 64,319 (total regional attendance, not including South America which does not have an event) upwards to 427,230 Facebook “likes” as of May 3, 2013. Perhaps, the best population indicator is *Jack Rabbit Speaks*, the official published newsletter with email circulation greater than 100,000.
Howard spent twenty years crafting the concentric Social City. His published Garden City synthesized over a century of literature and experimentation on community ideology and urban design, culminating in a comprehensive reformist city in the country rooted in the values of place and community (Fishman 1977).

The Garden City, as theorized, prioritized social processes over physical form, but relied on radiating concentric rings for efficient transportation accessibility and offered one of the earliest examples of zoning to separate desired land uses (Ward 1999). Population parameters were set at a maximum of 32,000-persons centered on a 1,000-acre urbanized area surrounded by an additional 5,000-acres of actively cultivated agricultural land and green belts. Important public facilities were to be located at the center, followed by Grand Avenue and its plaza, then characterized by radiating inner rings offering public spaces, a community hub [Crystal Palace], marketplaces, and demonstration facilities. Middle rings included varying residential typologies and densities connected through cooperative kitchens. Heavier industrial uses were reserved for outermost rings, along with important transportation linkages. Perimeter green belt agricultural production areas and open space bound growth and maintain isolation but concentrated and intensified community life within (Fishman 1977).

Garden Cities, originally designed as cooperatives, required philanthropic land speculation to fund initial construction, though community administration was reserved for bipartisan resident-elected board governance (Fishman 1977). As proposed, rental revenue generated from increasing land value was to be repaid to original absentee

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17Ebenezer Howard’s Social City was a cluster of seven garden cities; a ring cluster of six smaller 30,000-person garden cities arranged around a larger 50,000-person central city hub.
investors until residents earned sufficient wages working farms, factories, and shops or in public service roles to collectively owning their land. Howard’s vision was for a localized, self-sufficient economy, short commute distances, and preservation of the countryside.

Howard’s success was envisioned as countryside entirely urbanized, except for green belts, by decentralized clusters of mid to low density satellite cities linked by road and rail networks. Each Garden City had to reach maximum capacity in order to finance groundbreaking on the next new independent city. Yet, in practice it became quickly evident that the Garden City would fall victim to attempting to create community via strictly physical design means and therefore lacked deeper substantive qualities required to achieve long-term functional and ideological self-sufficiency (Parsons 1998). Though his vision never fully materialized, Howard got closest with Letchworth Garden City, the world’s first Garden City manifestation, but interest in Garden Cities waned and they were replaced by two grander utopian visions: Le Corbusier’s paternalistic skyscraping Radiant City and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre City, a futuristic glorified suburbia (Fishman 1977). The Garden City model still proved to be a viable form, though, and had a profound influence on areal standards for housing density and layout that persisted throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Miller 1979). Following the aftermath of major city bombings and postwar housing shortages, decentralization legislation spurred nearly thirty garden city variations (Hall and Ward 1998, Hall 2002). In addition, garden city adaptations were spread worldwide and made an iconic foundational mark on Walt Disney’s Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT) (Ward 1999, Foglesong 2003, Miller 1979). In ideal form Howard’s lasting legacy was only expressed
as initiating the larger European Town Planning, American New Town, and New Urbanist Movements but modernized, and generically reinterpreted, as master planned communities or Planned Unit Developments (PUD).

Black Rock City offers a more radicalized vision with equal desire for achieving a global movement, “to produce positive change in the world,” (Burning Man 2013). Designing an alternative space, albeit temporary, that fosters any mission has historically been challenging to intentional places. There has been little recorded discussion of the influential utopian planning models credited for inspiring Black Rock City’s regional design, though the degree of order is clearly inorganic. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Special Event Permits require an official city plan.\textsuperscript{18} Drafted up by Rod Garrett, Larry Harvey’s long-time friend and architect/planner, the original schematic was a simplistic line drawing reflecting the first temporary autonomous zone trip, a “rounding the campfire” coupled with demarcated centralized gathering and camping spaces linked by transportation corridors. In striking contrast to its anarchistic foundations, submitting an official plan codified an innately protective circular form and represented a first marked leap toward a highly organized, instant contemporary city.

Tragic events and lawsuits involving a motorcyclist and injury related to a motor vehicle running into an occupied tent in 1996 created need for greater BLM regulatory oversight leading organizers to pedestrianize and control camp density, rather than allow sprawl, at Black Rock City (Chen 2003).\textsuperscript{19} So, in experimenting with form on Washoe

\textsuperscript{18}When any person, group, or organization that makes or attempts to make a profit, receive money, amortize equipment, or obtain goods or services as compensation from participants in recreational activities occurring on public lands, the use is considered commercial according to Chen (2009).

\textsuperscript{19}Bowditch (2010) documented that “you accept the responsibility for serious injury or death by attending this event” disclaimer was added to the backside of each ticket following 1996 lawsuits.
County private land in 1997 (figure 1), Garrett created five pre-engineered arced streets with bisecting city blocks facing onto a large, open, plaza space anchored around the nondescript yet symbolic Man effigy, always given centermost and highest prominence. Back at the Black Rock the following year, the plan grew to its current concentric ring form and the layout has since remained, with notable planning achievements such as zoning via Placement, a form of social engineering to foster diversity, interaction, complementary uses, and sound mitigation. By 2008, Black Rock City expanded on its area twenty percent to five-square miles contained within nine lineal miles of T-Bar webbed fencing set against a 440-square mile rugged open space backdrop. Now having

Figure 1. 1997 Black Rock City Site Plan, Hualapai Valley, Washoe County

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20 Washoe County Planning Department required that camp areas be easily navigable for emergency services.
21 The camp grid area is limited to 1.5-mi² within the larger 5.5-mi² Black Rock City limits. Placement is a process managed by the Black Rock City Community Services Department that assigns camp site locations through pre-application review for registered theme camps and villages based on their proposed land uses, space needs, and principle contributions.
thirteen streets, each with extended arcs, population growth and decline in subsequent years has been accommodated with minimal constrictions and expansions.

The current plan (figure 2) consists of curvilinear streets (those named alphabetically) that are bisected by wide radial boulevards located at thirty-minute axes with the latter all leading participants toward the Man focal point.²² Street life is paramount at Black Rock City, with Esplanade operating as a Main Street derivation

²²Time and alphabet wayfinding was instituted at Black Rock City as part of the 1999 Wheel of Time theme (Appendix B).
occupied by pedestrians, bicyclists, and mutant vehicles (colloquially dubbed “art cars”), and lined by a vibrant mix of leisure uses. Center Camp, located at 6:00 and Rod’s Road, commemorating the architect’s passing, is a fractally recursive space serving as the official community hub. Still in close proximity to Esplanade, it remains set back so as to accommodate congestion and is conveniently flanked by health and human services (offering medical care and emergency response times faster than default cities at no cost) and volunteer departments including the ARTery, Media Mecca, Black Rock Solar, Black Rock Arts Foundation, and Burners without Borders. Longitudinal blocks offer a gradient of decreasing population density from the innermost core outward to the perimeter Gate Road with greatest densities experienced from Esplanade through mid city “G” Street (400-430 feet) and along multinucleated sectors along 3:00 and 9:00 Boulevards (Burning Man 2013). Beyond, mid city blocks shorten to 200 feet and include additional neighborhood pocket parks and plazas. Purposely, Black Rock City is not a complete circle; the notched opening functionally accommodates general wind patterns and also creates a large Deep Playa sculpture garden space welcoming participant exploration:

We've told people: okay, you've got your tight little world of your mates and your friends, and you're bonded together — that's like a lot of sub-cultures in our world — but we've said don't close the circle. You cannot close the circle. You've got to leave it open so you can bridge out to a larger world, so that you can credit the

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23 Uniquely decorated motorized vehicles that no longer resemble an original vehicle base are inspected and permitted by the Department of Mutant Vehicles (DMV) for use at Black Rock City. Burning Man participants also refer to these vehicles as “art cars”.

24 ARTery is the Burning Man Project team responsible for placing art on the playa. Media Mecca reviews media requests prior to journalist documentation and on-site grants all cameras and video equipment with approved laminated badges. Black Rock Solar assists non-profit, public, low income and education sectors gain access to clean energy, particularly those found in rural and/or tribal communities. Burners without Borders formed as a response to Hurricane Katrina hitting New Orleans, Louisiana the same week participants were at Black Rock City, Burners without Borders provides grassroots disaster relief. Black Rock Arts Foundation supports community-based interactive art to the rest of the world.
world outside your circle with as much reality as you see in those around you. And, indeed, so that you can feel that the great world has the same reality, the same sense of inner reality that you feel in yourself. (Harvey 2000)

A remarkable feat and testament to Garrett, his antipodal gated regional city continues to prove workable for inhabiting an unrelenting alkali playa while providing a replicable plan for developing an impermanent city in the desert. With its single, enduring design, the compact city allows for an efficient, scalable annual lifecycle (beginning from and concluding in desert nothingness) accommodating population growth from 250 to 56,149-participants within two decades.

**BLACK ROCK GARDEN CITY**

Black Rock City, like Howard’s model garden city, has been durable in adapting to changing geographic and temporal circumstances (Ward 1999). In part, this is because of a near identical physical form spanning a radius of nearly three-quarters of a mile from center point to circumference. The garden city model now serves as slightly smaller version of contemporary Black Rock City. Black Rock City has a larger populace but is still physically smaller as currently designed (figure 3).
Garrett’s pre-engineered arced streets with bisecting city blocks facing out onto a large, open, plaza space and its current concentric ring form replicates the garden city pattern (see Chapter 4). Drafted prior to the motor age, Howard’s boulevards serve as good plan for Black Rock City’s automobile restrictions by providing radial corridors expanding out from the center (Hardy 2005). This divides the entire area into equal wards from which more distinct neighborhoods can develop (figure 4).

Beyond superficial similarities, in both examples the town center operates as the paramount community activity hub. Acting as prominent expressions of self-sufficiency, these interior cores function for goods and services market transactions, even though they are non-monetarily gifted at Burning Man. Economically, both Black Rock City and the garden city model are distributivist experiments with cooperation as the dominant moral imperative. In addition, community-based political aspirations of both cities remain unique in that charitable arms were responsible for managing and granting city functions, such as the Black Rock Arts Foundation (BRAF) selection and [partial] grant funding many large public art installations. Howard feared too much commercial activity and
relegated limited land use availability to constrict competition and reinforce communality. Benefiting from impermanence, Burning Man attempts to further radicalize market experimentation through declared decommodification and gifting, and wherein persuasive advertising or exploitation is condemned (Kozinets 2002). Burning Man provides participants space to practice radical self-expression reflected through productive property, not land ownership, forming creative capital (Bourdieu 1993, Florida 2002). Like Black Rock City, garden cities were originally mocked in the popular press as, “a whole colony of eccentrics making an exhibition of themselves,” (Hall 2002).

While no constructed garden city matches Howard’s original specifications, Letchworth Garden City, North Hertfordshire (34 miles outside of London), the first built, is nearest to his ideal (Hardy 2005). An effective promoter, Howard was able to assemble an initial thousand permanent residents, many artists, in 1903 on ideological cooperative community fundamentals. In addition, he was also able to attract manufacturers by offering lower taxes and rental rates and providing additional space. Skeptical though, Howard defied norms devising rent-rate financing wherein land was held collectively in trust for the common good upon debt payoff, and local commercial water, fuel, and waste disposal vendors serviced city provisions in an effort to deter capitalist land speculation and urban sprawl (Ward 1999).

Letchworth failed because population shortfalls lacked necessary profit yields required to reinvest in both physical infrastructure and basic intentional community programming plus perceived citizen over-involvement in political realms. Issues were compounded by unaffordable family-sized housing options, and blue-collar manufacturing employees were largely excluded to fragmented slum dwellings located
beyond city limits, inadvertently creating an elite homogenous skilled middle-class professional community dependent on high salary wages only available in London (Simon 2004). At the expense of inclusive social goals, early growth plateaued and, after a quarter century, fewer than half of the required 30,000-person baseline resided there (March 2004). Ultimately, legal and business tensions led to Howard’s removal from Letchworth decision-making processes (Hardy 2005). Once he was removed, political will shifted away from Howard’s vision, and by not stressing self-containment importance, the ideal was quickly dismantled. Useable model components, predominantly residential site planning and zoning tools, gave rise to the eponymous garden suburb – an intermediate satellite city emphasizing regional design without communality or industry. In time, open spaces were subdivided and backfilled, reshaping the once buffered Letchworth as a victim of London’s suburban continuity. Outside professional planning, garden suburbs devolved as a generic term synonymous with any residential development promoting generous green belt allocations, examples of which are pervasive in most American cities (Hardy 2005).

Planners and architects never immediately realize their actions, but over time professionals have become well versed in negative societal and environmental consequences associated with poorly planned suburbanization. By parsing out usable smart growth lessons from Howard’s original model – more specifically its compact regional form -- urban disciplines widely understand how promoting higher-density mixed uses within an efficient transportation network will encourage pedestrian, bicycle, and transit modalities, and when combined with large residential populations living in close proximity, overall gains in public safety and social interaction can be achieved
(Dantzig and Saaty 1973, Jacobs 1961). Black Rock City has no doubt benefitted from implementation of these best practices, but Burning Man’s greatest asset surpasses Howard’s vision in attempting to create a larger intentional society, not just a model environment. In promoting community principles such as diversity, compactness, sustainability, civic involvement and communality, which overlap design ideology, Black Rock City serves in theory as a culturally unique approach to twenty-first century garden city planning (Hardy 2005).

