Ephemeropolis: Burning Man, Transformation, and Heterotopia

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ABSTRACT

Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia is adapted to comprehend events with intentional transformational agendas. An ephemeral community installed annually in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, Burning Man is an exemplary *evental heterotopia*. With the shortcomings of the romantic-utopian "transformational festival" label identified, the article considers Black Rock City as a heterogeneous threshold and contested space. This hyperliminal weave is redolent in a complex ethos known as the "Ten Principles." Informed by Foucault's ambiguous entry on heteroclite spatialization, the article explores the paradoxical "other space" of Burning Man in which the "default world" is simultaneously neutralized, mirrored, and resisted. If Burning Man is transformative, this is therefore an enigmatic aesthetic. Adapting Foucault's six "principles of heterotopia" and modulating Victor Turner's "liminality," the article navigates the hyperliminal dynamics of Burning Man. In the process, a provisional framework is suggested for the study of transformative events.

1. "Leave No Trace," *Burning Man 2019 Survival Guide*, <https://survival.burningman.org/leave-no-trace>.

2. Graham St John, "Dramatic Heterotopia: The Participatory Spectacle of Burning Man," in *Interrupting Globalisation: Heterotopia in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Simon Ferdinand, Irina Souch, and Daan Wesselman (New York: Routledge, 2020, forthcoming).

3. These terms are the author's abridgements.

4. Observations and materials presented in this article derive from the author's eight visits to Black Rock City since 2003 and from field research of Burning Man Regional Events performed as part of the SNSF-supported project "Burning Progeny: The European Efflorescence of Burning Man," the Department of Social Science, University of Fribourg, Switzerland (January 2016–December 2019): <https://www.burningprogeny.org>.

5. Judi Neal, ed., *Handbook of Personal and Organizational Transformation* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017).

6. Jennifer Laing and Warwick Frost, "Nature and Well-being: Explorer Travel Narratives of Transformation," in *Nature Tourism*, ed. Joseph S. Chen and Nina K. Prebensen (New York: Routledge, 2017), 11–22.

7. T. J. Weisbecker, "Hallucinogenic Metamorphosis: An Overview of Hallucinogen-Induced Transformative Mystical Experience," in *Metamorphosis through Conscious Living: A Transper-*

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Introduction

Otherwise known as Black Rock City (BRC), Burning Man is an epic participatory arts gathering installed annually in Nevada's remote Black Rock Desert. Claimed as "the largest Leave No Trace event in the world,"¹ BRC is the model for a global network of Burning Man Regional Events. Over three decades, Burning Man has evolved from a small-scale cultural event into a consciously liminal event culture. While Burning Man has been considered a model "transformational festival," its complex spatio-temporality problematizes this logic. This article adapts Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia as mused in his 1967 lecture "Des espaces autres" (Of other spaces) to assist comprehension of the meta-transformativity of Burning Man, both in BRC and Regional Events. While elsewhere "heterotopia" has been deployed to illuminate Burning Man as a context for the dramatization of paradox,² the current article explores the value of the heuristic for navigating the spatio-temporal dynamics of a complex event culture.

The article begins by introducing the idea of the "transformational festival." While typecast as the model event in this class, the concept is demonstrably ill-suited to the "placeless place" of Burning Man. Heterotopia is then introduced to illuminate the experimental mosaic of BRC, an "other space" that simultaneously mirrors, resists, and subverts "default world" culture. The article recognizes the ambiguity inherent to a concept implying both a space or object (*heterotopia*) as well as a process (*heterotopic*). Drawing from theater, performance, festival, and other studies of the "other spaces" of play, the hyperliminal aesthetic of Burning Man is interpolated with the assistance of Foucault's six "principles" of heterotopia: universality, mutability, heterogeneity, heterochronicity, zonality, and reflexivity.³ In the playful spirit of "Of other spaces," each of these principles is adapted to navigate BRC. This approach benefits from qualitative research involving an in-depth review of scholarly literature on Burning Man, analysis of Burning Man Project media, and semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted during longitudinal field research.⁴ Serving as an introduction to Burning Man and providing an update on liminality appropriate to transformational events, the article illustrates the applicability of heterotopia for event studies, and notably the study of events with transformational intentions and agendas.

Transformational Festivalization

In current scholarship, "transformation" is reclaimed as something of a buzzword. With regard to leadership and organization,⁵ tourism,⁶ psychedelics,⁷ and contemporary pilgrimage,⁸ for example, the appellation is widely applied. It is a persistent theme among philosophers, especially those seeking solutions to the human predicament,⁹ a motivation also inhering in its application to public events with proactive agendas. The concept of the "transformational festival" was first promulgated by documentary filmmaker Jeet-Kei Leung in a 2010 TEDx talk and later popularized via *The Bloom* webseries, which is now also in development as a twelve-part TV series.¹⁰ Compiled in 2012–13, the original webpage for The Bloom charted the scope of the phenomenon, in which Leung used a set of criteria to include approximately one hundred events, most of them in West Coast North America. Involving multiday camping in natural sites

sonal Psychology Perspective, ed. Lindy McMullin, Regina U. Hess, and Marcie Boucouvalas (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 71–80.

8. John Hornblow and Jenny Boyack, "Pilgrimages of Transformation and Reconciliation: Maori and Pakeha Walking Together in Aotearoa New Zealand," in *The Many Voices of Pilgrimage and Reconciliation*, ed. Ian S. McIntosh and Lesley D. Harman (Wallingford, UK: CAB International, 2017), 19–30.

9. Grant Maxwell, *The Dynamics of Transformation: Tracing an Emerging World View* (Nashville, TN: Persistent Press, 2017).

10. Jeet-Kei Leung and Akira Chan, *The Bloom: A Journey through Transformational Festivals*, webseries, 2014, Bloom TV, <https://www.thebloom.tv>.

11. The Bloom, "Guidelines for Inclusion," accessed February 12, 2018, <http://thebloomseries.com/guidelines-for-inclusion-transformational-festivals-map>.

12. Burning Man, *2018 Annual Report*, 3.

13. Caveat Magister (a.k.a. Benjamin Wachs), *The Scene That Became Cities: What Burning Man Philosophy Can Teach Us about Building Better Communities* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2019), 45, 105.

14. Ibid, 201.

15. Larry Harvey, personal communication, March 16, 2018.

16. Robert V. Kozinets, "Can Consumers Escape the Market?"

remote from populated urban regions, these participatory events are promoted as featuring an "ecstatic core ritual" provided through electronic dance music, visionary art and performance, workshops on new paradigm subjects, the creation of "sacred space," and a social economy of artisans and vendors. These events are further stated to implement sustainability practices with a "minimal environmental footprint," support participants in "healing processes," and exhibit a conscious intention to "support personal and social transformation."¹¹

While Burning Man is showcased by Leung as a watershed in "transformational festivals," this proposition is not without complications. To begin with, as its organizing body the Burning Man Project (BMP) communicates, Burning Man is not a "festival." In response to the controversial increase of convenience, or "plug-n-play," camping in breach of a core participatory ethos, and via efforts in "preserving and protecting the values that set us apart from mainstream culture," the BMP has been vociferous in attempting to distinguish Burning Man from mass-produced events, notably commercial music and dance festivals.¹² In his roving discourse on the philosophy of Burning Man, Caveat Magister insists that "Burning Man spaces" are not "consequence-free entertainment venues" but spaces of "applied existentialism" compelling participants to make meaningful collaborations and build authentic communities.¹³ Importantly, this community thrives on the tensions that run through its core.

Tension is embedded in the bricks and DNA of Burning Man, as is the clear belief, demonstrated through practice, that properly handled creative tension enhances culture.... Much of the joy that people find in this environment comes from their unique inspirations and their unique humanity bouncing into one another in unexpected ways.¹⁴

The position echoes the views of primary founder Larry Harvey, who returned repeatedly to the point that paradox is the engine that powers the potential of Burning Man. As Harvey communicated in an email to the author (weeks before he succumbed to the effects of a stroke):

The commonest form of festival, at least in America, is a commercial music festival. We don't want to be conflated with that, and most contemporary festivals are choked with commerce. We hardly fit this model ... and it is a rare festival indeed that aspires to effect world culture, that sees itself as an agent of change. I suppose we think of our event as something more than spectacle and entertainment, and do not want to be confused with the Iowa State Hog Festival (though we do love bacon).¹⁵

The comment arose in the context of an exchange about "why," as I put it to Harvey, "this festival isn't a festival." His response reflected on the absence of commercial sponsorship, and on the fact that, consistent with the principle of *Decommodification*, there is no vender marketplace in BRC—although, as has been cogently argued, BRC cannot exist beyond commerce.¹⁶ Although ethnographic comparisons are scarce, Burning Man deviates from other events to which the "transformational" label has been applied—many featuring marketplaces and lacking the "applied existentialism" that provokes "do-ocratic"¹⁷ outcomes.

Transformational festivals are manifold. Rainbow Gatherings, UK Free Festivals, Australia's ConFest, Germany's Fusion, and Portugal's Boom, along with many events deemed "transformational" in North America and around the world, from Lucidity in California to Tribal Gathering in Panama, are models for conscious living informed by post-1960s adaptations of

Emancipatory Illuminations from
Burning Man," *Journal of Con-
sumer Research* 29, no. 1 (2002):
20–38.

17. Katherine K. Chen, *Enabling
Creative Chaos: The Organization
behind the Burning Man Event*
(Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 2009), 55.

18. See Jemayel Khawaja, "Sym-
biosis Gathering Co-Owner Wants
to Ditch the Term 'Transformational
Festival,'" *VICE*, September
10, 2016, [https://www.vice.com/
en_us/article/8q7mek/symbio-
sis-gathering-2016-interview](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8q7mek/symbiosis-gathering-2016-interview).

19. Kitt Doucette, "7 Wildest
Transformational Festivals: From
Burning Man to Shambhala
Gathering," *Rolling Stone*, May 11,
2016, [https://www.rollingstone.
com/culture/culture-lists/7-wild-
est-transformational-festi-
vals-68486/](https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-lists/7-wild-est-transformational-festivals-68486/).