**CANARY IN THE COAL MINE**

Black Rock City’s built environment is dynamic, changing from event to event, but it is always utilitarian in nature. Comfortable protection from the harsh desert climate drives need for portable shelter, from primitive tents to modern prefab dwellings and monumental art. Evolving from participatory habitus (see Chapter 4), practical experiences, experimentation and creativity, interactivity, function, and intent dictate physical forms and facilitate art becoming architecture and architecture becoming art (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005). Inner, dense, urban settlements exemplify a downtown core, though most of the city comprises egalitarian single-story developments. When participants are out at “deep playa” open space or on the world’s largest plaza they bring fewer material ties, but camp homes reveal class contrasts observable in Black Rock City’s 820-acre residential zone.\(^{25}\) Since Christmas Camp first appeared in 1993 it sparked a dramatic shift in residential preference and now nearly half (48 percent) of all participants organize themselves into whimsical or motif theme camps or multi-camp

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\(^{25}\) According to Rod Garrett, former Black Rock City architect/planner, he designed the ‘world’s largest plaza’ to be 4,800 lineal feet across.
villages (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005). This trend prompted Larry Harvey to select an annual Burning Man theme (appendix B) to more cohesively tie the landscape.

Though optional, theme camps may reserve Placement by application to ensure sufficient camp area based on the Project’s review of drafted, digitally submitted site plans. Placement also grants early arrival for the applicant/mayoral contact. Often named to reflect status or group interests, “Silicon Village” or “Martini Village” tie participants to elevated status. Encouraged fashion eccentricity, and principles of decommodification and gifting aim to create an egalitarian environment; observation, however, reveals residential architecture that is still predominantly (78 percent) tents, yurts, geodesic

26As Glade (2011) and Burning Man (2013) identify, theme camping – a dominant trend at Black Rock City – provides a specialized motif and invites participants to interact in various and unexpected ways. Peter Doty, member of the Cacophony Society, shaped derivative city life by, “dress[ing] up in a Santa Claus outfit for about five days in hundred degree temperatures. They hung colored lights and played Christmas carols 24 hours a day, and everybody moved away from them. But it was meant to be cathartic, of course, because Christmas is the most irritating holiday you can imagine. And so, he turned the great consumer holiday on end. If you walked past, they would practically drag you over and offer you eggnog, which had alcohol in it. But to get to the eggnog, you had to eat the fruitcake. They had created this whole interactive scenario that was very socially coercive, and it was the greatest, most cathartic, Christmas I’ve ever experienced. At the end of it, [because] our town was so small… they exchanged gifts at Christmas Camp. And, as it happened, Santa didn’t get a gift. So he went to every single camp on that playa, because he was just relentless, and complained bitterly about it and made everybody feel really guilty. He had created a fantasy premise that turned into social interaction. It finally involved everybody. You know, 300-400 people, one way or another,” according to Larry Harvey (2000). Glade (2011) Black Rock City villages comprise several cooperating camps with shared affinities, and house 150+ participants. Each village must have its own “mayor” (point of contact), and a defined mission statement.

27Placement is a process managed by the Black Rock City Community Services Department that assigns camp site locations through pre-application review for registered theme camps and villages based on their proposed land uses, space needs, and principle contributions.
domes, or other creatively pieced together imported materials, reflecting a growing class contrast with motor homes or recreation vehicles (Burning Man 2013). Housing ranges from basic walk-in tent camps and simplistic tarp lean-to shelters up to million-dollar recreational vehicles, but the minimal cost easy-to-transport-and-assemble, prefabricated folding hexayurt (figure 5) appears to be the current portable, single-family housing trend and can be outfitted with car-battery powered evaporative coolers (Glade 2011). Visible social strata nearly vanish beyond camp boundaries, but challenges exist as the city grows because participants residing at the periphery prefer to spend daylight hours within blocks of their camp homes rather than to venture out into other neighborhoods. Instead, many participants choose to reserve their commute energy to travel into the vital core for nightly entertainment.

Figure 5. Hexayurt with Evaporative Cooler, 2012

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28 Hexayurts are residential structures constructed from polyisocyanurate insulation sheets (Tuff-R or R-Max) taped together with bi-directional filament tape.
Unlike most permanent cities whose cores grew blighted and dangerous as residents decentralized, contemporary Black Rock City maintains its vibrant downtown with a highly engaging, active public realm, but camp life near the perimeter reveals opposing opinions toward residential suburbanization. While many participants satirize an American Dream suburban home (figure 6), others embrace its appeal. Plotting along a typified default city history, distance from the central core reveals marginal land lacking control where it is most frequently needed. Camps arranged with long, unarticulated street facades provide limited connection to surrounding public spaces. Social interactions are reserved for private gatherings held either inside individual recreational vehicles or in a central courtyard. This site orientation creates a dead corner affecting the larger neighborhood. Not limited to strictly residential developments, this trend is now observable in commercial-style development also (figure 7).
In light of this trend in 2011, the Project issued its first and so far only design guideline, specifically targeting “turnkey” vendors to break up featureless street-fronting recreational vehicles (figure 8), and “endeavor to provide passersby with some form of public amenity, especially at intersections, which are traditionally highly interactive gathering places.” Everyone desires privacy, but providing others with attractive public space is considered good etiquette,” (Burning Man 2012). Yet, the same camp placement and orientation was observed in 2012 following policy notification, revealing participant

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29 Turnkey, also referred to as “Plug-n-Play” or “Pay-to-Play”, offer participants options to pay vendors for pre-constructed camps, services, and amenities which thus allow one to show up [plug in] at Black Rock City and enjoy [play] the event instead of having to construct camp spaces.
disregard for philosophical ideology, but also an indication of changing residential preferences tied to affluence.

While one is free to live how one chooses at Black Rock City, there is no right way to participate. The perceived dilution of self-reliance associated with turnkey camping is contentious among the community, though it is also difficult to restrict given that opportunities vary in degree of service provision. Many vendors, who are also participants, offer to provide basic infrastructure thereby allowing campers time to focus energy on beneficial interactive art projects and community course offerings. Other vendors operate as tour operators and have developed profitable business models by commodifying opulent, exclusive “experiential offerings”. Camping companies will not only provide space and setup basic motor homes, port-a-potties, outdoor showers, meals, electricity, and potable water with septic service but also more elaborate shuttled transportation (via airplane or helicopter), gourmet chefs, live music, decorated bicycles and costumes, satellite communications, and registered art cars. At camp homes, turnkey amenities identify and differentiate social strata among participants even though “playanymys,” eccentric fashion, and principle gifting, decommodification and inclusivity are intended egalitarian forces. 30 The Project is involved in a dialog with vendors and citizens aimed at minimizing impacts, but increased turnkey volumes are placing additional demands on existing Departments of Public Works, Gate & Perimeter, and Placement by requiring added organization and coordination efforts, which will likely

30Playanymys are pseudonymous identities adopted by Burning Man participants.
lead to greater process and fee institutionalization, thus perpetuating Burning Man’s equity issues (Burning Man 2013).  

**CONCLUSION**

Ideological and regional design linkages between Black Rock City and Ebenezer Howard’s garden city remain clear to students of geography and planning. While the first garden city ultimately lacked profit and suburbanized after failing to attract population and heterogeneous economic conditions necessary to maintain basic intentional community tenets, Black Rock City has the good fortune that these conditions do not apply because of ephemerality and increased population demand. Black Rock City provides an unexpected case for revisiting good city form and has developed at a time when cohesive modernist planning approaches are professionally unpopular and instead evince discontinuity and fragmented landscapes (D Harvey 1989, Talen and Ellis 2012). Temporal-morphological trends reveal a gradual evolution, though Burning Man has always been more concerned with creating a social movement than enacting a visual design exercise. With an efficient, compact, easy to negotiate site, order in a harsh physical space should accommodate growth up to an anticipated 70,000-participants (by 2016) with minimal revision. Recent population restrictions and instituted ticket selection mechanisms coupled with steep entry prices fuel exclusivity, which is diametrically opposed to its ideological community principle of Radical Inclusion. The greater affluence influx increases pressure for campsite-scale turnkey camping experiences, which visibly can, though not all do, manifest pay-to-play signal erosion of

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31 As noted in Roberts (2009), Department of Public Works Operations Director came to Burning Man by way of San Francisco’s Survival Research Labs (SRL). SRL pioneered large-scale industrial machine art and often used fire in their performances.

32 At 70,000-participants Black Rock City will rank as a Nevada’s tenth largest city.
the larger city mission. Left unmitigated, these factors accelerate into an expected garden city trajectory from distributivist experiment to control planned development. As an organization, under direction of Burning Man’s original visionary, The Project recognizes this threat and pays significant consideration to annual planning endeavors, but is hindered by radically self-expressive participant-built social space ideology. Not to be ignored, Burning Man is transitioning itself well beyond playa city limits, but Black Rock City remains as a historically powerful artifact and reminder not to underestimate the unlikely few whose ideas have shaped the cities of many.
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CHAPTER 3: PLOTTING IN THE DESERT

“At the core of the dream was the hope for a special relationship with nature. A passion for beautiful California filled the souls of the artists and intellectuals”

“Nature, that awesome setting for the California dream! Heroic, eternal, overwhelming, it proved a glory, and a problem. It promised a profusion of gifts: beauty, life, health, abundance, and, perhaps most important of all, a challenging correlative to inner aspiration” (Starr 1973, 417–418)

INTRODUCTION

Burning Man is ultimately a California event, even if in 1990 its physical manifestation shifted east over the Sierra Nevada crest and onto Nevada’s Black Rock playa during the Labor Day weekend. For an initial half-decade, Burning Man was solely a San Francisco reality (illicitly set on the city’s Baker Beach), and today’s Burners—as attendees are known—owe a vast debt to Larry Harvey and Jerry James, whose nimble minds birthed a fertile concept. While the originality of the founders and the endurance of the ritual yearly burn for nearly thirty years is nothing anyone would want to contest, it bears remembering that the burning of cares and solstice celebrations are, by no conceivable stretch of the imagination, something created on the West Coast as humanity careened toward the end of the twentieth century.

Not surprisingly, Larry Harvey himself is first to acknowledge these antecedent ties and as his entrepreneurial research stretches further across global lecture circuits he has grown “more worldly” in understanding intellectual utopia (Sherry and Kozinets 2007):

In practice, what we do has historic parallels. In the ancient world, half the worlds’ great religion came out of the desert or mountains, with the idea that you were in contact with powerful natural forces... But we're not feather fathers, we’re not druids (although many come here to pretend to be), but we are saying the
infrastructure of a temporary civilization. It’s a laboratory to consider how perhaps society can be constructed and how we can critique it. (L Harvey 1993)

Roots plunge as deep as anyone could wish to pursue them: from ancient ritual to the Classical Age, by one reckoning—extending across a dozen distinct cultures, religions, and societies (Elliott 1960). A critical and even contrarian view of ruling society was unmistakable: “The theme of Saturnalia is reversal—reversal of values, of social roles, of social norms,” the literary philosopher Robert C. Elliott wrote in 1970, explaining the social underpinnings of Carnival and Mardi Gras (11). Revelry at the Bohemian Grove near the Russian River as early as 1881 included a ceremony for the Cremation of Care as part of the elite rituals (exclusively male) of the San Francisco gentry, according to a 1908 write-up by Porter Garnett, who, as a producer of Bohemian Club grove plays, was in a position to know (1908; Brechin 2006). “Burning Man provides a sense of the tension behind the often exploitative social endeavors of late capitalism and the constant utopian yearning for a more communal world,” (Sherry and Kozinets, in Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005, 102). Unlike centuries of secret society rituals, Burning Man is broadly inclusive, although intrinsically tied to bohemian and underground punk countercultures. Links were solidified when John Law of San Francisco’s Cacophony Society helped arrange for the first zone-trip out to the desert in Nevada’s Black Rock country (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005; Gilmore 2010). Now twenty-three years later, the burn still

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31 Formed from the Suicide Club, an underground secret society beginning 1977 as a course taught by Gary Wayne at Communiversity at San Francisco State University. San Francisco Cacophonists were a random network of free spirits in pursuit of experience beyond mainstream society engaging in playful and subversive dada and Surrealist ethos according to Bowditch (2010). The Cacophony Society zone trip is inspired by Andrew Tarkovsky’s film Stalker (1979), and refers to entrance into a changing landscape of the post-apocalyptic world (Bowditch 2010). Zone trip further references Hakim Bey’s (1991) guerilla uprising Temporary Autonomous Zones that briefly liberate an area (land, time, or imagination) from engagement with the state before dissolving and reforming elsewhere.
reflects historical rainbow gatherings, happenings, culture jams, and Situationist antecedents that reverse, mock or reconceptualize manifestation of American sub/urban landscapes (L Harvey 2000; Jones 2011). Yet, uniqueness and originality are hardly necessary to create meaning and fascination to thousands of onlookers and participants.

This essay is in part personal account, placed within the larger context of cities. Although this is a transitory place, connections to urban geography endeavor to emphasize the ties of a happening — Burning Man — to its setting. To provide context, we consider how Burning Man connects with larger conceptions of who we are and what we do, and why we do that, without feeling need to attach the term “bizarre” to “Burning Man.”