20. B. Joseph Pine II and James
H. Gilmore, *The Experience
Economy: Work Is Theatre and
Every Business a Stage* (Boston:
Harvard Business School Press,
1999).

21. The Ten Principles are *Radical
Inclusion, Gifting, Decommod-
ification, Radical Self-reliance,
Radical Self-expression, Com-
munal Effort, Civic Responsibility,
Leaving No Trace, Participation,
and Immediacy* (for an expla-
nation of each, see [https://
burningman.org/culture/philoso-
phical-center/10-principles](https://burningman.org/culture/philosophical-center/10-principles),
accessed May 7, 2019). In this
article, all principles are capital-
ized and italicized.

22. Chris Rojek, "Leaderless
Organization, World Historical

the *rites of passage* model. Intentionally responsive to a convolution of modern crises (from ecological to existential), they are designed to orchestrate transition. Each instance features a unique weave of liminal characteristics animated by diverse movements, seeding hybrid cultures. Evolving in recurrent events optimized over seasons and through the decades, emergent event cultures are hyperliminal vehicles for conduct that can be revolutionary and recreational, leisurely and spiritual, celebratory and activist.

The "transformational festival" label is debated among eventgoers and within event organizations.¹⁸ Chief among concerns is the superficiality presumed to adhere to a label glossed in *Rolling Stone* and other publications promoting hyperindividualist event "bucket lists."¹⁹ The promotion of consumer transformation in such lists is not far removed from the "produced experience" that arrives complete with product interaction and customized outcomes thought integral to the "experience economy."²⁰ If we recognize concurrently that the transformative experience is typically offered to affluent white event tourists, some entertaining neoprimitivist sensibilities, "transformation" appears to be shaped by race and class privilege. *Radical Self-expression and Radical Self-reliance*—among the Ten Principles of Burning Man²¹—appear to be codifications of privileged white individualism. And yet, since Burning Man also codes values in eight other principles, including *Gifting, Decommodification, and Communal Effort*, a nuanced framework is necessary. As signaled by its paradoxical ethos, the "transformational" profile of Burning Man is complicated—a circumstance neglected by critics and exponents alike. For instance, while Rojek has argued that Burning Man is the "modern equivalent of fiddling while Rome burns,"²² that analysis founders on an oversimplified formulation that is bereft of empirical insight. On the other hand, although Burning Man is celebrated by other commentators as the festive front of the human potential movement, the approach is reductionist. For example, while Burning Man is imagined as a transmodern platform for consciousness evolution through self-actualization,²³ it is irreducible to the objectives of transpersonal psychology. Burning Man may be an "optimally situated environment for reflexive self-discovery,"²⁴ but self-transformation under extreme physical conditions cannot be accomplished without cooperation with others.

Although events can be labeled, and self-identify, as "transformational," their complex charter, and schizoid aesthetics, is routinely neglected. This is partially attributable to an essentializing tendency in Victor Turner's influential conceptualization of social liminality: *communitas*. Notably deployed in pilgrimage studies, *communitas* glosses over the agonistic sociality in sacred destinations among habitués jostling for control over meaning, resources, and space. If a pilgrimage destination is considered a "realm of competing discourse"²⁵ as much as—or more than—a "realm of pure possibility,"²⁶ such contestation is heightened in festivals and gatherings that become *transformational* destinations for eventgoers who behave like pilgrims. If BRC and other events like Glastonbury Festival are populated by disparate stakeholders contesting the significance of the event, such complexity is elided in approaches desiring to capture *the* experience purportedly intrinsic to an event. For example, despite claims that Burning Man is a performance culture with "multiple meanings," one study pursues "the Burner experience," and even imagines a "six-stage" rite of passage "that an individual may go through on their journey from spectator to participant."²⁷

Burning Man commenced in 1986 when Larry Harvey and Jerry James torched an eight-foot effigy on Baker Beach, San Francisco, at summer solstice. When authorities intervened to

Events and Their Contradictions:
The 'Burning Man City' Case,"
Cultural Sociology 8, no. 3 (2014):
361.

23. David L. Bottorff, "Emerging
Influence of Transmodernism
and Transpersonal Psychology
Reflected in Rising Popularity of
Transformational Festivals," *Jour-
nal of Spirituality in Mental Health*
17, no. 1 (2015): 50–74.

24. Jeremy Hockett, "Participant
Observation and the Study of
Self: Burning Man as Ethno-
graphic Experience," in *AfterBurn:
Reflections on Burning Man*, ed.
Lee Gilmore and Mark Van Proyen
(Albuquerque: University of New
Mexico Press, 2005), 76.

25. John Eade and Michael J. Sall-
now, "Introduction," in *Contesting
the Sacred: The Anthropology of
Christian Pilgrimage*, ed. John
Eade and Michael J. Sallnow
(London: Routledge, 1991), 5.

26. Turner's description of liminal-
ity in Victor Turner, "Betwixt and
Between: The Liminal Period in
Rites de Passage," in *The Forest
of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu
Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univer-
sity Press, 1967), 97.

27. Wendy Clupper, "Burning Man:
Festival Culture in the United
States, Festival Culture in a Global
Perspective," in *Festivalising!
Theatrical Events, Politics and
Culture*, ed. Temple Hauptfleisch,
Shulamith Lev-Aladgem, Jacque-
line Martin, Willmar Sauter, and
Henri Schoenmakers (New York:
Rodopi, 2007), 237, 230.

28. Kevin Evans, Carrie Galbraith,
and John Law, *Tales of the San
Francisco Cacophony Society*

prevent the annual burning of "the Man" in 1990, the San Francisco Cacophony Society invited Harvey to burn the effigy in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, the subsequent stage for the annual reenactment of a theater of creative destruction. Historically, Burning Man is nurtured by a vast cultural mycelium. While its immediate background is apparent in the Dadaist and prankster eventalism of the Cacophony Society,²⁸ deeper roots lie in West Coast North American freak and festival culture,²⁹ other utopian experiments in California and elsewhere,³⁰ the "metaphysical America" percolating in Chautauquas dating back to the nineteenth century,³¹ and a frontier settlement legacy integral to the American character.³²

While ethnographies of Burning Man are quick to observe a transformative logic in its design, commentators struggle to parse the tensions fueling its aesthetic. In her monograph on ritualization at Burning Man, Lee Gilmore³³ explored how the rites of passage model, with its tripartite phases of transition (Arnold van Gennep adapted by Turner)³⁴ permeates the phenomenon. Seemingly hewn from this model, Burning Man is consciously transitional. The model has clearly influenced the artistic direction of BRC. For example, a little over a century after the original publication of Van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* (1909), the 2011 BRC art theme was "Rites of Passage." In recognition of the criticisms leveled at Turner, Gilmore is nevertheless cautious to adopt a template. There can be no singular passage transpiring among the "spiritual but not religious" who gravitate to this dusty expanse. As for "the Man," the eponymous effigy embodies an interpretative free-for-all encouraged by the BMP. The Man is, if anything, a symbol of hyper-reflexivity.

Figure 1. Burning Man, Black Rock Desert, 1990. Photo by Danger Ranger. Source: Burning Man Project.

(San Francisco: Last Gasp Publishing, 2013).

29. Erik Davis, "Beyond Belief: The Cults of Burning Man," in *Afterburn: Reflections on Burning Man*, 15–40; Erik Davis, *The Visionary State: A Journey through California's Spiritual Landscape* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), and *Tribal Revival: West Coast Festival Culture* (San Francisco: Lovelution Press, 2009).

30. Rachel Bowditch, *On the Edge of Utopia: Performance and Ritual at Burning Man* (London: Seagull Books, 2010), chapter 2; Kerry Rohrmeier and Paul Starrs, "The Paradoxical Black Rock City: All Cities Are Mad," *Geographical Review* 104, no. 2 (2014): 153–73.

31. Sarah M. Pike, "Desert Goddesses and Apocalyptic Art: Making Sacred Space at the Burning Man Festival," in *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture*, ed. Eric Mazur and Kate McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2001), 155–76.

32. Ronnie Diehl, "The American Frontier in Acoustic Space" (MA thesis, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2010).

33. Lee Gilmore, *Theater in a Crowded Fire: Ritual and Spirituality at the Burning Man Festival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

34. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

While identified as transformational, or a "transformational space,"³⁵ this status is compounded by a phenomenon in possession of multiple identities. Burning Man is a unique space (the Black Rock Desert plays³⁶); a festive fire-arts gathering with distinct burn rituals; a temporary settlement (Black Rock City, 2019 pop. 80,000); a nonprofit organization (the Burning Man Project, which transitioned from an LLC in 2014); a global cultural movement (with a network of more than ninety official Regional Events in over thirty-five countries); and a land steward (owner of Fly Ranch, Nevada).³⁷ Adding to this imbroglio, Burning Man is animated by the Ten Principles—the replicable and mutable DNA of Burning Man.

Burning Man Project's purpose is to uphold and manifest the values described in the Ten Principles of Burning Man.

1 Radical Inclusion

Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.

2 Gifting

Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value.

3 Decommodification

In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.

4 Radical Self-reliance

Burning Man encourages the individual to discover, exercise and rely on his or her inner resources.

5 Radical Self-expression

Radical self-expression arises from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.

6 Communal Effort

Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction.

7 Civic Responsibility

We value civil society. Community members who organize events should assume responsibility for public welfare and endeavor to communicate civic responsibilities to participants. They must also assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with local, state and federal laws.

8 Leaving No Trace

Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather. We clean up after ourselves and endeavor, whenever possible, to leave such places in a better state than when we found them.

9 Participation

Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play. We make the world real through actions that open the heart.

10 Immediacy

Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most important touchstone of value in our culture. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, the reality of those around us, participation in society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers. No idea can substitute for this experience.

Figure 2. The Ten Principles of Burning Man. Source: Burning Man Project..

35. See Denise Nicole Green and Susan B. Kaiser, "From Ephemeral to Everyday Costuming: Negotiations in Masculine Identities at the Burning Man Project," *Dress* 34, no. 1 (2011): 1–22.

36. Graham St John, "At Home in the Big Empty: Burning Man and the Playa Sublime," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 13, no. 3 (2019): 286–313.

37. Further dimensions include the virtual, represented by forums such as eplaya.burningman.org and social media. One notable development is *Burn2* (formerly *Burning Life*) a "virtual playa" created in 2003 by Philip (Linden) Rosedale within the virtual world of *Second Life* and promoted as "an officially sanctioned Burning Man Regional," <https://www.burn2.org/>.

38. Michael Ventimiglia, "A Tale of Two (Impossible) Cities: Plato's Republic and Black Rock City, NV," *The Towner*, June 8, 2016, <http://www.thetowner.com/two-impossible-cities/>.

39. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," trans. Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene, in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (New York: Routledge, 2008), 16. The text was originally published in French as "Des Espace Autres," *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, no. 5 (October 1984): 46–49. It was first translated into English as "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–7. The version cited throughout this article is "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 13–29.

This background shows that Burning Man is a complex evental phenomenon (and more than simply an event). Heterotopology, as we will see, lends weight to this analysis while highlighting a simple fact: BRC is a potent threshold. In response to rebukes that BRC is unsustainable beyond its eight days of operation, as Michael Ventimiglia has related, it is not intended to be a more permanent social order: "Its purpose is to provide perspective on this order, to carve an exceptional space from which this order can be reimagined." In pushing the imagination, not unlike Plato's Republic, Burning Man serves to "awaken us to our own potentialities."³⁸

Transformational Event Heterotopology

Due to its shifting and piecemeal figuration, Foucault's "heterotopia" is an enduring source of misunderstanding among scholars. Shaped by material originally presented on a radio show on December 7, 1966, the concept became the subject of the lecture "Of other spaces" delivered in the spring of 1967 to the Cercle d'études architecturales (Circle of Architectural Studies) in Paris. In this lecture, Foucault expressed an interest in sites that have the "curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations designated, mirrored, or reflected by them."³⁹ Foucault sought to distinguish between two types of such prismatic sites. The first were "emplacements with no real place"—that is, "utopias," which are "emplacements that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. It is society itself perfected, or else it is society turned upside down." By contrast, there are real places "that are a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted." He referred to these sites as "absolutely other than all the emplacements that they reflect."⁴⁰ Amid a playful narrative, Foucault addressed various examples of heterotopias—including the cemetery, garden, museum, prison, festival, ship—that elicited some or all of six "principles" (discussed below).

While inspiring interdisciplinary scholarship, the notion of heterotopia is plagued by incoherence and inconsistency,⁴¹ resulting in confusion and bewilderment.⁴² It has been remarked that a multiplicity of meanings renders heterotopia "an essentially ambivalent and radically open concept associated generically to exception and abnormality."⁴³ A liberal romantic tendency, notably in the wake of Edward Soja's transcendent "thirdspace,"⁴⁴ sees the concept deployed as a sign of the spatial resistance possible within postmodernity. As Heidi Sohn argues, heterotopia appears to represent for many "the only realizable space of material and social possibility: the virtual possibility of a space of openness, and of radical social transformation." This tendency to treat "all spaces and human groups that deviate from the established order as potentially subversive, challenging and resistant formations, and hence reading into them all sorts of positive, utopian transformative powers endowed by their liminality" fails to understand a formulation intended to destabilize discourse and which defies clarity, logic, and order.⁴⁵ As a further and not unrelated problem, given its inherent ambiguity and rolling conflation of significance, the concept could be applied to almost any space, from Viennese Gardens⁴⁶ to Zapitista spatial politics,⁴⁷ Facebook,⁴⁸ video games,⁴⁹ and "ostalgic" sites.⁵⁰

Compounding matters, in the original usage—in the preface to *The Order of Things*⁵¹—Foucault's heterotopias are literary depictions of space, not actual sociocultural spaces. In an attempt to formulate "a unified theory of the heterotopia," notably through Foucault's reading of Maurice

40. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 16.
41. Benjamin Genocchio, "Dis-course, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of 'Other Spaces,'" in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 35–46.
42. Peter Johnson, "The Geographies of Heterotopia," *Geography Compass* 7, no. 11 (2013): 790–803.
43. Heidi Sohn, "Heterotopia: Anamnesis of a Medical Term," in *Heterotopia and the City*, 41–50; 46.
44. Edward J. Soja, "Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in the Citadel-LA," in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, 13–34.
45. Sohn, "Heterotopia," 48.
46. Robert Rotenberg, *Landscape and Power in Vienna* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
47. Anthony Faramelli, "Mirror Masks: The Political Space of Zapatismo," in *Spaces of Crisis and Critique: Heterotopias beyond Foucault*, ed. Anthony Faramelli, David Hancock, and Robert G. White (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 131–52.
48. Robin Rymarczuk and Maarten Derksen, "Different Spaces: Exploring Facebook as Heterotopia," *First Monday* 19, no. 6 (June 2014), <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i6.5006>.
49. rhetoricalquestions, "Video Games as Heterotopias: On

Blanchot, where "the simultaneous presence of incompatible descriptions of space...negate each other, completely effacing the possibility of the space that is ostensibly described," Kelvin Knight concludes that the term was "never intended as a tool for the study of real material sites."⁵² And yet, if heterotopia signifies "a set of literary motifs used by writers to present an alternative configuration of space,"⁵³ texts *do* shape the way space is conceived, mapped, and occupied. This is most notable in theater—thought to be "the heterotopia par excellence"⁵⁴—but also in games, festivals, and other scripted events that blur the lines of myth and reality in the configuration of space. As performance frameworks that serve to disturb the fixed and the finished, the spaces of theater and festival are vehicles for an imaginary that retains the heuristic potential of heterotopia as discontinuous and unsettling. In the case of the experimental space of BRC and its progeny, we observe an unparalleled play space where the borderland between fantasy and reality is remarkably fuzzy.

The congruence of heterotopia with play space is apt when returning to the original 1966 radio show in which Foucault adopted "the tone of an old traveller telling children amusing stories about the marvelous places he has visited."⁵⁵ Before turning to the "counter-spaces" that adults invent and which gave him pause "to dream of a science that would take for its object these absolutely 'other' spaces," Foucault touched on "localized utopias" of which "children know very well."

They lie at the bottom of the garden, up in the attic, or in the parents' great bed. In this bed a child can discover the ocean by swimming between the covers or the sky by bouncing on the springs and leaping into the air; the great bed becomes a forest where one can hide or a zone of titillating pleasure because the child knows that punishment will follow when the parents return.⁵⁶

While the parallel with Johan Huizinga's spaces of play is noteworthy,⁵⁷ Foucault's original playful oratory carries over into his account of heterotopia. The oratory is charged with the impulsive, the improvisatory, and the "carefree gaiety" characteristic of "paidia," which Roger Cailliois⁵⁸ contrasts with the discipline of "ludus." While named as such, the themes Foucault presented are thereby tentatively "principles."

It has been suggested that heterotopia is best understood as both empirical *and* conceptual. Using another of Foucault's terms, as a kind of *dispositif*, Peter Johnson writes that heterotopian space "combines method and object, generating new effects, experiences, openings and dangers." It encourages sites "to be used as a starting point for research as both a conceptual method and object; it helps disrupt established thought, practice and human subjectivities; it resists the settling of binary thinking; and it assists in formulating new relationships and alliances."⁵⁹ An influential treatment is found in *The Badlands of Modernity*, where Kevin Hetherington refigures Foucault on heterotopia and Louis Marin on "utopics" to provide a nuanced exploration of modernity's spaces of "alternate ordering."⁶⁰ Accommodating a unique mix of rational debate and hedonistic pleasures, the Palais Royal of eighteenth-century Paris is regarded as one of the first sites for the expression of "the utopics of modernity, the ambivalent interplay of freedom and control."⁶¹ The Palais Royal, along with other spaces like the Masonic lodge and the factory are considered to have "acted as obligatory points of passage, in producing a spatiality that expressed the utopic ideas of freedom and order through which we might begin to understand modernity."⁶² Akin to "laboratories," these

Magic Circles and Other Spaces,"
posted on rhetoricalquestions,
February 28, 2016, [https://
rhetoricalquestions2016.
wordpress.com/2016/02/28/
video-games-as-heterotopi-
as-on-magic-circles-and-oth-
er-spaces/](https://rhetoricalquestions2016.wordpress.com/2016/02/28/video-games-as-heterotopias-on-magic-circles-and-other-spaces/).

50. Petr Gibas and Blanka Nyk-
lová, "Staying in a Fallout Shelter:
Exploring Ostalgia Through
Post-Socialist Heterotopia,"
Cultural Geographies, 26, no. 4
(2019): 519–26.

51. Michel Foucault, *The Order of
Things* (Andover: Tavistock, 1970
[1966]).

52. Kelvin T. Knight, "Placeless
Places: Resolving the Paradox of
Foucault's Heterotopia," *Textual
Practice*, 31, no. 1 (2017): 141–58;
155, 154, 142.

53. Ibid, 147.

54. Lieven De Cauter and Michiel
Dehaene, "The Space of Play:
Towards a General Theory of
Heterotopia," in *Heterotopia and
the City*, 87–102; 94.

55. From De Cauter and
Dehaene's introductory notes
to Foucault, "Of Other Spaces
(1967)," 13.

56. Christine M. Boyer, "The Many
Mirrors of Foucault and Their
Architectural Reflections," in
Heterotopia and the City, 53–74;
54, 53.