**TAKE ‘EM OUT TO THE DESERT**

“To quote Danger Ranger, legendary protector of the Playa, in the desert there are as many paths to heaven as there are stars in the sky,” (L Harvey, in Traub 2011: 11).

Seeking clarity by going to the desert is, like putting a torch to “cares,” hardly a new phenomenon. The fourth century mystics known as the Desert Fathers did exactly that as part of sequestering themselves from temptation and urban strife in their search for

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34 As described by Michael Niman (2011) there are numerous parallels between Rainbow gatherings and Burning Man. Rainbow gatherings are intentional communities that attract as nearly 30,000 people to National Forest land for one week each July since 1972, though smaller regional-scale events are held throughout the year. Participants practice ideals of peace, love, harmony, freedom, and community. Similarly inclusive, decisions are made by consensus and all are welcome. Allan Kaprow first coined Happenings in 1956, though later developed in his work *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (1966) as unique participatory theatrical performances with an emphasis on art and environmental connection, each having a different outcomes based on audience actions. Bowditch (2010) notes that the Cacophony Society originally introduced a culture jamming aesthetic to Burning Man, a subversive effort to counter consumptive media messaging and advertising, and thus giving rise to costuming and satirical builtscapes. Guy Debord, prominent member of Situationist International (SI), wrote in *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) anti-establishment Marxism for avant-garde artists heavily influenced by surrealism and dada. The SI constructed spaces, for situations, that allowed momentary transformation among participants by critically analyzing everyday life, which laid foundations for psychogeography and unitary urbanism.

35 Danger Ranger is the playa pseudonym for Michael Mikel, Burning Man Project Board Member.
contemplative release. Their form of getting away was a little more extreme than anything most Burning Man participants would likely consider, but it tapped the same vein. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton captured motivations of the Desert Fathers in a poetic translation that relates directly to our experiences some 1600 years later: “the simple men who lived their lives out to a good old age among the rocks and sands only did so because they had come into the desert to be themselves, their ordinary selves, and to forget a world that divided them from themselves” (1960, 23). The ascetic Fathers sought a return to simplicity, a conscious turning away from earthly affairs—or maybe, better said, they went to the desert so that they might see and more clearly dodge distraction. Though a far different logistical experiment, parallels and ironies most Burners would recognize.

Arid places and mountain peaks each attract, and each is renowned for clearing the cobwebs and adding a sense of composure — short-lived or permanent — from human companionship (Blake 2002). James E. Vance (1982) wrote about the virtues of urban living, and was a confirmed believer in the notion first voiced in Vitruvius that the city sets men free. In Burning Man and its Black Rock City, four ideas are blended: the original need to separate to seek clarity, the liberating value of urban dwelling in communal quarters, the utopian possibilities of closely concerted action, and the value of participation. While Burning Man’s Executive Director Larry Harvey may see additional lessons in the annual playa experience (Duff 2009), these qualities make Burning Man something truly unusual, and help draw worldwide attention to its idiosyncrasies and its teachable moments. Occurring upon an extraordinary desert playa, its vast space is one out of which only human initiative could manifest an imagined surreal place (Ingold
Abridged by the Black Rock Desert’s relentless winds, corrosive alkali and silica soils, and scorching sun, tens of thousands of visitors surround the towering centermost wooden Man, for an annual coming together in their intention to live in a short-lived isolation from American society. The city itself is a fleeting creation where nothing is offered up for sale and no traces remain. If overcoming challenge is a key utopian appeal, then the dramatic shift from an classic American agrarian worldview with quarter-century growth from a thorp of 80 to more than 56,000 extending over five square miles certainly indicates its powerful attraction (L Harvey 2000).

**DRAWING DOWN ON THE CALIFORNIA IDEAL**

The search for the ideal faces a particular challenge when it comes to California. No other part of the North American continent has spawned so many novelties in urban and rural community building (Vance 1972). Settlement of California after statehood in 1850 brought any number of planned and intentional communities, whether fifty families of German farmers and vintners who in 1857 started Anaheim (Raup 1932), irrigation colonies lodged in the San Joaquin Valley (Kahrl and Bowen 1979), or utopian experimenters at Point Loma or in small enclaves in the Sierra Nevada (Hine 1953). Certainly Burning Man, which came 130 years later, is an expression of a deep-seated arcadian impulse. As Vance puts it, “the Hudsonian search encouraged the migration to California as the heartland of the ‘geography of the ideal’ expressed in social detachment and the cult of the wilderness. There arcadia became the settlement form,” (Vance 1972, 185).

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36 Corrosive alkali and carcinogenic silica soils quickly transform into mud when wet, and lack access to water sources and vegetative shade. Diurnal temperature variations range between 40°F and 100°F and gusting winds can form “whiteout” dust storms conditions.
In the context of Burning Man and Black Rock City, and its flirtation with wilderness nearby (Goin and Starrs 2005), and with the perceived need to transplant a population compelled to art and stimulus: “arcadia inherits from the long history of American social geography: concern for images, the search for utopianism and primitivism, and the sheltering in an hygienic countryside” (Vance 1972, 207). Burning Man founders considered a move from a crowded San Francisco region to someplace nearby yet sufficiently remote to allow for behavior that could be considered unusual enough to inspire skepticism and even a public outcry were it set in the city. The answer was to create a new city.

The more complicated question is just how truly utopian are Burning Man and the city it builds? During the peak of the West Coast migration to communes, the Berkeley sociologist Ted Bradshaw and planner Ed Blakely catalogued what they saw as an ongoing phenomenon in the early twentieth century:

California has a long history of utopian life style experimentation made possible by the rapid change and innovations attendant on the process of becoming an advanced industrial society. Today [1978] these experiments continue with large numbers in communes in rural parts of the state where young people and middle class dropouts develop alternative patterns of community, family, and economy. Furthermore, due to sharp differences in life styles, these groups frequently conflict with local residents over visible patterns of behavior, land use, and lack of participation in the traditional community and economy. (1978, 21)

Rightly, they note that an intentional resettlement of formerly urban residents into the countryside can offer a rough transition and a steep learning curve. That lesson was delivered in the “communitarian” movement in California almost a hundred years before (Hine 1953).

What is singular in Burning Man is a marriage by choice of wilderness and city
building. The idea of cities is precisely juxtaposed against wilderness ideal and so often wilderness was aggressively excluded; the urbanist movement was about shoving aside the wild. Burning Man enters the wilderness to create a demountable built, ephemeral, frontier city, and that mines something special (figure 9).

Figure 9. Frontier Art Car, 2012

This phenomenon is profoundly “Californian,” in ways that New York Times film critic A.O. Scott reiterates in a recent film review: “the West — California in particular — still thrives in the popular imagination as a place where wilderness and refinement, law and violence, inferno and Utopia collide and commingle” (2012). There are, of course, many examples of utopian efforts of moving away to establish a new forms— in some cases, it was essential to go far enough that a conflict would be beyond the awareness of neighbors who might otherwise complain about intentional activities. Or, on a smaller scale as Roger Barnett once noted, the libertarian suburb where anything goes and the
one rule was “don’t complain” embroiders the American land (1978). Anything-goes is at least partly at work in Burning Man, although the Bureau of Land Management, Pershing County Sheriff’s Department, and the Black Rock Rangers (a volunteer mediation corps loosely modeled upon the Texas Rangers), maintain a close watch for transgressions — social or illicit.

As the geographer David Harvey cautions, “the figures of ‘the city’ and of ‘Utopia’ have long been intertwined” (2000: 156). This is made considerably more complicated in the United States context by the love-hate relationship that many of the country’s Founding Fathers maintained with city life. Thomas Jefferson would, after all, allude to cities as “cesspools of vice,” but Alexander Hamilton countered by strongly favoring close urban residence in tensions that shaped new republic development.37 And Marx and Engels, who certainly recognized the significance of urban densities for generating a revolutionary consciousness, would, in the opening chapter of The Communist Manifesto (1848), denounce “the idiocy of rural life.” David Harvey offers his own view in the eloquent Spaces of Hope (2000): “It is hard to untangle the grubby day-to-day practices and discourses that affect urban living from the grandiose metaphorical meanings that so freely intermingle with emotions and beliefs about the good life and urban form” (157).

People in all cities are forced to interact in socially approved ways. So form and function are intertwined in ideal communities just as much as they are in the everyday. The social engineer, however well meaning, would have to grapple with the details of the

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conurbation. David Harvey continues, “All the great urban planners, engineers, and architects of the twentieth century set about their tasks by combining an intense imaginary of some alternative world (both physical and social) with a practical concern for engineering and re-engineering urban and regional spaces according to radically new designs” (2000, 164).

This is an imperative, for all city planners employ the mantle of social engineer (Popper 1946). Of course in the first years of Burning Man, anarchistic sentiment encouraged random settlement, but as attendance grew, public safety intervened and organization prevailed. Black Rock City form is more than a mere byproduct of “rounding the static wooden Man campfire”; it is now the legacy of Rod Garrett, project architect, whose adaptable site design serves for effective creation and participation while accommodating growth in the world’s largest intentional community, albeit an ephemeral one. With architectural patterning reminiscent of Hygeia, the legendary city of Atlantis, or Campanella’s City of the Sun, Black Rock City shares more with Thomas More’s Abraxa and Leonard Cooke’s Llano (Bowditch 2010, Hayden 1976, Negley and Patrick 1971). But, undeniable resemblances exist to Ebenezer Howard’s (1898) garden city.

Like Howard, Garrett’s plan is less concerned with resulting form than grand concentric boulevards (see Chapter 4). Often overlooked is that applying modernist order serves as something liberating at Burning Man. User-friendly street signage and portable sanitation infrastructure was never intended to subvert anarchistic roots of Burning Man. Both reflective and constitutive form encourages principles and moral order, in satisfying two

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38 Burning Man Project uses the term “social engineering” interchangeably with zoning, not in the same context as Karl Popper’s seminal (1946) The Open Society and Its Enemies volumes.
39 World’s largest intentional community” as claimed by the Burning Man Project organization.
40 Abraxa was a utopian island of crescent streets, esplanades and public squares.
basic human needs, bodily health and finding the way, the city encourages Charles Baudelaire walks and Situationist dérive to unfold (Bowditch 2010, Debord 1956). The playa itself serves important to this pedestrian experience as, “the physical contact with the desert floor and the paths through space transform the blank canvas into a written, multivalent narrative,” (Bowditch 2010: 9).

In a utopian city there is a rationalization for cleaning up, and as Robert Elliott (1970) points out, utopia must be physically constructed often to the point where sewers hardly smell. There is a vast literature on utopian constructions originating with Plato’s Republic through the Middle Ages (Bowditch 2010, see also Starrs and Wright 2005). Many scholars are of a mind that human interactions are shaped by the place where they transpire, but without getting too deterministic, there is little argument that place matters. Which explains why weddings occur in bucolic spots, golf courses are rarely ugly, anglers’ fish clean streams, and why hideous settings are widely believed to have caustic effects. The “amenity factor” as Edward Ullman once described it, has meaning (1954; Walcott 2010).

There is value, however, in constructing utopia as someplace different, and perhaps even alien, or dystopian. Making arduous journeys from global metropolises, waiting out hours of traffic, just to arrive and wait to breech utopia’s entryway into a physically dystopian environment. Black Rock City gates originally intended a distinct reversal from those that liberal minds might typically envision, at a fair remove from

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41In Baudelaire experiential walks, as expanded on by Walter Benjamin, participants trace random movements through impulse and inspiration in gaining a somatic understanding of Burning Man society. Situationist International, according to Sadler (1998), describes dérive as an unplanned drift, or journey, through an urban landscape that subconsciously directs participants into authentic new experiences. The SI city was meant to create and enhance spaces for encounters with other people, and with places.
gated insular, class-sorted master-planned places created out of a fear or a loathing reaction to core urban issues. Where a gate staffed by the ritual rent-a-cop is perceived as a requirement for privileged safety and control. Instead, Black Rock City’s ticket threshold represents an entrance to freedom. Symbolically, but authentically, participants crossing over are warmly greeted with a “welcome home” hug, even on their first visit.

**Black Rock City Life**

![Figure 10. Black Rock City Landscape, 2011](image)

Those unfamiliar with Burning Man, or who only know an image presented in media, may wonder why it is worth the considerable effort and expense. Those who seek beyond the photographic bounty of monumental aesthetics and beautiful people to view Black Rock City’s campscape might be surprised. Not striking, it is a landscape comprising dusty tents, tarps, motor homes, recreation vehicles, and parked cars and trucks (figure 10). Deeper observation exposes further ironic adventures in radical self-
reliance that necessitates working together to create shelters from and between these seemingly scattered structures, patching holes literal or metaphorical. The process of overcoming initial vulnerability from complete exposure is invisible. Reflecting the well-worn man versus nature trope, participants arriving at an unfamiliar challenging entryway, especially the first time, ‘place’ themselves upon a stage battling a rigorous physical space to devise a week’s worth of durable private space. Following the set up of an habitable retreat (whether tent, yurt, teepee, or recreational vehicle) much of the week is spent continually tinkering with and innovating demarcated camps to better serve larger personal and communal needs.