57. See De Cauter and Dehaene,
"The Space of Play."

58. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and
Games*, trans. Meyer Barash
(Urbana: University of Illinois
Press, 2001 [1958]), 13.

heterotopias are conceptualized as experimental sites for ordering society. This research recognizes sites through which social and cultural order—the utopics of modernity—is performed, with Hetherington remarking that heterotopia is "a process rather than a thing."⁶³ Building on this approach and exploring heterotopia as a "technique," Joanne Tompkins addresses "theatre heterotopia" in which actual and conjured locations coexist. Contemporary theater serves as a "laboratory in which other spaces—and therefore other possibilities for socio-political alternatives to the existing order—can be performed."⁶⁴

Amid ongoing interpretative labors, ethnographers have paid closer attention to the heterotopic formulation of events, and notably festivals as sites that facilitate transformations in time, space, and culture.⁶⁵ In a comparative study of rural folk festivals—Sidmouth Folk Week in southern England and Feakle Traditional Music Festival in western Ireland—Bernadette Quinn and Linda Wilks sought to shape a coherent theoretical framework for festival analysis, embracing Foucault's ideas to form "principles" of "festival heterotopia."⁶⁶

The study of festive heterotopias nevertheless remains fragmentary, with event cultures pursuing conscious transformational agendas receiving limited critical attention. What "transformation" is implied for participants of populous large-scale events claiming inclusivity and featuring heterogeneous alterity remains largely undocumented. While such events are noticeably "utopian" in intent, their utopics are typically multidimensional and paradoxical. In an early investigation of the multiplicity native to transformational events, the author undertook field research at an alternative-lifestyle gathering.⁶⁷ In that study, "heterotopia" was devised to elucidate how stakeholders in an authenticity conflict mobilized to articulate competing versions of the event, and how the event community sought to resolve tensions over its contested significance. The hyperliminal character of transformational events was further explored in a study of psychedelic trance events. An experimental environment for disparate conduct, Portugal's Boom Festival was observed to juxtapose the transgressive and progressive inclinations of eventgoers,⁶⁸ with Boom illustrating the complex liminal aesthetics of psytrance.⁶⁹ In further research, rave, techno, and other dance music events illustrated that the socio-aesthetic of the "vibe" endogenous to these event cultures is shaped by differential modes of responsibility.⁷⁰ While competing modes of liminal being may cause anxieties, both internal to events and in their external reception, successful events provide participants access to diverse "transformative" repertoires. Rather than dismissing events and their communities as suffering from irresolvable contradictions, irreconcilable differences, or crippling paradox, a more assiduous approach recognizes that events are shaped by a diversity of movement agendas.

In Quinn and Wilks's analysis of folk festivals, "transformation" (and thus heterotopia) is ultimately synonymous with the regeneration of social order and revitalization of identity. Transformation has a different valence in events consciously identifying with a "transformational" zeitgeist. Often identifying as "gatherings" and not "festivals," operating independently from commercial, political, and religious agendas, such events are typically managed by nonprofit and cooperative organizations with a strong volunteer base. Such event communities have solid roots in alternative culture movements, nurture grassroots media and communications departments, and encourage nonconfrontational community mediation. Heterotopology illuminates this evental development, notably in relation to the polydimensional, paradoxical, and indeterminate character of "transformation."

59. Johnson, "The Geographies of Heterotopia," 800.

60. Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (Routledge: London, 1997); Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (London: Macmillan, 1984).

61. Hetherington, *Badlands of Modernity*, 17.

62. Ibid, 12–13.

63. Ibid, ix.

64. Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (Sydney: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6. The figuration of heterotopias as spaces, methods, and technologies of performance grows apparent in wide-ranging research, including that conducted on "performance heterotopias" like those manifesting as national incidents morphing into media events that were integral to the bicentennial re-imagining of Chile. Néstor Bravo Goldsmith, "Heterotopias of Power: Miners, Mapuche, and Soldiers in the Production of the Utopian Chile," in *Performing Utopia*, ed. Rachel Bowditch and Pegge Vissicaro (London: Seagull Books, 2018), 223–58.

65. See Graham St John, "Alternative Cultural Heterotopia and the Liminoid Body: Beyond Turner at ConFest," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (2001): 47–66; Neil Ravenscroft and Xavier Matteucci, "The Festival as Carnavalesque: Social Governance and Control at Pamplona's San Fermin Fiestas," *Tourism*,

To assist comprehension of the paradoxical aesthetic of Burning Man, I now attempt to navigate a path informed by Foucault's six "principles of heterotopia." These spatial characteristics include universality, mutability, heterogeneity, heterochronicity, zonality, and reflexivity. Each is addressed in the following. While not deployed to provide a comprehensive map of the burner mosaic, heterotopia does offer a language with which to navigate the Burning Man labyrinth. At the same time, this interpretation and adaptation of Foucault's text helps reshape heuristics—notably *liminality*—useful to the study of events and festivals.

Hyperliminality

While heterotopias are "constant in every human group," Foucault postulated that they are varied, stating that "perhaps one would not find one single form of heterotopia that is absolutely universal." That said, in an approach both revealing and wanting, "two major types" are entertained. The first, common to "primitive" societies, are "heterotopias of crisis," said to be "privileged, or sacred, or forbidden" places for individuals in a state of social crisis such as adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, and the elderly.⁷¹ Here, Foucault identifies those spaces integral to passage rites, also known as "life crisis" rituals. While these "crisis" spaces are said to be disappearing in the modern era, boarding rooms and honeymoon hotels are named as nondomestic sites of sexual encounter in the modern coming-of-age process. The second category of these spaces are "heterotopias of deviation," such as psychiatric hospitals, prisons, and rest homes.⁷² This sketch foreshadows Foucault's obsession with cartographies of power, and specifically, carceral technologies for the mad, sick, criminal, and perverse. Despite its offhand style, the approach denotes the universality of what Van Gennep understood as the "liminal" phase of rites of passage—from the Latin *limen*, or threshold—extrapolated by Turner as "liminality,"⁷³ the interstitial aesthetic of ritual, theater, carnival, pilgrimage, games, and cultural celebrations. Even though Foucault offered little direct contribution to the theory of ritual, public events, and event spaces, this fleeting attestation of the foremost "principle" of heterotopia conveys an understanding of the panhuman status of passage rites. This is important, given that the anthropology and sociology of events is indebted to the study of ritualized transition. Getz based his "model of the planned event experience"⁷⁴—foundational to event studies—largely on the rites of passage model. More importantly, the approach forecasts a nonessentialist attitude towards liminality, which appears suffused with ambivalence. Single events, notably festivals, are invariably messy and indeterminate. Such is known to festival scholars, for whom seasonally recurrent events possess a range of liminal modalities, the complex variations of which constitute an event's distinct "morphology."⁷⁵ That festivals typically interweave ritualesque and carnivalesque⁷⁶ elements is germane to their aesthetic. As has been concluded, festivals "bring together multiplicity, particularly conflicting and oppositional ideas, in order to create potential. The outcome, however, is ambiguous and not predetermined."⁷⁷ Tracing the complex spatial contours of the liminal, heterotopia evokes an uncertain threshold.

From Beach to Burnerverse

Referring to the second "principle" of heterotopia, Foucault stated that "in the course of its history...a society can make a heterotopia that exists, and has not ceased to exist, function in a very different way."⁷⁸ Evental heterotopias alter their purpose or attract complementary or competing significance over time. Foucault offered the example of the cemetery, which until the

Culture and Communication 4, no. 1 (2003): 1–15; Defne Karaosmanoglu, "Nostalgic Spaces of Consumption and Heterotopia: Ramadan Festivities in Istanbul," *Culture Unbound* 2 (2010): 283–302; Mahmoud Yazbak, "The Muslim Festival of Nabi Rubin in Palestine: From Religious Festival to Summer Resort," *Holy Land Studies* 10, no. 2 (2011): 169–98; Francesca C. Howell, "Sense of Place, Heterotopia, and Community: Performing Land and Folding Time in the Badalisc Festival of Northern Italy," *Folklore* 124 (2013): 45–63; Nadeem Karkabi, "Staging Particular Difference: Politics of Space in the Palestinian Alternative Music Scene," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 6 (2013): 308–28; Jorge Pérez Falconi, "The Festivals Internacional de Teatro de la Habana (FITH) and the Festival of Mexico (fmx): Between Place and Placelessness," *Lat. Am. Theatre Rev.* 48 (2014): 181–93; Lindiwe Dovey and Federico Olivieri, "Festivals and the Politics of Space and Mobility: The Tarifa/Cordoba African Film Festival (FCAT) as Nomadic Heterotopia," *Screen* 56, no. 1 (2015), 142–48.

66. Bernadette Quinn and Linda L. Wilks, "Festival Heterotopias: Spatial and Temporal Transformations in Two Small-Scale Settlements," *Journal of Rural Studies* 53 (2017): 35–44.

67. St John, "Alternative Cultural Heterotopia."

68. Graham St John, "The Logics of Sacrifice at Visionary Arts Festivals," in *The Festivalisation of Culture*, ed. Andy Bennett, Jodie Taylor, and Ian Woodward (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 49–68.

end of the eighteenth century was positioned in the heart of the city, next to the church. Over time, in response to hygiene concerns, cemeteries became marginal "other cities" peripheral to population centers. Events, notably festivals, similarly change their function over time. More specifically, as events attract multiple meanings their purpose grows mixed, with different, sometimes competing, purposes coinciding or predominating at different times.

Figure 3. Zone Trip #4—Bad Day at Black Rock. T-Shirt design by Sebastian Hyde and Kevin Evans.

Since its inception in 1986, Burning Man has mutated dramatically. In the first five years, crowds gravitated to an enflamed wooden effigy dubbed "The Man" on summer solstice at San Francisco's Baker Beach in visual proximity of the iconic Golden Gate Bridge. The nonpermitted ritual was repeated and the population expanded annually until police prevented the torching of the effigy in 1990. That year, Harvey and his friends were invited to burn an effigy in Nevada's Black Rock Desert playa as part of "Zone Trip #4: Bad Day at Black Rock" organized by the Cacophony Society⁷⁹ (fig. 3). This flat, two-hundred-square-mile expanse refreshes seasonally as mountain runoff evaporates, exposing a plane of encrusted white dust. The harsh conditions of this playa became the context in which a community of artists reassembled a settlement that by 1996 had a total population of eight thousand (by 2017, eighty thousand). Over three decades, the weeklong event over Labor Day attracted a growing population from locations across North America and around the world—a population that, under the guidance of the BMP, formed a network of Regional Events. Speaking to this cultural mobilization, Harvey announced

69. Graham St John, *Global Tribe: Technology, Spirituality and Psytrance* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2012).

70. Graham St John, *Technomad: Global Raving Countercultures* (London: Equinox, 2009).

71. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 18.

72. Ibid.

73. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

74. Donald Getz, *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007), 170; Donald Getz, "Event Studies: Discourses and Future Directions," *Event Management* 16, no. 2 (2012): 171–87.

75. Alessandro Falassi, *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

76. Jack Santino, "From Carnivalesque to Ritualesque: Public Ritual and the Theater of the Street," in *Public Performances: Studies in the Carnivalesque and Ritualesque*, ed. Jack Santino (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2017), 3–15.

77. Lisa Gabbert, "American Festival and Folk Drama," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Folklore and Folklife Studies*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 283.

78. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 18.

79. Evans et al., *Tales of the San*

in 2000 that "we are no longer staging an event; we're coordinating a global community."⁸⁰ Over three decades, the phenomenon mutated from a small beach burn into a fire-arts gathering, and from a temporary desert city to a global cultural movement. Through the cultivation of the Ten Principles in a transnational network, and in offshoot events like Washington DC's Catharsis on the Mall,⁸¹ the liminal culture of Burning Man has transmigrated far from its marginal roots.

Frontier Carnival

The third characteristic emphasizes composite and incongruous spatial elements. In gardens, Oriental carpets, theater, and cinemas, heterotopia are said to be capable of "juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are themselves incompatible."⁸² Hetherington notably writes that heterotopias are contexts for "unsettling juxtapositions of incommensurate 'objects' which challenge the way we think."⁸³ Monstrous incongruities may appear in these preposterous spaces since the internal organization of "texts" and "objects" derives from similitude rather than resemblance. "Like a collage," heterotopia "brings forward the out-of-place and offers it up as a basis for alternative perspectives and orderings, revealing what is hidden among the ruins: little fragments of past, forgotten lives, found objects, strange, unsettling novel things that have a poetic wonder about them."⁸⁴ Istanbul's Sultanahmet, notably during the festival of Ramadan, is regarded in one study as a heterotopic space where Islamicist and secular discourses, the global and local, East and West, interface, and "where a utopian future is inscribed."⁸⁵ Spectacular concurrences like this are believed to be pivotal to tolerance and diversity in a multi-religious state. In commentary on the "multidirectionality" of the Festival Internacional de Teatro de La Habana and the Festival de México, arts and theater festivals in Mexico and Cuba are said to "juxtapose one and many spaces, real and unreal, normal and extraordinary, chaotic and ordered."⁸⁶ Embodying the ambivalence native to heterotopias, while these festivals are appraised as standardized and "placeless," they nevertheless enable the celebration of local cultures and places.

Black Rock City has attracted a whirlwind of signs spiraling like dust devils around its *axis mundi*. From its inception, a surrealist impulse for adventure and unpredictability reigned, a legacy of the Dadaesque Cacophonists. But in repeated installments on-playa, the reproduction of chaos necessitated planning and organizational management—a form of governance. Sometimes symbiotic, other times tense, these ludic and civic tendencies have interfaced to shape an immediate civilization recurring in an unforgiving natural theater. A hard-won confluence of licentiousness and pragmatism underlies the freak logic of this strange flowering in the void.

By 1996, participants were privileged to a "drive-by shooting range," a rough satellite conurbation of rave camps called the Techno Ghetto, Pepe Ozan's Desert Opera, and extreme artworks destined for the flame—not least of all "The Man," whose dimensions expanded each year in relative proportion to event population. Anxieties grew over increased media coverage. Concerns were lodged about the proliferation of "frat boys," "ravers," and other predators thought to extract more from the experience than they contributed. At the same time, there were anxious reactions to the formation of a managerial class and concerns about elitism. Camps formed around divergent philosophies and visions. While for defenders the event would expand in perpetuity, others believed it had a use-by date. BRC had become the urbanity they had sought to escape. A divide separated managers (led by Harvey) seeking legitimacy, from detractors (notably,

Francisco Cacophony Society.

80. Larry Harvey, "La Vie Boheme: A History of Burning Man," lecture at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, February 24, 2000, <https://burningman.org/culture/philosophical-center/founders-voices/larry-harveys-writings/la-vie-boheme/>.

81. Graham St John, "The Cultural Heroes of Do-ocracy: Burning Man, Catharsis on the Mall and Caps of Liberty," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 15, no. 1 (2019), <http://liminalities.net/15-1/burning.pdf>.

82. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 19.

83. Hetherington, *Badlands of Modernity*, 42.

84. Ibid, 50.

85. Karaosmanoglu, "Nostalgic Spaces," 297.

86. Falconi, "The Festivals," 191.

87. Hakim Bey, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone—Ontological Anarchy and Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991).

88. Larry Harvey, "How the West Was Won: Anarchy Vs. Civic Responsibility," *Burning Man Journal*, November 12, 2013, <http://journal.burningman.org/2013/11/philosophical-center/tenprinciples/how-the-west-was-won-anarchy-vs-civic-responsibility>.

89. Brian Doherty, *This Is Burning Man: The Rise of a New American Underground* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2006), 105.

Burning Man co-founder John Law) relishing impermanence. The former vision necessitated a legal entity (i.e., Black Rock City LLC, founded in 1999), a formal staff structure with operation manuals, financial oversight, health and safety planning, insurance, dialogue with county sheriffs and the permit-issuing Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and media liaison protocols. The latter camp required that Burning Man remain clandestine and, not unlike the concept of the "temporary autonomous zone" (TAZ),⁸⁷ vanish. While the event *would* indeed vanish on a seasonal basis, the conviction here was to resist formalization, incorporation, spectacularization.

Tensions flared in 1996 when the first annual art theme—"The Inferno"—dramatized the corporate takeover of Burning Man. As Harvey explained, the theme "substituted corporate-induced consumerism for metaphysical evil."⁸⁸ Evoking anxieties over corruption and the "selling out" of the community "to large, sinister, forces,"⁸⁹ the theme invited manifold interpretations. As the character based on Law (Moustachio) performing in the stage play *How to Survive the Apocalypse*,⁹⁰ announced:

Culture dies the moment you name it
The moment you tie it down
You are building another cage here
Another scam for another age here
Another spectacular con
But the Cacophony is gone.

In a nod to Guy Debord, Law admonished the event for having become a spectacle, far removed from its roots in the Cacophony Society. For Harvey, however, "The Inferno" strengthened community—and indeed, forged a movement—in the face of commodification. Burning Man rose from the ashes. As the character based on Harvey (Stetson) would expound in the same stage play:

We are giving light to culture
Thousands will hear the call
If we build the man, they will come
If we burn the man
Then everyone will see the smoke.

That the vast playa could be a "world of discipline or emancipation, resistance or sedation"⁹¹ illustrates the aporia that heterotopias often generate.

Arguably, with each passing year, Burning Man had become a controlled event. Early participants sought freedom from depredations by the state, religion, and media—liberties inherent to the principle of *Radical Self-reliance* in which the individual is encouraged "to discover, exercise and rely on his or her inner resources." But as Harvey recalled, "slowly, step-by-step, circumstances drove us to invent a government."⁹² The story recounts the fate of pioneers settling a new frontier. Throughout the 1990s, this "settlement began to leapfrog outward, forming a dispersed archipelago of separate campsites—a sort of gold rush in pursuit of individual autonomy."⁹³ But if it was to survive, and thrive, this rogue outpost needed rules, roles, and roads. It required borders, official communications channels, urban planning, and risk management strategies. Founded by

90. First performed at Stage Werks, San Francisco, in 2008, *How to Survive the Apocalypse* featured the music of Mark Nichols, lyrics by Erik Davis, and was produced by Dana Harrison and directed by Christopher Fülling.
91. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 25n15. The passage is from Dehaene and De Cauter's clarifying comments to their translation of Foucault's original text.
92. Harvey, "How the West Was Won."
93. Ibid.
94. Jon Mitchell, "Mayors of U.S. Cities Visit Black Rock City," *Burning Man Journal*, October 23, 2018, <https://journal.burningman.org/2018/10/news/brc-news/mayors-of-u-s-cities-visit-black-rock-city/>.
95. Steven Raspa, "From Apotheosis to Artful Cities: Ra\$pa's Ride through Burning Man's Evolution," *Burning Man Journal*, October 20, 2019, <https://journal.burningman.org/2019/10/black-rock-city/building-brc-from-apotheosis-to-artful-cities/>.
96. Rachel Bowditch, "The Inferno: Burning Man and the Tipping Point," in *Festive Devils of the Americas*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio, Angela Marino, and Paolo Vignolo (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 305.
97. Larry Harvey, interviewed by the author, April 8, 2016.
98. Olivier Bonin, dir., *Dust & Illusions*, DVD, Madnomad Films, 2009.

Michael Mikel, the Black Rock Rangers was the first of many volunteer services that commenced as provisional experiments. Services initially labeled with comic irony, and in parody of official culture, including the Department of Public Works and the Department of Mutant Vehicles, would become fully-fledged departments integral to a growing "city," which would lose the scare quotes to behave like an actual city. Indeed, the US Conference of Mayors sent a delegation of eleven mayors to BRC in 2018.⁹⁴ By 2019, according to associate director of community events Steven Raspa, "we had more mayors, urban planners, architects, representatives from embassies and cultural institutions than perhaps ever before"⁹⁵ (fig. 4).

Figure 4. Black Rock City, Nevada, 2015. Source: Burning Man Project.