Figure 11. Neotraditional Camp, 2011

Community is strengthened through interaction, and residents and passersby share an equal curiosity in each other. Demonstrated innovations or ornamentation serves as
icebreakers for conversation (figure 11). Learning from neighbors is fundamental to being able to design workable shade pavilions and wind and dust-proofing solutions. In planning for and building Black Rock City discussing applied skills and showcasing personal ownership and sweat equity positively reinforce community. The site’s lack of resources forces use of only materials brought in, and built environment aesthetics recall autonomous favelas, barrios, shantytowns, or townships. Scattered encampments may have begun as individual dwellings; repeated trips expand local networks to form larger camps among neighbors, common interests, or subcultures, and specialized roles and functions evolve themes, which may stay at camp level or agglomerate into self-sustaining villages.\(^{42}\) Though manifested habitus leads to repetitive patterns participants gain a communal sense of having done it for them. Participants experience a liminal ritualistic transitioning of ‘living it together’ that once completed fosters a sense of community extending beyond ephemeral city borders (V. Turner 1995).\(^{43}\)

Constructing space for personal safety and retreat is only one community driver; participants want to express creativity while spending their leisure hours at Black Rock City, but can also do that at camp home. So much so that veteran burners have questioned whether its worth the energy expenditure to see another part of the city, choosing instead to stay put in an occupied neighborhood. Participants may spend days enacting wild or fantastical efforts tinkering, expanding, and creating new private space to enjoy with their

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\(^{42}\)As Glade (2011) and Burning Man (2013) identify, theme camping – a dominant trend at Black Rock City – provides a specialized motif and invites participants to interact in various and unexpected ways. Black Rock City villages comprise several cooperating camps with shared affinities, and house 150+ participants. Each village must have its own “mayor” (point of contact), and a defined mission statement.

\(^{43}\)Victor Turner extended Arnold van Gennep’s anthropological research by framing liminal as the disorientation stage, where participants transition from their pre-ritual identity, time, or community into structuring their new ways. During this period social hierarchies may become uncertain and expected outcomes questioned, thereby establishing new customs and institutions to form “communitas.”
neighbors. The habitus of staying put is an ironic sentiment considering Burning Man’s image revolves around annual art themes (appendix B) and ever changing built environments circling through some stage of the creation, fruition, and destruction lifecycle. Though resembling small-scale suburban habitus, deeper analysis suggests the original intentions for connection (immediacy and communality) and generosity (gifting) may explain this anomaly (Kelleher and Mattison 2004, Kreutner 2002, Windline 2006).

While city planners work diligently at government desks to craft policies and guidelines to bring citizens together, preferably on foot or by bicycle, they codify varied architectural features, create complementary but not overly competitive uses, frame visible safety sightlines, and weigh balances between active and lingering public space. Basic human desires for simplicity and spontaneity are so often overlooked.

With Center Camp, and the Man and Temple as obvious exceptions, without any single or reigning best practice manual, Burning Man participants seem to reject a notion of designing places to go to by instead creating places to stay. This type of participation is not a reconceptualization of City Hall but true experimentation from the hearth, or more specifically right from the street front. Personal preconditioning (see Chapter 4) remains seemingly inescapable: participants often employ recognizable attention-grabbing Route 66 and Las Vegas design tactics.44 Many “burners” get noticed, whether through signage, ornamentation, wild colors and mismatched patterns, lighting and pathways, or a more is more approach (Venturi, Brown and Izenour 1977).45

44Robert Venturi’s postmodernist architectural imagery cites popular culture vernacular garishness of Las Vegas and the use of illusionary materials typified in Route 66 roadside construction. Further comparisons with highly artificial manufactured experience economy developments in Las Vegas, Disneyland, or other Retail Entertainment Districts (RED) environments are traceable, though, not addressed here.
45“Burners” is a community-adopted term for participants at Burning Man.
Even with inward spaces, welcoming others is natural and easy because participants dress in visually flamboyant costumes. Freed from bureaucratic limitations, freedom and free choice are attractive (Glynn 2004). This is not just limited to built spaces, participants can actively choose how to be part of, or effect change in, their community and city (Berg 2011). No one need venture far, not even beyond a neighbor’s camp or a city block, to fully experience vibrant Black Rock City life. At its core, Burning Man attempts to expand upon the golden rule; not only are participants to interact with others in a way they wish to be interacted with in exchange, but also it is about participants living the way they want to live, and effects are surprisingly traditional: “residents say hello to their neighbors, collect recyclables, and at dusk light lamps on the path to the man,” (Berg 2011).

**INCLUSIVE BUT ELITE**

Not for everyone, Burning Man proclaims to be inclusive but appeals to a highly selective population. Perhaps not keeping its pace with an increasingly multicultural California, annual census results reveal an unmarried heterosexual male, under 40 years old, liberal, educated Caucasian population earning between $10,000-75,000 per year (Burning Man 2013). Participants are predominantly emigrating from the Bay Area, with Richard Florida’s (2002) creative class making its appearance at the event as early as 1994 (Chen 2009; L Harvey 2000). At first, “not see[ing] any correspondence

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46 Historically, a long-form census has been conducted annually at Center Camp but in 2012, two census were adopted, a random sample at the entryway and also the annual long form census. Results showed statistically significant differences for gender.

47 According to the 2012 Black Rock City Census, the average age of participants is 34 years old.

48 Richard Florida suggests there is a socioeconomic class of workers comprising the super-creative core and creative professionals involved in developing processes and knowledge-based work. Understanding
between the internet and wilderness camping,” Larry Harvey later came to recognize parallel egalitarian spaces offering few obstacles for creating another world through connective ease. “It's a realm of virtual reality to which anyone can contribute.

Participants mask and wear costumes, construct elaborate theme camps and art works, extemporize games and participate in spontaneous theater. Aided by a few expressive props, they program worlds entirely of their own devising,” (L Harvey in Traub 2011: 11). Perhaps, again ironically, Black Rock City is not connected to telecommunications aside from satellite services, but Fred Turner (2009) and Jessica Richman (2008) points to the playa canvas as a familiar interactive creative commons space. Part of the rise in popularity among the Silicon Valley set, where Black Rock City’s tangible immediacy proves more “personally, culturally, and socially significant,” (Hockett 2005). As Internet popularity grew, presumably Web 2.0 and social media, technology innovations fueled greater interest in Burning Man attendance (figure 12). “Silicon Valley poured money and resources into building elaborate theme camps and innovative art installations, often incorporating laser and Tesla coils,” (Bowditch

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Figure 12. Facebook “Like,” Sign 2012

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this population could be a potentially driving force for economic development in post-industrial American cities.
In recent years minimal, but increasing, access to national cellular networks and Wi-Fi coverage has been reported; however, most participants interviewed do not miss external connectivity while experiencing the event.\textsuperscript{49}

Population caps, expensive ticket prices, and online-only sales channels not only perpetuate a growing digital divide, these entry barriers reinforce selection of an elite population. Escalating ticket and preparation expenses support larger empirical research that white-collar incomes largely fund the leisure sector and that ‘experiential consumption’ and ‘paid for’ personal entertainment are on the rise (Rifkin 2000).

Observable at Black Rock City, examples of paid for “turnkey” camping experiences provide luxury recreation vehicles that are delivered pre-stocked with costumes and gifts, and such largesse generates internal debate over authentic participation and class separation.\textsuperscript{50} Although stricter limitations on ticket quantity and have been instituted to curb commodification, existing low-income options are capped to less than ten percent of the population, and considerable discretionary income is still necessary as participants engage in hyper-capitalized consumption when preparing for Black Rock City (Kozinets 2002, Jones 2011).\textsuperscript{51} Not surprisingly, some “veteran” participants now prefer other

\textsuperscript{49}Immediately following the event, participants are observed entranced in technological reconnection, to the degree there is minimal acknowledgement of each other.

\textsuperscript{50}Turnkey, also referred to as “Plug-n-Play” or “Pay-to-Play”, offer participants options to pay vendors for pre-constructed camps, services, and amenities which thus allow one to show up [plug in] at Black Rock City and enjoy [play] the event instead of having to construct camp spaces. There is a vast literature on authenticity in understanding that which is real, actual, or a truth. Vannini and Williams (2009) extend this definition to include inherence, and therefore a quality, which cannot be stripped away from an object, person or process. In analyzing subculture membership specifically Beverland, Farrelly and Quester (2010) showed the contested nature varied by degree of different identity benefits, including flow and kinship formation. As Chen (2009) illustrates, the desire to preserve authenticity is not unique to Burning Man, gentrifying neighborhoods reveal erosive tensions between newcomers and displacement of long time residents.

\textsuperscript{51}Robert Kozinets research on consumer market behavior refers to hyper-capitalization when participants shop for supplies prior to Burning Man. Often these large market transactions are frequent, and favor big-
opportunities for Burning Man-style experiences whether within the growing diaspora of extended global regional network or through external culturally purified experimental experiences that harken original intentions like Northern California’s private, year-round PermaBurn or Paolo Solari’s (1984) Arcosanti in the Sonoran Desert.\footnote{The 2004 Afterburn Report states, “the Burning Man event is becoming an initiation, a Hajj, if you will, that may be undertaken intermittently. It is an ever-expanding diaspora that has begun to populate the wider world.” Twenty-two regional “decompression” and “recompression” events, of which Burning Flipside in Austin, Texas remains the largest, provide attendees an opportunity to have the Burning Man experience\footnote{closer to home and meet people in their area affected by participation (Culpper 2007). These events are sanctioned through Letter of Agreement with Burning Man Project and must follow Ten Principles and pay licensing fees. Many regional events have grown and are organized under their own Limited Liability Corporations according to Quaak (2012).} even within bicycle riding distance. There is a philosophy of intention behind all of this, with California antecedents, but riddled with paradoxes.}

CONCLUSION

Yet, through all of this, Black Rock City is a notable experiment. It continues to grow in population and self-satisfied grandness. The layout of the city—recreated each year around a different theme, with a cartography that is the product of imaginative minds—allows for the formation of distinct neighborhoods and identities originating freely from each threshold. The remoteness makes a certain creative sinfulness possible, but principles hold dangerous activities in check. While inclusiveness, participation, self-reliance, expression, and immediacy are still bywords and although nylon-webbing fences hold in its residents, what is unmistakably wilderness lies not far away—even within bicycle riding distance. There is a philosophy of intention behind all of this, with California antecedents, but riddled with paradoxes.
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CHAPTER 4: WELCOME TO BLACK ROCK CITY

(An earlier version appeared in Berkeley Planning Journal)

ABSTRACT

By applying Bourdieu’s ideas of *habitus* and *doxa*, this paper explores how Burning Man participants negotiate ideological and pragmatic limitations in transforming a vast desert landscape into an urban physical and social space. The ephemeral city serves as a model for radical self-expression with an internal society, which creates an engaging participatory experience among differing and sometimes conflicting social institutions. Burning Man Project, committed to democratically and collaboratively engaging with participants in the production of space, demonstrates a realistic possibility for successful negotiation of pragmatics and ideologies while still allowing ample room to foster freedom and community. In examining these dynamic negotiations and their resultant influences on the physical landscape through varied lenses, this article suggests how Black Rock City might be a portable adaptation for other spaces of insurgency.

“*Black Rock cliché has it that you can’t say anything very penetrating about Burning Man because its diversity and contradictions undermine any generalization you might be tempted to make.*” (Davis, in Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005: 13)

“*Trying to explain what Burning Man is to someone who has never been to the event is a bit like trying to explain what a particular color looks like to someone who is blind.*”

(Burning Man 2013)

INTRODUCTION

No single description of Burning Man can encompass all of its cultural complexities. This examination is focused on the event site, an eight-day encampment in the Nevada desert known as Black Rock City. It uses Pierre Bourdieu’s classic work, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, to provide a vocabulary and model for examining how people construct an ideological and practical radicalized urban space at Black Rock City, and offers examples through varying lenses of social organization. *Habitus*, often unconscious, is gained through enculturated and learned dispositions and behaviors, while *doxa* are the deep, unconscious beliefs and values held as universals. This paper
pays particular attention to identifying habitus of Black Rock City participants, and to
analyze how it functions, together with doxa, to create a separate space from the
participants’ normal world. The question then becomes: How are external habitus and
doa incorporated and/or transformed by participants to create Black Rock City’s
physical and social space?

**Burning Man**

Burning Man evolved from a small, spontaneous gathering on Baker Beach, San
Francisco into a highly organized, planned, and federally permitted annual +56,000
person community. It began in 1986, on the summer solstice, when founder Larry Harvey
invited friends to join him in burning an eight-foot-tall wooden effigy, and though no
official explanation has been given, the meaning was symbolic enough for those twenty
participants to become the impetus for an annual event. As participation grew, so did the
effigy, to the point of becoming a public safety hazard. Larry Harvey teamed up with
members of San Francisco’s Cacophony Society, and relocated Burning Man out to
Black Rock Desert in 1991.\(^53\) Those early years, “Burning Man remained an anarchic,
unregulated, get-together with a heavy emphasis on performance art and pyrotechnics,”
(F Turner 2009).\(^54\) After some ideological struggles between founding members,

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\(^{53}\)Formed from the Suicide Club, an underground secret society beginning 1977 as a course taught by Gary Wayne at Communiversity at San Francisco State University. San Francisco Cacophonists were a random network of free spirits in pursuit of experience beyond mainstream society engaging in playful and subversive dada and Surrealist ethos according to Bowditch (2010).

\(^{54}\)Peter Goin (2003) documented early interviews with participants who described the event as a ritualized pagan performance along with chaos, energy and spirit.
Harvey’s vision for a more centralized, socially engineered event, strengthened by inter-agency relationships and public services, prevailed (Doherty 2004).