The Inferno not only staged a theatrical performance of hell, it manifested a real-life version. That Black Rock City had spiraled out of control and reached its "tipping point" was evident in tragic accidents including that befalling crew member Michael Fury, who was decapitated on his motorcycle playing a high-speed game of road chicken.⁹⁶

In subsequent years, a scalable concentric grid designed by Rod Garrett was implemented, encouraging neighborhoods, restricting motor-vehicle activity, and promoting bicycles. Ironically, while many anarchists had sought freedom from all rules and laws, "it turned out that from the very beginning, instinctively, they needed order."⁹⁷ As Harvey stated in the film *Dust & Illusions*, the BMP was not devised to "exterminate freedom"⁹⁸ but extended permissions to greater numbers. Celebrating "belonging on a civic scale," the 2010 art theme, "Metropolis," was a powerful evocation of this civic imperative.⁹⁹ By this time, concerns continued to circulate that Burning Man had strayed far from its roots, that the effigy had been built taller, more spectacular and removed from the populace, and that its ceremonial destruction had become regimented and liturgical. A testimony to this fear that the Man had grown to symbolize an organization taking itself too seriously was the official reaction to a 2007 incident when the effigy was completely rebuilt after the Man pavilion was set alight and damaged five nights before its preordained

99. Burning Man, "2010 Art Theme: Metropolis—Life of Cities," accessed January 6, 2020, https://burningman.org/culture/history/brc-history/event-archives/2010-2/10_theme/.

100. Joe Garofoli and Leslie Fulbright, "Burning Man is Burned too Soon—Arson Arrest," *SFGATE.COM*, August 28, 2007, <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Burning-Man-is-burned-too-soon-arson-arrest-2524487.php>.

101. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94–130.

102. Graham St John, "Blazing Grace: The Gifted Culture of Burning Man," *NANO: New American Notes Online* 11 (2017), <https://nanocrit.com/issues/issue11/Blazing-Grace-The-Gifted-Culture-of-Burning-Man>.

103. Hetherington, *Badlands of Modernity*, 51.

104. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 20.

105. Ibid.

106. Quinn and Wilks, "Festival Heterotopias," 42.

destruction on Burn Night. Lamenting the event's lost heritage of chaos and absurdist humor, the "prank" was performed by Cacophonist Paul Addis, who was charged and later convicted of the felonies of arson and destruction of property. Addis served two years in a Nevada prison and later committed suicide.¹⁰⁰ For critics, the resurrection of the Man and the criminalization of the prank exposed what Addis sought to demonstrate: that chaos had become institutionalized. Resembling the process where religious organizations evolve into normative versions of their origins in "spontaneous communitas,"¹⁰¹ the episode revealed that Burning Man had grown committed to replicating the foundational event in accord with ceremonial procedure protected by law. Further, it illustrated how the disruptive imagination of the trickster clashed with civic imperatives that became essential to the proliferation of Burning Man.

Addis's disruption exposed how Burning Man is fraught with tensions operating at the core of its ethos. Indeed, the Ten Principles are nothing if not paradoxical. On the one hand, there are principles like *Immediacy*, in which the virtue of lived experience is esteemed above ideas and beliefs, and *Radical Self-expression*, which champions individual expression as a virtuous performance of the authentic self. On the other, there is *Civic Responsibility*, which values "civil society," "public welfare," and compliance with local, state and federal laws, and *Communal Effort*, which values "creative cooperation and collaboration." A successful "burn" will navigate the terrain between immediacy and cooperation, play and work, freedom and control. This ludic–civic tension makes for a necessary paradox, with serious implications if either tendency gains ascendancy. At one extreme, where self-indulgence, transgression, and carefree abandon predominate, a culture of convenience may thrive where principles like *Gifting* and *Radical Self-reliance* are outsourced to experiential service providers, as evident in the "plug-n-play" camp controversy.¹⁰² At the other, governance and micromanagement presages bureaucratization. The Addis incident exhibited the broiling of a long-simmering standoff between liberty and governance in BRC, a tension incidentally pivotal to the "utopian idea of modern society."¹⁰³ As Hetherington argues, this idea, which unfolds in the context of heterotopias, demonstrates the process of social ordering more than the establishment of a new order, where utopia is always deferred, never arrived at, never finished.

Monument to Impermanence

Thought to possess multiple orders of temporality, heterotopic sites "function fully when people find themselves in a sort of absolute break with their traditional time."¹⁰⁴ This fourth contemplation is of notable interest to the study of transformational events. Here, libraries and museums (spaces that accumulate time) are specifically contrasted with festivals—events "linked to time in its most futile, most transitory, most precarious aspect." These heterotopias are not "eternitary" (like cemeteries) but are "absolutely chronic." Foucault refers to "fairgrounds, these marvellous empty emplacements at the outskirts of cities, which fill up, once or twice a year, with stands, displays, heteroclit objects, wrestlers, snake women, fortune tellers."¹⁰⁵ Drawing on his idea that they are host to "heterochronisms," festivals are said to "break or disrupt traditional concepts of time by interrupting present time and accumulating past times."¹⁰⁶ That is, not only do event heterotopias inaugurate a disruption of routine temporality; within festive time, participants may dwell within, or relive, the historic "moment" of an event that is seasonally recurrent over many years. How festivals are host to—and how rituals enable participants to embody—"other" temporalities has been a subject of considerable interest in anthropology,

107. Howell, "Sense of Place," 47.

108. Christopher L. Witmore, "Vision, Media, Noise and the Percolation of Time: Symmetrical Approaches Mediation of the Material World," *Journal of Material Culture* 11, no. 3 (2006): 267–92.

109. Howell, "Sense of Place," 57.

110. Larry Harvey, "Radical Ritual: Spirit and Soul," *Burning Man Journal*, January 30, 2017, <https://journal.burningman.org/2017/01/philosophical-center/spirituality/radical-ritual-spirit-and-soul/>.

ethnology, and folklore studies. In her study of the Festa del Badalisc, an Epiphany festival in Andrista, a high mountain village in northern Lombardy, Italy, Francesca Howell emphasizes that this event possesses a "mysterious polychronic ambience" because it takes place within a region where multiple temporalities "percolate," "stimulating a complex temporal brew."¹⁰⁷ Drawing on Christopher Witmore's concept of time "percolation,"¹⁰⁸ she holds that when "a sense of polychronicity is found in a heterotopic festival space it can allow for an acute and tangible awareness of sense of place in festival participants. As the Badalisc festival unfolds in the wintry Alpine night, a sense of the liminal allows other times and influences to bubble up into the present, 'percolating' through it."¹⁰⁹ Howell's study serves to highlight how seasonally recurrent ritual and performance enables the embodiment of the past in the present.

The primary rite of BRC—Burn Night—is illustrative. Ceremonial *and* festal, this event enables the populace to inhabit a break in time that has been recycled since the inaugural burn in 1986, with each occasion signaling an accumulation of novelty but at the same time enabling a return to a fixed tradition. At various stages in the event's history, art themes—which shape the design of the Man and BRC's interactive program—have highlighted these divergent perspectives (evolutionary/traditional) on time. For instance, the 2009 event had a Darwinian theme ("Evolution"), and other themes have celebrated the maturation of Burning Man from a remote gathering to a city ("Metropolis" in 2010), to a culture with global pretensions ("Caravansary" in 2014), to a cultural chrysalis in the wake of the passing of the event's primary founder ("Metamorphosis" in 2019). On the other hand, the 2017 theme, "Radical Ritual," underlined tradition and the rituals integral to ensuring a cyclical return. Harvey's commentary explained that the word "radical" in "Radical Ritual" inferred "all that is fixed and fundamental in human nature"¹¹⁰ (fig. 5). Harvey earlier stated this intent in commentary on the "Wheel of Time" theme of 1999, writing that in returning to the playa after a year's absence, "it sometimes feels as if one had never left the desert. Within this

Figure 5. "Radical Ritual," 2017. Photo by Graham St John.

111. Larry Harvey, "1999 Art Theme: The Wheel of Time," https://burningman.org/culture/history/brc-history/event-archives/1999-2/99_theme/.
 112. Stewart Harvey, "Black Rock Dawn," in *Playa Dust: Collected Stories from Burning Man*, ed. Samantha Krukowski (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), 47.
 113. Quote included in the newsletter's call for volunteers, *Building/Burning/Man*, June 1992, https://z9hbb3mwou383x-1930ve0ugl-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/BBM_1992.pdf.
 114. Buck A. E. Down, "The Art of Nothing: The Aesthetic Legacy of Larry Harvey," *Burning Man Journal*, May 22, 2018, <https://journal.burningman.org/2018/05/opinion/serious-stuff/the-art-of-nothing-the-aesthetic-legacy-of-larry-harvey>.
 115. D. S. Black, "Postscript," in *Desert to Dream: A Dozen Years of Burning Man Photography*, ed. Barbara Traub (San Francisco: Immedium, 2011 [2006]), 176.
 116. Rod Garrett, "Designing Black Rock City," *Burning Man Journal*, April 20, 2010, <http://journal.burningman.org/2010/04/black-rock-city/building-brc/designing-black-rock-city/>.
 117. James H. Carrott and Brian David Johnson, *Vintage Tomorrows: A Historian and a Futurist Journey through Steampunk into the Future of Technology* (Sebastopol, CA: Maker Media, 2013).
- changeless world time seems suspended. We build the same city, we burn the same Man, and by these actions we are changed. Ritual time is cyclical time and quite unlike the ordinary measure that divides our daily lives."¹¹¹
- The distinctly *other* spatio-temporality of the playa is pivotal to the chronic ambiance of BRC. The playa is the bed of an ancient inland sea that covered much of present-day Nevada for about two million years. The Pleistocene-epoch Lake Lahonton has long since vanished, though it has flooded the imagination of humans ranging into the region some twelve thousand years after its desiccation: "That was a world thousands of years removed from our own," imagines Stewart Harvey, "but you can still feel its presence in the shifting playa sand and the timeless wind."¹¹² To inhabit this primordial wilderness is to occupy a "timeless" place. At the same time, when inhabiting *playaspace*, one is also inhabiting an *other*-time shaped not only by the primordality of the space but also by the temporality of the festive, the going beyond routine time and into sacred time, sometimes called "playa time."
- The ephemeral character of BRC is also an effect of fire arts, with signature installations the Man and the Temple destroyed by fire in rituals dedicated to the celebration of impermanence. In the second edition of the BMP newsletter, *Building/Burning/Man*, Larry Harvey expounded that the Man was a "monument to transience,"¹¹³ an allegory for life itself. This sentiment, which could be extended to the entire event, is fitting in the wake of Harvey's death on April 28, 2018: "An entire city—with all its noise and bustle and teeming humanity, its monumental works of art, humans being and humans doing—is only in full flower for a week, and then is quickly and anonymously whisked away, an analog for life itself. It's a temporary, albeit noisy blip that gives way to the great nothingness in a relative blink of an eye, barely an interruption geologically speaking"¹¹⁴ (fig. 6).
- As this comment implies, BRC is completely rebuilt each year, following its total de-installment the year prior. Such perennality is not unique in the world of events, and nor is the commitment to return event spaces to pre-event conditions. What is unusual here is that a city-sized event is assembled upon the seasonally refreshed "canvas" of a state-managed wilderness area. The dutiful dedication to restore an absolute desert to pre-event conditions is unparalleled in the world of events. That burners are obliged toward *Leaving No Trace* at this scale has earned BRC the mantel "ephemeropolis."¹¹⁵ What's more, this dedication to event dis/assemblage on scales equally grand and minute relies upon an uncompromising effort to keep time. That this ephemeral city is operationally reliant upon chronic scheduling, that immediacy depends on administrative protocols and extensive mediation, are hallmarks of an enigma. The orchestration of timelessness (the sacred) in BRC is a remarkable feat of engineering, as measured in the spatial design of the city: a clock face. A twelve-hour clock map design with radial streets named by the hour was implemented in 1999¹¹⁶ in conjunction with that year's "The Wheel of Time" theme. As stated in the theme description, with the Man as the axis and an enormous clock dial spanning nearly half a mile of desert terrain, BRC became a "living timepiece."
- The spatio-temporal conditions of the playa enable the performance of alternate time periods, a possibility apparent in steampunk, a futurist-vintage style combining historical elements with anachronistic technological features. As materials "recombobulators" and eccentric inventors showcase steam-powered contraptions referencing Jules Verne, they reclaim a history that never existed.¹¹⁷ Influenced by Survival Research Labs projects that are said to have inspired

Figure 6. The Temple, 2016. Photo by Rand Larson.

118. John Law in Piero Scaruffi, "John Law interview: Part2 cacophony society," published on YouTube, November 6, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CacdrQMUKVU>.

119. <http://www.uchronians.org/>, accessed June 13, 2009.

steampunk subculture,¹¹⁸ such contraptions have included a self-propelled three-story Victorian house, "The Neverwas Haul," appearing on-playa in 2006, also the year of "Uchronia." A 200-foot-long, 100-foot-wide, and 50-foot-high installation that appeared to me like a gigantic haystack winking in green luminescence, the immense Uchronia was funded by Belgian artists and built using rejected pinewood. The work was inspired by French philosopher Charles Renouvier's 1876 novel *Uchronie (L'Utopie dans l'histoire)*, which replaced *topos* (from "utopia," literally "no place") with *chronos* to generate a word denoting *no time* or *beyond time*. For the installation's creators, "uchronic" signaled an "alternate history" intended to challenge the "reality" of its temporally displaced populace. Rather than an effort to create an alternate history, Uchronia (literally a no-time place) appeared to signal the possibility of entering time outside history, a temporality that, not unlike its spatial precursor—utopia—is motivated by hope: a "portal, showing us what the world could be like if creativity ruled supreme" and time were altered.¹¹⁹ This gigantic "what if?" sculpted upon the playa's blank canvas was consistent with the altered temporality endogenous to festive consciousness. Despite the fact that most burners knew little of the concept behind what was dubbed the "Belgian Waffle," the installation became a familiar feature of playa space for a week. With the desert night a welcome reprieve from the frying sun and whiteouts, with its occupants bathed in neon green, Uchronia metamorphosed into a dance club. And, on the final night, it burned. With its image seared into my retinas for weeks, Uchronia became a cavernous conflagration, an allegory of impermanence, the flaming whispers of which engulfed all who witnessed. In the wake of its desolation, on the celebratory margins of its dissolution, sensual acts of beauty conspired in blinking conclaves upon the playa.

It has been suggested that variable temporalities are associated with distinct heterotopic spaces that "form an absolute break with time (the cemetery), accumulate time (the library) or are linked to time fleetingly (the festival or fair)."¹²⁰ While this is indubitable, events are contexts for multiple temporalities. As we have seen, the festive chronotope of BRC is layered with times primordial, traditional, evolutionary, immediate, organized, and imaginary. It is also a context in which festive abandonment coincides with the accumulation of time. The selective archiving of playa-time is

120. Johnson, "The Geographies of Heterotopia," 794.

121. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 20.

122. See Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva (The Kitchen Sisters), "Burning Man—Archiving the Ephemeral," *The Keepers Story* #25, *The Kitchen Sisters Present* podcast, accessed January 6, 2020.

123. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 21.

apparent in "City of Dust: The Evolution of Burning Man," an exhibition and series of lectures at the Nevada Museum of Art, Reno in 2017–18. That exhibit, which subsequently traveled to the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC in 2018 as part of the exhibition "No Spectators: The Art of Burning Man," is an effort to inscribe impermanence with permanence (fig. 7). The strategy appears more overt in the glass enclosures of "swag" and other items of historical interest that have been displayed in BRC's Center Camp over many years. The commitment to exhibit collections of significant historical objects, the accumulation of which are like "heterotopias in which time never ceases to pile up,"¹²¹ is converse to the virtue of immediacy, a paradox recognized by Burning Man rogue archivist Christine Kristen (aka Lady Bee) and education director Stuart Mangrum, who in recent years have advanced documentation and archival efforts.¹²² While this distinction is faithful to Foucault's contrast in spatial attitudes toward time between the museum and library on the one hand and the festival on the other, here disparate chronicities coexist within the same festive space.

Figure 7. "No Spectators: The Art of Burning Man." Exhibition at Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian, Washington, DC, 2018. Source: Burning Man Project.

Zone Trip

Heterotopias are identified as zonal spaces that always "presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable."¹²³ That is, in this fifth "principle," heterotopias are zones with access governed by practices and rituals making them simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. In the first instance, one may be constrained, "as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else one has to submit to rites and to purifications." In these examples, accessibility relies on the granting of permissions or the performance of appropriate gestures. Indicating the Muslim hammam and Scandinavian sauna, Foucault suggests that heterotopias are consecrated entirely by "activities of purification" that are part religious and part hygienic. In the second instance, he refers to "emplacements" that appear to be inclusive but "conceal curious exclusions," such as rooms accommodating travelers on large farms in Brazil and elsewhere in South America. While "guests" are entitled to occupy these

124. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 21.
125. Quinn and Wilks, "Festival Heterotopias," 42.
126. Jenny Kane, "Burning Man at 30: How a Group of Radical Pranksters Built a City in the Desert," *Reno Gazette Journal*, August 9, 2017.
127. All editions of *Rough Draft* are available at <https://archive.org/details/roughdraftofficial171vari>.
128. Evans et al., *Tales of the San Francisco Cacophony Society*, xiii.

rooms and stay overnight, they are not granted access to the family court.¹²⁴

While this is an irritatingly piecemeal approach to a complex subject, it is a theme of direct relevance to those demarcated zones we know as public events, and notably, festivals. And not unlike festivals, transformational events possess jurisdictional spatio-temporal boundaries, often at considerable remove from participants' places of residence, zoned off from the non-event world with gates through which entrants or members must pass. Ticket holders gaining access to these event precincts are not only made liable to state laws as a condition of entry; they are also typically expected to observe zone lore, including tacit rules and event principles. Not only must entrants be sufficiently networked, possess economic and social capital, and hold a ticket to gain admission, but they also "must continue to respect the necessary rites and perform the required gestures."¹²⁵ Events are sites of contention between the included and the excluded, a struggle between those who belong and those who do not. In the case presented by Quinn and Wilks, folk festivals contextualize tension between amateur and professional musicians. Larger-scale events possess manifold internal boundaries and potentially, multiple heterotopias. While access to interior evental zones or districts may require specific passage rites, gestures, and status achievements denoting membership, openness, fluidity and boundary disruptions are characteristic of festive zones with permissive agendas, especially given the unusual in-situ overlap between private and public space. Such internal boundary confusion enables a relaxation of societal norms. As surveyed and emplaced units of zoned autonomy on-playa, camps (notably "theme camps") encourage disruptive (and notoriously, *camp*) aesthetics.

To be in the zone burners call "on-playa" requires passage across a physical threshold. The symbolic power of the threshold was recognized in the inaugural desert sojourn of 1990. Driving onto the playa having convoyed overnight from San Francisco, eighty-nine intrepids exited their vehicles, joined hands, and stepped over a line on the playa surface. Michael Mikel (aka Danger Ranger) recounts this moment: "I took a stick and I drew a line in the ground and I had everybody line up, and I said, 'On the other side of this line, everything will be different. Reality itself will change.' We all stepped across that line together and things have been different."¹²⁶ As promoted in the September 1990 edition (issue #48) of the Cacophony Society newsletter, *Rough Draft*, this excursion—dubbed "Zone Trip #4"—was "an opportunity to leave your old self and be reborn through the cleansing fires of the trackless, pure desert."¹²⁷ Rooted in the Dada-inspired events of the San Francisco Suicide Club, Cacophony Zone Trips were adventures "beyond normal time and place." In the occupation, reclamation, and subversion of cemeteries, underground sewers, disused morgues, and army barracks, among other adventures in the San Francisco Bay Area and further afield, spatio-temporal norms were subverted and burlesqued in surrealist rites of passage across and beyond territorial and temporal conventions. While scaling the spans of the Golden Gate Bridge was among the most spectacularly sublime of these sublegal explorations of urban space, zone ventures included roller skating on the Embarcadero Freeway, formalwear sewer walks, urban spelunking in subterranean causeways, and partying in abandoned bunkers, as occurred with the Atomic Café events.¹²⁸ Making these nonpermitted sojourns into urban *terra incognita*, participants passed across thresholds marking limits as social as they were physical. Simply put, their trespasses licensed the abandonment of rules defining appropriate conduct in specified spaces. In these temporary zones where conventional rules of etiquette were inverted and confounded, the border between reality and imagination grew ambiguous.