Key organizers formed Burning Man Project (the Project), to manage the event and its regional network year-round. With the exception of 1997, annual plans outline all functions occurring on the 3,200-acre site, manage growth, mitigate potential human environmental impact, and serve as framework for year-round agency stakeholder engagement. As such, the Project has fostered community development by reinforcing physical and cultural structures to illicit desired participant actions which is especially important given site environmental constraints and organizational dependence on volunteers (Chen 2003). Participants, “volunteer for different reasons, some do it for fun, for a sense of community or for public recognition. Volunteers enjoy their work because they have freedom to select their tasks, coworkers and leaders (Chen 2005). The Project oversees the Department of Public Works, its largest volunteer corps, under direction of Larry Harvey, as Executive Director. The Department is charged with permit compliance from infrastructure setup starting the first week in August through final grid cleanup in late September. The Project applies cooperative consensus-based decision making throughout its hierarchical tiers (Chen 2009).

Burning Man started out with me and my friend Jerry James, and then it was me and a little band, and then it was me and a little band and a group underneath

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55 Burning Man Project uses the term “social engineering” interchangeably with zoning, not in the same context as Karl Popper’s seminal (1946) The Open Society and Its Enemies volumes.
56 Twenty-two regional “decompression” and “recompression” events, of which Burning Flipside in Austin, Texas remains the largest, provide attendees an opportunity to have the Burning Man experience closer to home and meet people in their area affected by participation (Culpper 2007). These events are sanctioned through Letter of Agreement with Burning Man Project and must follow Ten Principles and pay licensing fees. Many regional events have grown and are organized under their own Limited Liability Corporations according to Quaak (2012).
57 Burning Man experimented with a private parcel in Washoe County, Nevada.
them, and then it's a group underneath them. You have to have hierarchy, because someone always has to get up and look down at the big picture. (L Harvey 2002)

All administrative, policy, financial, and legal decision-making is done by unanimous approval of the Board with direction from Larry Harvey at the helm. In addition to organizing countless participant volunteers, the organization remains actively engaged in the planning efforts required for upholding the nation’s largest commercial Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Special Recreation Permit, as well as annual approvals from more than twenty departmental jurisdictions including agencies from the State of Nevada, Pershing County, Washoe Paiute Tribe, Nevada Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Authority, Federal Communication Commission, and the Nevada State Health Department. Compliance required revenue and full-time staff which led to the Project selling tickets to participant, pricing which has generally increased with population growth.

Burning Man participants build campsites during the eight-day event, the more elaborate of which rely upon year-round planning and fundraising. These sites combined with the Project’s use of zoning, the construction of large architectural monuments, public services, and infrastructure, have earned its nickname, “Black Rock City”. Annual themes (appendix B) are selected to tie artistic elements to the urban landscape. Theme camps and large-format art exhibitions are pre-permitted through a Placement application process and, with the exception of 2009’s economic recession, population growth has

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58 When any person, group, or organization that makes or attempts to make a profit, receive money, amortize equipment, or obtain goods or services as compensation from participants in recreational activities occurring on public lands, the use is considered commercial according to Chen (2009).
been near exponential.\textsuperscript{59} In 2011, tickets reached permitted capacity and were subsequently sold via lottery. In its current form, Black Rock City accommodates approximately 56,000 people across a two-mile diameter city situated within a gated seven-square-mile open space area. Future growth is anticipated to occur through 2016, but will be subject to regulatory limitations and impact mitigation set forth by forthcoming Special Recreation Permits (BLM 2013).

**Ideological City**

![Figure 13. 1992 Burning Man Site Plan](image)

As it is currently designed, Black Rock City has neither unique nor novel urban form. Figure 13 shows the first site schematic, Rod Garrett early vision for Burning Man at Black Rock Desert in 1992. This original design demarcated locations for camping, sanitation, transportation, and the centrally located Man monument.

\textsuperscript{59}Placement is a process managed by the Black Rock City Community Services Department that assigns camp site locations through pre-application review for registered theme camps and villages based on their proposed land uses, space needs, and principle contributions.
Its circular structure harkens a sacred architecture of prehistoric tribal cultural settlement. In 1995, participants nicknamed the site “Black Rock City,” reflecting a rough city-like structure that included transportation corridors, designated camping areas, and a large public plaza surrounding the centermost Man effigy (figure 14). The following year ushered in a 150-person “village,” the first themed conglomerate concept housing larger population and density. As this trend so grew the plan and as currently designed, Black Rock City has evolved into a contemporary replica of Ebenezer Howard’s garden city (Howard 1902, Tuan 1977). As Mumford (1967) astutely noted, Howard’s concern for social processes greatly exceeded concern for the physical form, and focused more on incorporating reformist principles and utopian ideologies. Burning Man offers a less pastoral, more radicalized vision for social spatial engineering based on “an inclusive, decommodified creative society actively engaged in civic life, communities, and the world at large…to produce positive change,” described
as “a great machine, efficiently providing the many hundreds of functions needed to help sustain us in a wilderness almost devoid of life.” (Burning Man 2013).

Over time and as a community, Burning Man participants developed an ethos, which the Project codified into a list of Ten Principles (Table 1). The Ten Principles are not intended as laws, but as a guideline for metropolitan cultural norms. They call for all practices to be guided by: Radical Inclusion, Gifting, Decommodification, Radical Self-Reliance, Radical Self-Expression, Communal Effort, Civic Responsibility, “Leave No Trace,” Participation, and Immediacy (Burning Man 2013). Taken together, the Principles now simultaneously describe and frame behavior and meaning on and off the desert playa. These prescriptive Principles are not enforceable rules but serve as a common ethos for organizing regional Burning Man events that take place around the world and throughout the year.
Though the Ten Principles, or “Commanciples” (figure 15) are considered mandatory reading for new participants, their operationalization takes different forms at different scales, and is not a matter of direct indoctrination. Each Principle has a specific meaning, yet participants and camps interpret and reshape them to fit their own ideological frameworks. Thus, the Principles serve to unify a diverse community across the spatio-temporal plane.

The Principles of decommodification and gifting allow the Project to be the only paid concessioner at Black Rock City. However, only ice, coffee, and tea are made available for purchase, and all proceeds are donated to the local Gerlach Elementary School. Participants are expected to arrive prepared to meet all their own needs, and to bring gifts to share, which can include extra food, water, and shelter for the less experienced. Gifts are given without the promise a return, which creates a bond within the community (Bowditch 2010). A ‘gifting economy’ is therefore intended to foster communication and goodwill expectations among participants (Burning Man 2013, R3 2002).

Yet this noncommercial sphere is actually made possible by a semi-invisible, rarely acknowledged, hyper-capitalization that is particularly evident in camps (Kozinets 2002). The networks of necessary supplies, structures, transportation, creature comforts, and large-scale building materials do not adhere to the gifting Principle, and many of the acquisition processes necessary to bring these supplies intersects with globalized

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60 The 2004 Burning Man Survival Guide refers to principles as the Ten Commandments per Gómez (2013).
61 Robert Kozinets research on consumer market behavior refers to hyper-capitalization when participants shop for supplies prior to Burning Man. Often these large market transactions are frequent, and favor big-box retailers. This is distinct from Jeremy Rifkin who uses hyper-capitalism in the paid for experience sense.
commodity markets. Estimates range, but Burning Man has an approximately $75 million economy, with the average Burner spending $1,000 on a ticket and external pre- and post-event ‘big-box’ retail consumption. This is a particular financial boom to Northern Nevada towns that serve as event gateways and have realized significant sales and tourism tax revenues. This consumption stands in contrast to the principle of radical self-reliance. Participants increasingly redistribute supplies within the community using community-supported online marketplaces to facilitate exchanges among participants and limit corporate monetization.

**Pragmatic City**

Black Rock Desert’s physical geography presents challenges such as extreme temperature variations, strong winds, lack of water and vegetation, corrosive alkali soils which quickly turn to mud when wet, dust storms, and a vast expanse of unrelenting desert (Goin and Starrs 2005). During its first years, the resulting urban form was more ‘organic’ because limited planning existed (See Chapter 2). Survival was considered paramount, and a grid-like clustering of camps near the center stemmed from basic needs, making the free-form representation of early Black Rock City more or less that of any tent city: a daily changing landscape of strewn-about plastic tarps, folding chairs, parked cars, and colorful nylon. “Given the vast range of potentially self-destructive behavior at Burning Man and the desert conditions Black Rock City should have disintegrated rather than grown, yet collaborative creation of art and performance of self become one and the same for many participants: [serving as] the basis for the organization of

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62 Organic refers to unplanned settlement patterns and the resulting morphology versus ‘inorganic’ planned, or ordered, settlements which result in more rational, geometric shapes.
63 Overcoming public health threats of dehydration, sunburn, particulate inhalation, and “playa foot;” inhabitants also lack access to water sources and vegetative shade.
commons at Black Rock City and for the feeling of community,” (Sherry and Kozinets 2007). With growth the most recent urban form, illustrated in figure 16, is meant to accommodate and mitigate discomfort and danger from exposure and vulnerability by providing familiar locational references, which create a sense of shared communal struggle (Keim 2001, Sennett 1970).

Figure 16. 2011 Burning Man Site Plan
Harmonious form and function at Black Rock City are represented through the design of its ‘public’ realm, most importantly the central public plaza, which includes the Man and Temple monuments and Center Camp. At Black Rock City’s centermost point stands the multi-story towering Man effigy (figure 17), “an imposing locus of physical and perceptual centrality,” from which the city radiates outward (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005). Iconic, the wood and neon Man effigy is fundamental; as a figure it remains symbolic of the larger community and as a structure it serves as a powerful geographic apex and highest point in the flat landscape. Its plinth not only elevates its cultural importance, but also provides an interactive public exhibit space (Boehm 2010, Lippard 1998). The non-descript Man serves as a surveillant voyeur watching down on the panopticon city; an ideological notion rejected by the physical act of burning it

64 Note the ‘public realm’ of Black Rock City is placed within gated private perimeters and is the dominant spatial realm, but is exclusive to ticket holders, with a consciously policed boundary.
The more subtle irony is that the burn is spectacle *par excellence* in an environment defined by “no spectators,” (De Certau 2002, Wray 2005). That said, it remains a spectacle lacking meaning, except with what participants may choose to attach to it; it has no dogmatic presence, and if there was to be a definitive meaning then it remains, “that there *is* no definitive meaning” (Wray 2005).

Center Camp (figure 18) features an enclosed, shaded gathering place for social interactions and educational exhibits, as well as an opportunity to purchase coffee. In contrast to these active spaces, the passive, yet creative, Temple Monument is a space for collective reverence and honor (Boehm 2010).

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65 Jeremy Bentham’s prison design, discussed further in Foucault (1977) *Discipline and Punish*, imposed social control through inescapable surveillance by guards stationed at its center point.

66 A few exclusions to gift economy exist at Black Rock City. Coffee and tea are available for purchase at Center Camp, ice is available daily at Artica stations throughout the city; all proceeds go to Gerlach charity. Theme camps and villages may have service provision contracts with Burning Man Project vendors.
Creating a sense of radical urbanism through physicality is profoundly important to Burning Man’s functional success. Black Rock City exists in the publicly controlled realm, and private spaces must be self-constructed by participants. These private camps occur along streets that radiate out from the central plaza in a 1.5-square mile curvilinear grid, using a geographic reference system of letters and numbers. Streets are laid out to accommodate bustling bicycle traffic and pedestrians. Vehicular traffic is restricted to motorized art cars that serve as public transportation and/or official event service vehicles. A considerable area of “valuable” camp space is designated to accommodation of parked vehicles, expanding the scale of Black Rock City (Shoup 2011). Streets offer ample pedestrian and bicycle mobility space, places for people to watch, and gathering or resting places. Street life is supported by the physical landscape through varied scales, setbacks, mixed services, and differing campsite sizes and densities.

During the weeklong event itself, a vibrant, energetic mix of yurts, tents, geodesic domes, RVs, more densely lined residential streets and unique structures pieced together by participants creating an autonomous vernacular of great imagination. All Black Rock City housing forms are self-provided by participants, and reflect incredible variety and ingenuity. Camps vary tremendously in scale, size, and residential typology preference, with many unique blends of form and function. For example, First Camp functions as the city’s political power center. As the residence of Burning Man founders and Black Rock City Council (Board) members, First Camp is prominently placed near Center Camp. It is clearly identifiable by a sculpture, “Bone Tree” (figure 19) and its arrangement is based on the original 1990 encampment, where the early group is described as having “circled the wagons” (Boehm 2010). Danger Ranger (preferring walk-in camping) is Burning
Man Board Member and Black Rock Ranger founder, claims, “First Camp is too pretentious and separate from the rest of the community. First camp has become an ivory tower. There is way too much money and infrastructure support provided to it. At First Camp you need an appointment to get past the guard. Anyone can walk into my camp and talk to me. I really feel that I am more accessible and closer to the community where I camp out on the edge of Black Rock City,” (Mikel, in Bowditch 2010).

An example of form experimentation is Vertical Camp, featuring a structure designed from reusable scaffolding to create intricate towering apartments with a large communal kitchen and living area; as an alternative housing option it serves dozens of residents within a small building footprint. Vertical Camp (figure 20) challenges other participants to consider a compact city in place of the current dominant low-density land use pattern. In addition, by siting along an official art car transit route, Vertical Camp also encourages multi-modal development considerations (Metropol 2010).

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67Danger Ranger is the playa pseudonym for Michael Mikel, Burning Man Project Board Member.
As habitus remains camp homes prove to be more telling examples of external world behavioral ties. At Black Rock City, ‘home’ is a place, which functions as a place for both social gathering and restful introspection, where private and civic lives intersect. Most camps seek to replicate neo-traditional street-oriented neighborhoods in which lighted entrance paths, front porches, welcome signage, and decorative awnings invite social interaction with passersby. Communal spaces may include chairs, sofas, and bars oriented toward the street and open for use by anyone at anytime. Other camps clearly exhibit a preference for exclusive, private space by parking vehicles in a monumental wall facing the street to disconnect them from the larger public realm. Communal spaces
here are interior courtyards with chaise lounges, fire pits, and elaborate outdoor kitchens reserved for private use by inhabitants.

**Institutional City**

With rapid growth, it quickly became evident that a replicable, adaptable plan for managing thousands of participants would be necessary at Burning Man. Center Camp now serves as the “downtown,” populated by structures built by the Project to handle Black Rock City governance and institutional functions analogous to municipal services, such as health and informational services. Citywide public service divisions are provided through all volunteer partnerships such as Black Rock Rangers (protective services modeled after the Texas Rangers), Department of Mutant Vehicles (DMV), and the Department of Public Works (DPW), Earth Guardians, Temple Guardians, Black Rock City Municipal Airport (88NV), the Post Office (BRC3PO) and media outlets (Burning Man Information Radio (BMIR), *Black Rock Gazette*, and *Piss Clear* newspapers).\(^{68}\)

Philanthropic arms supported by the Project are also represented at Center Camp, such as Black Rock Arts Foundation, Black Rock Solar, and Burners without Borders.\(^{69}\) Burning Man as an institution has clearly evolved beyond a temporary desert community into a nested, year-round network of governance and participation.

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\(^{68}\)DMV is responsible for reviewing and approving Mutant Vehicles at Black Rock City. DPW is a large volunteer corps charged with permit compliance from infrastructure setup starting the first week in August through final grid cleanup in late September. Earth Guardians are volunteer teams who embrace Leave No Trace by assisting with post-Black Rock City raking cleanup endeavors per BLM Special Recreation Permit requirements. Temple Guardians protect and preserve safety of the Burning Man Temple and participants who visit it.

\(^{69}\)Black Rock Arts Foundation (BRAF) supports community-based interactive art to the rest of the world. Black Rock Solar assists non-profit, public, low income and education sectors access to clean energy, particularly those found in rural and/or tribal communities. Burners without Borders started after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, Louisiana the same week participants were at Black Rock City, Burners without Borders provides grassroots disaster relief.
The Project, specifically its City Manager, works not only to ensure that the main event remains an operational, legal enterprise, but also assists with regional network gatherings to promote a strong sense of community outside Black Rock City gates. Regional networks in turn reinforce a sense of community while in the city. In 2011, regional groups banded together for the first time to form the Circle of Regional Effigies (figure 21).\textsuperscript{70} CORE was a 22-piece installation, exhibiting handcrafted art that encircled the larger Man and celebrates transformational “efforts to support the Burning Man ethos as a global cultural movement” (Circle of Regional Effigies 2011, Gone Off Deep 2004). Yet, from a planning perspective, the best example of institutionalization at Black Rock City is Placement, the method by which the Project employs residential zoning.\textsuperscript{71} Theme camps are aggregated among interior blocks and along the central corridor (figure 16 shaded areas) to create a downtown district, to lively boulevards, and to encourage social interaction (Metropol 2010).

\textsuperscript{70} Twenty-two regionally-constructed effigies placed around the Man plinth burned on Thursday night.
\textsuperscript{71} Placement is a process managed by the Black Rock City Community Services Department that assigns camp site locations through pre-application review for registered theme camps and villages based on their proposed land uses, space needs, and principle contributions.
Variously sized theme camps are placed based on three criteria: ability to attract participants, capacity for interaction, and a demonstrated seriousness and willingness to meet application deadlines (Metropol 2010). Theme camps featuring large sound systems are sited along the outermost corridors, facing open space for noise mitigation. This may have a historical connection to the first sound camps (figure 22) being located separately from the camping area before the firming up of the city plan (St. John 2009). Kidsville, a theme camp created for participants with children, maintains boundaries within which no mature content is permitted, and provides shared childcare and play spaces. Within the city maximum amplification is 90 decibels at 20-feet, but large theme camps offering large scale sound art must be located along 10:00 and 2:00 corridors with speakers turned toward the open space at all times. Graham St. John (2009) notes that prior to 1997 there was a concerted effort to make the ghettoized rave camp a legitimate outer suburb of Black Rock City. Though the event is geared toward adults children have always been present at Burning Man. Founders Larry Harvey and Jerry James children were present at the inaugural 1986 burn and as such are welcome to attend, however as Bowditch (2010) notes the Project aims to protect them from sexually explicitly behaviors by spatial segregation from family-oriented camps. Participants over age 13 are required to have tickets and an adult over 21 must accompany participant under age 18.
Despite this formal process, in anarchistic tradition, zoning remains entirely optional. Theme camps that are not willing to apply and all other participants who are not part of a theme camp may locate anywhere available, or choose among designated areas such as those reserved for walk-in camping, families, or quieter nights. Campsites are selected and configured during a ‘land grab’ in the first 48 hours after gates are opened followed by midweek and weekend infill. Every block offers something unexpected for congregation and local belonging as part of the greater public realm on the other hand private needs must be accommodated. As Larry Harvey suggests, the ultimate aim is for Black Rock City to provide “integrity of place, against spontaneous initiatives that no one should control. It’s part of making people feel at home” (Burning Man 2013).

Designers often debate whether regulatory planning limits creativity and therefore directly results in a bland built environment. If true, this suggests that a dichotomous relationship exists between Black Rock City as a planned city with its predefined rings and an anarchistic, artistic ideological city. Rather, the familiar garden city form provides an efficient, human-scaled surreal landscapes to be experienced from imagination, inception, participation, and destruction, all over a brief, weeklong “ephemeropolis” history (figure 23) (Black 1998).
Social City

In the most simplistic terms, Black Rock City society is fundamentally the question of, “wouldn’t it be cool if we built this and offered it up to the community?” (Burning Man 2012). Annual census data reveal that the majority of participants are unmarried urban Caucasian males under forty with college educations, full employment, and liberal political views (Burning Man 2012). They are new members of Richard Florida (2002) creative class, an identity, at least in part, that assumes stereotypical effects foisted on the young by the geographic mobility of contemporary American mass suburbanization—possible exposure to a landscape of strip-style commercial and
monotonous housing. Such places lack the aesthetic values inherent to fostering a sense of place and reduce neighborhood interactions, thus providing little sense of civic belonging (Ewing 1997, Sorkin 1992). In this private realm, consumption as leisure is considered the norm, yet according to scholars it fails to produce long-term satisfaction and displaces or suppresses other human desires (Davidson 2011, Kiem 2004, Rifkin 2000, Sorkin 1992).

The physical stresses of Burning Man participation present challenges to participants through difficult pilgrimage, self-reliance, and innovation as a means to deal with energy depletion from the harsh sun, blowing alkali dust, and extreme daytime temperatures (Goin and Starrs 2005). These tests foster cooperative survivalist efforts and participation in inhabiting an unfamiliar world (Goin and Starrs 2005). Participants choose to relocate to a new community that echoes Westward Expansion by migrating to and building a home, evoking artistic frontiersmanship (Free Run Pictures 2008). Pioneer mentalities seek out a tabula rasa, where few care what happens out in the middle of nowhere. Migrating to Black Rock City and building a home is ultimately a nostalgic interpretation of American West, albeit an exclusive reconstruction—and radically expensive derivation—of doxic American wilderness tent camping.

“As an intentional settlement founded on the idea that “standards of normal life can be inverted or ignored in the pursuit of fresh experiences and fresh identities” (Doherty 2004, it offers participants a fresh slate, so long as the central tenet of Participation is upheld (Jones 2011). Many participants adopt pseudonyms and avoid

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74Richard Florida suggests there is a socioeconomic class of workers comprising the super-creative core and creative professionals involved in developing processes and knowledge-based work. Understanding this population could be a potentially driving force for economic development in post-industrial American cities.
discussing their external lives (Jones 2011). An informal form of social control internal to the event exists by policing or negotiating acceptable participation. Displays of ‘authenticity’ are fostered through peer pressure and usually require “dressing in a wild costume, going naked, wearing body paint, riding a strange vehicle, or working on or displaying art” (Kozinets 2002). Further, participant judgment as to the degree of participation serves as a bonding activity in which participants identify themselves in contrast to “tourists,” “weekenders,” “spectators,” “yahoos,” “lookie-loos,” and “frat boys” (Kozinets 2002). While participants acknowledge this tension, many instead focus on, “celebrating the present and looking toward the future,” (Chen 2009).

**Heterodoxic Space**

With population growth comes increased participation at Burning Man, perhaps as a response to societal insufficiencies, a quest for escape or spiritual enlightenment. Increasingly, online interactions and virtual social networks are shaping identity formation and transparent experimentation among younger generations. In stark contrast, the heterodoxic, or unorthodox, decommodified desert landscape largely isolated from telecommunication services requires immediate, physical presence for communication and interaction. The isolated desert site allows for socially theatrical experimentation; for instance, a decommodified economy prevails because few other places offer a landscape “unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising” (Burning Man

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75 There is a vast literature on authenticity in understanding that which is real, actual, or a truth. Vannini and Williams (2009) extend this definition to include inherence, and therefore a quality, which cannot be stripped away from an object, person or process. In analyzing subculture membership specifically Beverland, Farrelly and Quester (2010) showed the contested nature varied by degree of different identity benefits, including flow and kinship formation.
Population growth may be an accidental result of exploitative media coverage portraying Burning Man as a product of consumerism, rather than a rejection of it. As Hockett (2005) put it, the media portray “a countercultural spectacle, an entertaining diversion to be treated with clichéd analogies and superficial stereotypes. In contrast, participant-driven characterization of Burning Man tends to be much more personally, culturally, and socially significant.” Careful of its image, any outside media must submit an online application request prior to filming or photographing Black Rock City. If pre-approved, then once on-site all cameras and video equipment receive laminated badges from the Project’s Media Mecca Department (Bowditch 2010).

Burning Man offers a platform for deeper questioning and interpretation, though the event lacks dogma. Participation can lead one to nothing or lay foundations for new and expanded meanings outside traditional faith. Many report that participation in the potentially cathartic ritual burn is deeply spiritual. Misconceptions of idolatry may stem from Larry Harvey himself, whose views reference cult-like sensory dislocation, communality, and epiphany (Mangrum, in Doherty 2004). Black Rock City functions as a temporary autonomous zone, where each participant freely interprets and practices his or her own meaning, and may be better understood as “a better place for me to be myself, and you to be yourself, together” (Kozinets 2002).

**Negotiating Limits**

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76 Culpper (2007) claims isolation from industrial culture and economics aids in coaxing the performer of out of participants by disrupting one’s doxic self.
Black Rock City, having an exceptionally low crime rate, is not a place of lawlessness despite the principle of Radical Self-Expression.\textsuperscript{77} The Project has adopted adaptive management strategies for participants to work within external limits and to create new operational internal limits. For instance, Black Rock Rangers protect public well-being by patrolling city boundaries and the gate, peacekeeping, establishing fire safety boundaries, interfacing with agency protection services, fostering good relations with local law enforcement agencies, and managing traffic “exodus”. But Nevada Law Enforcement Officers (LEO) have uniform and plainclothes staff present on site to monitor adherence to federal, state, and local laws. For example, bars gifting alcoholic beverages are required to check a participant’s age.\textsuperscript{78} Similarly, all restaurants gifting food are monitored for compliance with public health standards. To mitigate potential authoritarian conflict and minimize the law enforcement presence required for 56,000+ people, the Project relies heavily on Black Rock Rangers not to enact laws or engage with infractions, but instead to address the norms and values of the community via conflict mediation.\textsuperscript{79}

Multiple official government bodies now also have an influence over Black Rock City in shaping internal limitations and accepting external limitations, none more so than the Bureau of Land Management, which sets environmental standards that profoundly

\textsuperscript{77}According to Gomez (2013) in total, there have been 76 arrests since Burning Man moved to Black Rock desert.
\textsuperscript{78}In addition to Pershing County Sheriff’s Department, Playa Safety Council organizes internal enforcement of Black Rock Rangers, Department of Mutant Vehicles, Gate & Exodus and Perimeter monitoring. Bowditch (2010) notes how LEO must have a search warrant to enter any enclosed private camp area; however, visible common areas and open doors are freely accessible to search.
\textsuperscript{79}Milchman (2007) and Jones (2010) clarified events Burning Man’s most notable crime. Artist, and longtime participant, Paul Addis’ 2007 arson – burning down the Man four days ahead of schedule during an early morning lunar eclipse – motivated as an act of radical self expression, Addis hoped to reignite Burning Man’s earlier chaotic and spontaneous spirit. Arousing considerable, and divisive community reactions ranging from hero to pariah, he spent two years in Nevada State prison.
affect daily life and hold consequences for the long-term viability of the Burning Man event. “Leave No Trace” is more than a guiding Principle; it is a practice enforced by volunteers who map the MOOP (Matter Out of Place) left behind after the event to publicly illustrate each campsite's compliance.⁸⁰

Earlier criticism by environmental activists has been paramount in continued ‘greening’ of Burning Man. The Project requires energy and fuel from ground breaking until cleanup. No definitive calculation exists on total fuel and energy required for the event, though Black Rock City has drawn criticism for its carbon footprint. In 2006 it was estimated that the event generated approximately 27,000 tons of carbon emissions, primarily associated with transportation to and from the remote site, plus electric generators and art car exhausts (Cooling Man 2007). A Sierra Club complaint regarding landfill-bound plastic water bottles and explosive displays used in art projects led to the formation of the Cooling Man Organization in 2007. Since then, Burning Man has worked to construct permanent solar arrays for carbon offsets, implement biodiesel usage, and promote generator-free camping (Kozinets 2002, Laing and Frost 2012, Sherry and Kozinets 2007).

Today Black Rock City purports to offer more imagined freedom than its anarchistic roots would call for, with an invisible security infrastructure akin to that pioneered by the Disney Corporation in managing theme park facades, where most participants never interact with it unless required to (Fogleson 2001). Legal aid, medical, counseling, fire, and emergency services are ever-present and respond immediately only

⁸⁰MOOP is a term for loose items, or waste, at Black Rock City. Leave No Trace is a federal environmental policy that Burning Man Project it is required to implement in order to hold the event on protected public lands per U.S. Bureau of Land Management permit compliance.
when needed. Other diverse community services are strongly encouraged through gifting, communality, and participation including cafés, bars, and restaurants, Black Rock City College, and recreation facilities (SK8 Camp, Black Rock City Roller Disco, Black Rock City Yacht Club). This *res publica* passion spurred numerous public services as independent volunteer initiatives that were later absorbed by the Project thus creating Harvey’s “living civic organism” (Burning Man 2013). For instance, costumed lamplighters illuminate streetlight lanterns each evening, Recycle Camp (figure 24) collects recyclables daily by modified bicycles, and Census Camp conducts an annual Black Rock City census.

Figure 24. Recycle Camp Bicycle, 2011
BALANCING HABITUS & DOXA

Burning Man’s changing themes (appendix B) help minimize limitations by stimulating creativity and ensuring Black Rock City will never be the same twice. Consequently, participants are offered wild new perspectives and connections that extend well beyond desert borders. Forming from and ending in perceived nothingness, Black Rock City remains throughout the year only in nostalgic imprints on the mind, imagery, and writings, which recount stories of having been there. This lingering “burning feeling” stems from balancing habitus and doxa and “working it out” at Burning Man (Bourdieu 1977). Participants bring with them perceptions of social institutions and models of social interactions, while at the same time they are engaged in creating new spaces and negotiating bottom-up and top-down social schemas. Residents are neither divorced nor set apart from the external world, but instead intertwined with it. Underpinning the cultural workings is a complex interpenetration of pragmatism and ideology, and a dynamic interplay between creativity and limitation (Bourdieu 1977).

The counterculture recreated and refracted within Black Rock City is a combination of orthodox worldview and heterodoxic participant constructions, which are not mutually exclusive. It is this inherently contradictory framework that successfully allows for rebellion through construction, sculpting, and reconceptualizing the ordinary, or default world. Orthodoxies are imported with modifications or are created anew at Black Rock City, forming the basis for radical Participation. Heterodoxies produced either parallel to, or in place of, wholesale cultural reproduction may intentionally echo orthodoxy, but with a different flavor. Thus, participants at Burning Man are not divorced or wholly set apart from their doxic beliefs, but complexly intertwined with them as
reframed by the ideology of the Ten Principles. Black Rock City combines the physical platform with countercultural social bases in a population educated to think critically (all participants received the *Survival Guide* and 65 percent of all participants hold at least a bachelor’s degree), thereby allowing for visibility of and commentary on doxa and habitus. Simply put, participants learn how to do things differently while experimenting with the physical and social landscape, which results in the production of a tangible alternative.

**CONCLUSION**

Not completely free from cultural entanglements with outside society, Black Rock City is an example of a democratically and collaboratively produced urban landscape transformed by negotiations between ideological and pragmatic limitations. These tensions between participant orthodoxy and Burning Man’s creativity ethos result in annual productions of radical new heterodoxic cities (Bourdieu 1977).

What is it that triggers this move? First, it is essential to have a tenable base in cultural or physical orthodoxy of city life outside Black Rock, if only for the purposes of providing an oppositional definition. Even in cases of spontaneous creation, a reworking or working out of something that came before is required, as was exemplified in 1960s countercultures or Bohemian culture. With similar ideological and pragmatic tenets and interactions occurring at Burning Man, the move toward heterodoxy as an attempt to work out contradictions caused by doxa is observable. Second, there needs to be a physical space for creativity and reinterpretation, and the playa’s open dry lake bed

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81 Required reading for all participants, the *Survival Guide* provides information to prepare for special circumstances associated with Black Rock City.
appears to provide a tabula rasa that offers counterculture its canvas until city construction. Lastly, participants with the desire and ability to question conventional reality allow doxa and habitus to become visible, so that participants are able to “figure out” alternative approaches and produce heterodoxy. Often participants remain unaware of their reworkings of default orthodoxy, which suggests unconscious thought is also at play.

Combined, these factors seem readily exportable, and may be located squarely in other spaces of heterodoxy and insurgency. Where people possess critical thinking abilities and a desire to change the status quo, heterodoxy can bloom. As observed in recent Occupy movements throughout the United States, spatial articulation of heterodoxy and external limits may differ. Where some incarnations work within legal permitting processes, others choose to ignore or resist governmental regulation akin to how Black Rock City camps locate themselves both metaphorically and materially outside of, but still tethered to, ideological and pragmatic habitus.

Countercultural lessons from Black Rock City may be portable to other, varied ephemeral spaces regardless of their intentions. Connections to temporary autonomous zones and other sites of insurgent development warrant future examination. Applying Bourdieuan social theory to constantly changing pragmatic and ideological workings of physical and cultural spaces can provide deeper insights to radicalized urban models. Heterodoxy at Burning Man extends beyond its own organizational and physical manifestations and is embodied in annually changing themes (appendix B) and ever-

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82Hakim Bey’s (1991) guerilla uprising Temporary Autonomous Zones briefly liberate an area (land, time, or imagination) from engagement with the state before dissolving and reforming elsewhere.
evolving infrastructural processes. The Project is continually committed to
democratically and collaboratively engaging with participants in LeFebvrian (1991)
production of space, and demonstrates possibilities for realistic negotiations between
ideology and pragmatics while still leaving ample room for freedom and community.
REFERENCES


CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

“What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas...What happens at Black Rock City does not stay in Black Rock City” (Burning Man Exit Sign)

As a ‘Burner’, my intent was to parse out, where possible, pertinent city planning lessons which harness the radical city spirit applicable to ‘default world’ communities. It was not to undermine claims to social movement, especially in an age of economic and political disenchantment. Attending Burning Man is still essentially a California utopian experience: where participants, through ephemeral intentions, apply habitus to democratically create, negotiate, and deconstruct heterodoxic space within their ephemeral gated garden city. Yet, in better understanding Black Rock City in urban geography terms, by tracing its antecedents and transformation into a desert heterotopia, observation reveals shortfalls in achieving half of its ideological Ten Principles (Table 1). Instead, Black Rock City appears to be a modern day city struggling with elite, exclusive growth pressures, which can have erosive community consequences.

FINDINGS

Given physical and population extents, research was largely theoretical, though relevant built environment findings were observed and documented in previous chapters. As a whole, findings support Balamir’s (2011) constitutive element model with this work falling almost entirely within ‘city’ and ‘community’ definitions (figure 25) but extends notions of Burning Man as a place of philosophical paradoxes.
More specifically, “The Black Rock City Mirage” (Chapter 2) revisits utopian new town planning at a time when it is professionally unpopular and examines its material and planning paradoxes. It further explains how greater affluence has generated increased demand for exclusive turnkey experiences often manifested as private spaces not requiring radical self-reliance and communal efforts and thus raising questions over ‘authentic’ participation.

Chapter 3, “Plotting in the Desert” addresses antecedent paradoxes and presents steep entry barriers including expense and access limitations that reinforce an elite homogeneous population not representative of multicultural San Francisco, or California roots. Population limits diametrically oppose the principle of radical inclusivity. Plus, newly instituted distribution channels threaten radical self-expression and decommodification.
Finally, (Chapter 4) “Welcome to Black Rock City” examines sociocultural paradoxes, which led to Burning Man Project’s decision to shift toward a global mission which decentralizes, and de-emphasizes, Black Rock City. This is culturally significant because the city as it currently exists offers a unique model for creating heterodoxy in America. With rare opportunities for production Black Rock City offers a safe place where participants are encouraged to do things differently, and are able experiment in the physical and social landscape.

**RECOMMENDATIONS & LIMITATIONS**

Perhaps knowing whether participants are touched in a meaningful way by Burning Man or if being there simply fills an intrinsic desire to be belong to something is no longer a matter importance but rather the fact that tens of thousands of participants each year continue to want to dwell in Black Rock City. Yet, principle failings should provide early warnings worth heeding to avoid an unappealing future garden city fate. Some may argue that concern over Burning Man growth has been a participant issue nearly as long as Black Rock City has been in the desert:

> In 1996 there was eight thousand people in Black Rock City. That was twice as many as the year before, and the unease was so palpable the even the *Los Angeles Times* took note: some mourn the population explosion as an influx of passive, slack-jawed gawkers and the death of Burning Man cool. (Bruder 2007)

Burning Man did fundamentally changed during this study course (2007-2012). At its start, Black Rock City was paramount, but Bureau of Land Management imposed population regulation proved to be a critical turning point, which became a major research limitation. The Burning Man Project (referred to as the Project) de-emphasized the city’s importance, making spatial and temporal boundaries fuzzier by shifting focus
toward grander cultural aspirations (St. John 2009). This strategic push out from the

desert into a larger global context aims to strengthen regional networks and unify the five
active, diverse virtual fora into a single, traceable, registered-member online “Burner
Profile” account.83 Sanctioned regional events, subject to legal consent, may maintain
unique local flavor but must employ and demonstrate Burning Man signature principles.
If the recent Fertility 2.0 theme serves as any indication, Burning Man Project’s
pronouncement to, “extend our type of culture wherever and however it may occur in the
world,” reflects this significant shift in trajectory well beyond existing Black Rock Arts
Foundation, Black Rock Solar, and Burners Without Borders’ current bridges into
mainstream culture (L Harvey 2012). Instead, “Burning Man is planting the seed of an
alternative way of living in the world,” thereby opening Burning Man up to popular
culture absorption and generating questions about the future of Black Rock City
(Bowditch 2010: 5).84 Participant promotional and educational efforts by the Project
should strengthen Black Rock City as its “ephemeropolis” placing emphasis on
pilgrimage as the quintessence of a Burning Man experience.

Radically Inclusive Means Pro-Growth

Simple solution, make Black Rock City accessible. Unlike the majority of default
cities it embodied a welcoming, radically inclusive, ‘pro-growth’ policy. Without
advertising, population size increased exponentially, doubling at times between
consecutive events. Then, the new resident influx went largely unquestioned by existing
participants, as “veterans” adapted their own personal behaviors to accommodate others.

83 The official Burning Man online forum is ePlaya.
84 In this context, alternative refers to John Morehead’s (2009) definition of embodying aspects of
countercultural ideas as well as utopian thinking.
American economic recession in 2009 triggered population decline at that year’s event, but interest rebounded the following summer, followed by a sharp rise in popular press and social media coverage. Notoriety generated ticket demands exceeding supply for the first time in Burning Man’s twenty-five year history, but effects were not immediately evident since most 2011 participants (over age 13) had previously secured tickets through either the Individual sale or direct from approved walkup vendors. Yet, even with protective multicolor holograms, detailed embossed decals, and authenticable serial numbers, reported population size surpassed total tickets sold, prompting BLM to respond with greater regulatory oversight and permit revocation threats.

Antipodal to event “we don’t sell out” foundations and principles, population limits create fundamentally unsolvable exclusivity problems at Black Rock City because free-market solutions favor wealth (L Harvey 2000). Selected new mechanisms attempt to minimize scarcity commodification, but in turn breed community outrage. Registration for the two-ticket lottery in 2012 exercised a classic prisoner’s dilemma where as soon as participants realized others might game the system, they too felt compelled to have friends, family, and campmates order extras. By overestimating altruism, projections fell short by 40,000 requests (Burning Man 2012). Further, price structuring systematically granted a competitive advantage to those able to afford higher price tiers by allowing them to benefit from multiple draws over those receiving a single draw from a smaller, inexpensive ticket pool. While limited low-income scholarships exist, they can be

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85In January 2012 a YouTube video entitled “Oh, the Places You’ll Go at Burning Man” released a reading of the Dr. Seuss (1990) classic set to images from Burning Man went viral with +2.5 Million hits [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahv_Hs7SIbE].

86Walkup vendors allowed anamomoyous ticket purchases.
difficult to earn.\textsuperscript{87} This year, a Holiday Presale offered $650 tickets (establishing a new elastic upper price limit) followed by a hierarchal, invite-only veteran Direct presale. All who remained then registered for a first-come first-served, one-day Individual online sale. The purchase process was fraught with technology failures (browser issues, server timeouts, inactive page refreshes) reportedly lasting up to nine hours and ultimately excluding many participants and researchers waiting in line (Burners.Me 2013). Nontransferable outside of the Project’s Secure Ticket Exchange Program (STEP), access is subject to additional bureaucratic control.

**NIMBY VETERANS**

Classic not in my backyard (nimby) dissension emerged among many who claimed to “devote their lives to Burning Man,” after only small fractions of large art, theme, and sound camps secured tickets. Debates ensued over “veteran” preference versus “privilege is not a right” event “virgins” who would comprise 40 percent of the 2012 Black Rock City population (Burning Man 2013). Scalped rates (50+ percent markup) angered participants who mainly transferred tickets within the community at face value, but suggested fixes to link photographs or identification were deemed unreasonable given anonymity’s importance at the event. After continued backlash, the Project worked with StubHub and eBay to diffuse inflated recirculation, but also injected direct distribution tickets to ensure paramount city investment completion. Organizational intervention minimized, and therefore biased, built environmental impacts that, theoretically unregulated, might have indicated city carrying capacity.

\textsuperscript{87}In 2013 up to 4,000 scholarship tickets ($180 each) are available. Applicants must write an essay and submit Income Tax evidence to prove need.
**BLACK ROCK CITY 2016**

The BLM Special Recreation Permit (2012-2016) requests continued growth up to a total of 70,000-participants. Exact population limits are reviewed annually. Increased population will be physically accommodated by extension of the 10:00 arc and an additional ring road, but the garden city form will remain intact (BLM 2012). Without significant variation to regional morphology it seems this particular research line has run its current course. It is anticipated that future Black Rock City events will continue, but Burning Man unforgottably failed its community by politicizing how ‘virgins’ are welcome so long as recognized establishment has first priority. In recognizing struggle, the Project as been open and forthcoming: “we have to figure out how to change what we are doing. We have some stuff to go through. You might think it is just wonderful that the six of us [board members] are still together for 10 years but it has been really challenging recently because we all have different desires in the world,” (Goodell, in Bowditch, 2010).

**FUTURE WORK**

Veteran participants are emigrating, whether by wholesale abandon or through sought-out purification, in an attempt to capture the original Burning Man experience elsewhere. Fourth of Juplaya, an annual unorganized, free, Black Rock Desert event with Burning Man-style camps, costumes, and fireworks, continues to grow in popularity. There are also offshoots such as PermaBurn that provides a permanent, private membership opportunity to leave one’s trace back in Northern California (Cruet 2012).

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88 A few long established Burning Man theme camps are also present at 4th of Juplaya.
mainstream culture are certainly fascinating extension topics warranting continued 
observation, but will make individual fieldwork more challenging. Research lends itself 
best to multi-scalar analysis, specifically, and future work may consider Black Rock City 
subsections where participants can reflect on the exploratory metamorphoses taking place 
in the unique environment that encourages them to do so.

No better example exists than the Burning Man’s Temple (figure 26), a spiritual 
and secular confluence serving as more than a ritual touchstone. Originally, artist David 
Best’s theme camp and community contribution, the Temple has evolved tantamount to 
the central Man monument. Now funded through an organizational art grant, selected 
designers spend a year from initial idea to safe destruction, encountering countless 
remote logistical challenges to create a space lasting eight days with the strict intent to 
burn it. “Each temple has been designated a mausoleum, house of memory for those who 
make the pilgrimage and have grown increasingly monumental with time,” and offers a 
sacral alternative place for participants dissatisfied with the larger event spectacle (Sherry 
and Kozinets 2007).

Beyond a testament to architecture, mass, material, or beauty, memorial messages 
and photographs posted on its walls represent authentic, raw, emotional grief that is 
physically and permanently released during the performative, solemn, and surreal annual 
burn. Since its inception, the temple has demonstrated an inspirational, communal public 
realm evoking “delicate strength” for participants to outwardly, interactively, emote 
together (Best 2012). The temple is essentially the finest representative of Black Rock 
City experience.
Figure 26. The Temple of Juno, 2012
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A – BURNING MAN GLOSSARY

Art Cars (see also Mutant Vehicles): Uniquely decorated motorized vehicles that no longer resemble an original vehicle base are inspected and permitted by the Department of Mutant Vehicles (DMV) for use at Black Rock City

ARTery: Burning Man Project team responsible for placing art on the playa

Best, David: Acclaimed sculptor and architect who created the first Burning Man Temple, now a staple feature of Black Rock City

Baker Beach: San Francisco site of the first Burning Man (held June 21, 1986) then again each year after through 1990.

Black Rock Arts Foundation (BRAF): Supports community-based interactive art to the rest of the world

Black Rock City: Participant nickname for the city-like structure formed at Black Rock Desert, Nevada

Black Rock Desert: Northern Nevada site location for the annual Burning Man event; more specifically a 5.5-mile² pentagon 9-miles northeast of Gerlach-Empire off State Highway 447

Black Rock Rangers: Participant protective service organization engaged in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, also an intermediary who maintains good relations with law enforcement agencies

Black Rock Gazette: Black Rock City’s circulated newspaper

Black Rock Solar: Assists non-profit, public, low income and education sectors access to clean energy, particularly those found in rural and/or tribal communities

BMIR: Black Rock Informational Radio AM station

Burners: The nickname given Burning Man participants

Burning Man Project: The nonprofit 501(c)3 entity that oversees Burning Man

Burner Profiles: Burning Man Projects online registration platform where participants register to purchase tickets. Requires name, email, mailing address.

Burners without Borders (BwB): Formed after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, Louisiana the same week participants were at Black Rock City, Burners without Borders provides grassroots disaster relief
**Center Camp:** The community hub, which is a shaded gathering place for social interactions and educational exhibits, as well as an opportunity to purchase coffee

**Census Camp:** Members of a theme camp who conducts, tabulates, and reports annual Black Rock City demographic and socioeconomics

**Circle of Regional Effigies (CORE):** Twenty-two regionally constructed effigies placed around the Man plinth burned on Thursday night

**Civic Responsibility:** The principle that values civil society by assuming responsibility for public welfare in accordance with laws

**Cacophony Society:** A random network of free spirits in pursuit of experience beyond mainstream society engaging in playful and subversive dada and Surrealist ethos

**Communal Effort:** The principle that encourages interactive cooperation and collaboration

**Cooling Man Organization:** Volunteer organization whose mission is building bridges between climate science, art and community and that works to offset emissions generated by Black Rock City

**Decompression:** Regional events that provide attendees an opportunity to have the Burning Man experience closer to home and meet people in their area affected by participation

**Decommodification:** The principle that resists consumption in an environment unmediated by commercial sponsorship, transaction, or advertising

**Deep Playa:** Open space located beyond the Burning Man Temple, a sculpture garden housing many art works placed with great distance between each piece

**Default** *(or Default World):* Referring to the reality outside Black Rock City limits

**Department of Public Works (DPW):** Large volunteer corps charged with permit compliance from infrastructure setup starting the first week in August through final grid cleanup in late September

**Department of Mutant Vehicles (DMV):** Responsible for reviewing and approving Mutant Vehicles at Black Rock City

**Direct Sale:** Ticket sale for those qualifying as Burning Man veterans

**Dust Storm:** Meteorological front comprising strong winds blowing playa soils
ePlaya: The official Burning Man online forum

Earth Guardians: Volunteer teams who embrace Leave No Trace by assisting with post-Black Rock City raking cleanup endeavors per BLM Special Recreation Permit requirements

Esplanade: Black Rock City’s Main Street fronting the large public plaza

Exodus: Traffic planning for the participant mass leaving Black Rock City between Sunday night and Labor Day

First Camp: Black Rock City’s political power center - the residence of Burning Man founders

Fence (or Trash Fence): Temporary nylon webbing put around the boundaries of Black Rock City

Garrett, Rod: Black Rock City’s former architect and planner

Gifting: The principle of unconditional giving without an expected exchange

Harvey, Larry: Burning Man founder, and current Burning Man Project Executive Director. Larry Harvey is tasked with creating annual Black Rock City themes

Hexayurt: Residential structures constructed from sheets of polyisocyanurate insulation boards (Tuff-R or R-Max) taped together with bi-directional filament tape

Holiday Sale: A limited ticket release in December where tickets are offered at highest pricing

Immediacy: The principle of honoring and overcoming realities that stand between us and our inner self, those around us, society, and the natural world

Individual Sale (or Main Sale): Open to all, it is a one-day first-come, first-serve online ticket sale in February for pre-registered participants to purchase two tickets

Kidsville: A theme camp created for participants with children

Lamplighters: Ritual illuminating of streetlight lanterns each evening

Law Enforcement Officers (LEO): uniform and plainclothes staff present at Black Rock City charged with monitoring adherence to federal, state, and local laws

Leave No Trace: The principle that respects the environment by endeavoring to leave places in better condition than found
Man: **Burning Man**’s symbolic towering effigy made from wood and neon, placed upon a plinth at the center of Black Rock City to be burned on Saturday night.

**Matter Out of Place** (MOOP): Nickname for water or trash. Participants practice MOOPing, or trash pickup while at Black Rock City to practice principle Leave No Trace.

**Media Mecca:** Burning Man Project department responsible for reviewing media requests prior to journalist documentation and on-site grants all cameras and video equipment with approved laminated badges.

**Mutant Vehicles:** Uniquely decorated motorized vehicles that no longer resemble an original vehicle base are inspected and permitted by the Department of Mutant Vehicles (DMV) for use at Black Rock City.

**Participation:** The principle that achieves ‘being’ through doing where everyone is invited to work and play.

**Playa:** The flat, dry in Summer, alkali terminal lakebed home to Black Rock City; located 9-miles northeast of Gerlach, Nevada in semiarid Black Rock Desert – High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area, elevation 3904’ of Pershing County it is a 3,200 acre remnant of Pleistocene Era.

**Playanym (also Playa Names):** An alternate identifier, or name, used while interacting in and with the Burning Man Community.

**Piss Clear:** A Burning Man newspaper named for survival hydration strategies.

**Placement:** Process managed by the Black Rock City Community Services Department that assigns camp site locations through pre-application review for registered theme camps and villages based on their proposed land uses, space needs, and principle contributions.

**Playa Foot:** Exposure to alkali soils can dry the skin until it cracks and bleeds.

**Radical Inclusion:** The principle that welcomes and respects anyone to, and in, the Burning Man Community.

**Radical Self-Reliance:** The principle that encourages inner resource discovery.

**Radical Self-Expression:** The principle that gives to others while respecting recipient rights and liberties.

**Recompressions:** Regional events that provide attendees an opportunity to have the Burning Man experience closer to home and meet people in their area affected by participation.
**Recycle Camp:** Theme camp members who collects recyclables in Black Rock City daily by modified bicycles

**Regionals** (also **Regional Network**): Events held throughout the year outside Black Rock City that are sanctioned through Letter of Agreement with Burning Man Project and must follow Ten Principles and pay licensing fees. Many regional events are organized under their own Limited Liability Corporations

**Secure Ticket Exchange Program** (STEP): Burning Man tickets are nontransferable outside of the Burning Man Project exchange platform ensuring that tickets are recirculated to registered community members at no more than face value pricing

**Special Recreation Permit** (SPR): When any person, group, or organization that makes or attempts to make a profit, receive money, amortize equipment, or obtain goods or services as compensation from participants in recreational activities occurring on public lands

**Social Engineering:** A term for zoning campsites by proposed land use

**Survival Guide:** Required reading for all participants, the *Survival Guide* provides information to prepare for special circumstances associated with Black Rock City

**T-Bars:** Metal stakes pounded into the ground to secure perimeter nylon fencing

**Temporary Autonomous Zone** (see also **Zone Trip**): Entering a changing landscape of the post-apocalyptic world and/or briefly liberating an area (land, time, or imagination) from engagement with the state before dissolving and reforming elsewhere

**Ten Principles:** Foundational and operational Burning Man community ethos

**Temple:** An architecturally significant mausoleum for participant pilgrims that serves as the spiritual and secular confluence of Burning Man. It burns on Sunday night signaling the end of Black Rock City

**Temple Guardians:** Volunteer group protecting and preserving safety of the Burning Man Temple and participants who visit it

**Theme Camp:** A residential preference that provides a specialized motif and invites participants to interact in various and unexpected ways

**Turnkey Camping** (also **Plug-n-Play** or **Pay-to-Play**): Participants who prefer camp experiences in which they pay for pre-constructed camps with varying amenities. This allows the participant to show up and enjoy the event without having to construct spaces
U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Federal agency responsible for permitting Burning Man charged with mitigating human environmental impacts

Vertical Camp: A residential experiment with reusable scaffolding to create intricate towering apartments with a large communal kitchen and living area that houses dozens of residents within a small building footprint

Veterans: Participants who devote their lives to Burning Man and have attended many years

Village: Black Rock City villages comprise several cooperating camps with shared affinities, and house 150+ participants. Each village must have its own “mayor” (point of contact), and a defined mission statement

Virgins: First-time Burning Man participants

Welcome Home: The universal participant greeting received at Black Rock City entry gates

Whiteout: Dust storm conditions that prevent visibility
## APPENDIX B – BURNING MAN THEMES

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<th>Theme</th>
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<td>Fertility: The Living Land</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Psyche: The Conscious, Subconscious and Unconscious</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Hope &amp; Fear: The Future</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>The Green Man</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>American Dream</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>Evolution: A Tangled Bank</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>Metropolis: The Life of Cities</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Fertility 2.0</td>
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