129. Evans et al., *Tales of the San Francisco Cacophony Society*, 3.

130. Hakim Bey, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone—Ontological Anarchy and Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991).

131. Burning Man, "Camp Placement Criteria," <https://burningman.org/event/camps/criteria/>.

132. Manuel A. Gómez, "Order in the Desert: Law Abiding Behavior at Burning Man," *Journal of Dispute Resolution* (2013): 349–73; 353.

133. Sybil Hatch, "A Brief History (and Future) of Leaving No Trace," *Burning Man Journal*, July 11, 2016, <https://journal.burningman.org/2016/07/black-rock-city/leaving-no-trace/a-brief-history-and-future-of-leaving-no-trace/>.

Integral to the guerrilla art practice of the Cacophonists was the philosophy of leaving a zone without a trace of one's presence. The practice of temporarily occupying a space in a sublegal context and then disappearing before the authorities arrive had been integral to the strange urban *dérives* of the Suicide Club, where "leave no trace" amounted to a necessary ethos of self-preservation.¹²⁹ These groups had been practicing what Hakim Bey might have called "poetic terrorism," a guerrilla practice abjuring permanent occupation and rejecting anything smacking of hierarchy, ideology, and dogma.¹³⁰

In the context of the playa, resettled annually and subject to local and federal law enforcement and public risk management requirements, as well as BMP "placement" policy protocols, the anarchist philosophy of the Temporary Autonomous Zone became unfeasible. By the mid-1990s, securing a ticket was a first-order priority for admission to the "special event" zone of BRC, a circumstance complicated by the advent of ticket scarcity in 2011. At the same time, official "placement" depends upon participants (as members of theme camps) demonstrating a persistent commitment to *zone lore* criteria: that is, "interactivity" and event principles, notably *Leaving No Trace* (see below). In other words, access to prized locations in the surveyed grid of BRC relies upon the recurrent performance of appropriate gestures.¹³¹

Accessibility is today compounded not only by ticket scarcity and placement requirements but by the interference of internet bots generating long wait queues and rejections at the point of online ticket sales. Regulating physical access, members of the Department of Gate, Perimeter & Exodus are delegated to oversee all logistics related to access, departure, and boundary security.¹³² The Gate is a threshold that officially converts entrants into "participants," a procedure accelerated if arriving via Burner Express (bus) or Burner Express Air (flight). After tickets have been displayed, entrants will next encounter Greeters, who may welcome them "home" with a hug, induct "virgin" eventgoers (often required to lie in the dust and perform "angel wing" gestures), and distribute a "Survival Guide" canvassing cautions, practicalities, and principles. Not only do ingress and official placement upon the playa require familiarity with the Ten Principles; successful egress (or "exodus") also depends on the community's careful observance of these coded virtues and values.

Notable among these principles is *Leaving No Trace* (LNT). For the BMP to obtain the BLM-issued Special Recreation Permit, the playa must be annually restored to its pre-event condition. Identified as "the one principle that is absolutely mandatory,"¹³³ LNT is a practice of the United States Forest Service and the National Park Service, as well as a standard measured by the BLM, required under the National Environmental Policy Act to conduct environmental impact analyses for projects it permits on federal land. The BLM's standard is that residue debris should not exceed an average of one square foot per acre during the BLM inspection—and the BMP has passed every post-event silt inspection since these inspections commenced in 1999. Where "leave no trace" originally connoted activities necessary for an illegal occupation of space sans detection by authorities, in the contemporary period of zonal occupation downstream from the activities of the Cacophony Society, the practice had become, quite ironically, a standard enforced by governing agencies to which the BMP must comply. In the former instance, departing without evidence of spatial occupation would allow occupants future illicit incursions. In the latter, leaving no or little trace permits future sanctioned use of space.

134. As explained in more detail
in St John, "At Home in the Big
Empty."

135. Chen, *Enabling Creative
Chaos*, 67.

LNT is a purification ritual complex that has become integral to the ethos of Burning Man. Restoring the playa to its pre-event condition is the goal of the Playa Restoration team in collusion with the entire event population, who are made aware that the seasonal reproduction of BRC relies on eliminating "MOOP" ("matter out of place"): essentially all non-dust, including all material waste. Prior to departure, careful "demooping" of camp, a ritualized observance known as "detailing"—and a performance inscribed in the "MOOP Map" (fig. 8)—is essential for future placement in BRC.¹³⁴

Figure 8. MOOP Map, 2018. Source: Burning Man Project.

While demonstrable knowledge of the ethos of the playa event space is a requirement for belonging to a no-place called "home," accessibility is fraught with paradox. Listed first among the Ten Principles is *Radical Inclusion*: "Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community." This principle, as Katherine Chen observed, derived from an understanding acquired on-playa in the mid-1990s that recruiting volunteers through exclusive friend networks was unsustainable, as there was need for volunteers with a wider variety of skills and professions. Encoded in *Radical Inclusion*, standardized procedures "relieved the bottleneck on recruitment and diversified an otherwise homogenous and insular membership."¹³⁵ The collectivist practice allowed more people to become involved in the organization, explore their hidden potential, invent new roles, even redesign entire departments. At the same time, as socioeconomic conditions and race relations are known to limit access, *Radical Inclusion* belies an exclusive inclusivity. Marlon Williams, a burner of color, addresses this point: "People often say, 'Burning Man is on another planet.' I really

136. In Dominique Debucquoy-Dodley, "Diversity & Radical Inclusion: Marlon Williams on the 10 Principles' Racial Limits," *Burning Man Journal*, May 3, 2019, <https://journal.burning-man.org/2019/05/opinion/serious-stuff/diversity-radical-inclusion-marlon-williams-on-the-10-principles-racial-limits/>.
137. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," 21.
138. Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 60.
139. Ravenscroft and Matteucci, "The Festival as Carnavalesque," 13.
140. Ibid, 2.
141. Gazi Islam, Michael Zyphur, and David Boje, "Carnival and Spectacle in Krewe De Vieux and the Mystic Krewe of Spermes: The Mingling of Organization and Celebration," *Organization Studies* 29 (2008), 1565–89.
142. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968).

like to remind folks that...trying to have inclusion, without affirmatively trying to move forward on that ethos...replicate[s] all the things that already exist within the default world. Black Rock City is not on another planet. It's very much on Earth, and specifically the United States, with all the challenges of our racial histories." Interpreting *Radical Inclusion* as a form of inclusivity for the privileged "who have felt excluded from a lot of other experiences," Williams deems the Ten Principles an expression of white privilege.¹³⁶ This perspective prompts an inquiry concerning events with transformational agendas: transformational for whom?

Impossible City

Foucault's final "principle" considers heterotopias "in relation to the rest of space," which are purposive at two extremes. At one extreme, they create "a space of illusion that exposes all real space, all the emplacements in the interior of which human life is enclosed and partitioned, as even more illusory." At the other, they create "another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorderly, ill construed and sketchy." Exemplary of the illusory character of heterotopia is the historical role of the brothel (and Foucault appears to have in mind the traditional French "house of illusion"). Exemplary of the other extreme—the heterotopia of "compensation"—is the colony, like the seventeenth-century colonies founded by Jesuits in South America, where all aspects of life were regulated in minute detail.¹³⁷ Here we approach the reflexive aspect of heterotopia, though more accurately spaces by which culture is illuminated and refracted, made transparent and distorted, like a hall of magic mirrors.

This spectrum is useful in the study of event spaces. While event heterotopias exist "in relation to all other sites and spaces," that they vary considerably was understood by Don Handelman, who detailed three types of public events, each possessing an "internal logic of design," or "meta-design." These are events that "model," "present" and "represent" the "lived-in world." Events that "model," such as rites of passage and shamanic rites, effect a change of status and identity, or influence the cosmos, via the resolution or synthesis of contradictions and uncertainty. Events that "present," like parades, state funerals, and royal pageants, are occasions mirroring politics and symbolism, replicating social order. And events that "represent," like carnivals and festivals, are unpredictable, often inverting and even subverting cultural and political order. Handelman qualified that "the probability of a given, real event fitting neatly within one type is necessarily small."¹³⁸

Festive events are notable for their disciplinary and/or transgressive extremes. Take for example, the San Fermin fiesta in Pamplona, Spain, now commodified as a major tourist event. In one study, the "freedoms" of the fiesta are thought illusory, serving as "a significant device for maintaining community governance and social control."¹³⁹ While this event is considered an example of a "disciplinary heterotopia,"¹⁴⁰ "krewes" opposing the commercial direction of the Mardi Gras in New Orleans adopt grotesque political satire in their ambivalent protests.¹⁴¹ Most festive events, especially carnivals—as ambiguous contexts in which freedom and governance interface—can be spaces of illusion and compensation, a circumstance echoing the liberatory and disciplinary interpretations of Bakhtin's "second world" of the people.¹⁴²

As unique platforms for such complexities, transformational events are busy hives for the expression of agendas with varying outcomes. BRC is recognizable between the polar extremes

143. Victor Turner, "Morality and Liminality," in *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols*, ed. Edith Turner (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 149.

144. Wendy Clupper, "The Erotic Politics of *Critical Tits*: Exhibitionism or Feminist Statement?" in *Political Performances: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan C. Hagedicke, Deirdre Heddon, Avraham Oz, and E. J. Westlake (New York: Rodopi Press, 2009), 251–68.

145. Ned Howey, "Gay, Straight... Playa-Sexual?" *Piss Clear* no. 27, August 31–September 1, 2005, 6.

146. Green and Kaiser, "From Ephemeral to Everyday Costuming," 7.

147. Ibid, 11.

148. Shalaco, "The Point of Black Rock City," *Burning Man Journal*, August 7, 2018, <https://journal.burningman.org/2018/08/black-rock-city/building-brc/the-point-of-black-rock-city/>.

149. In Jeremy Hockett, "Reckoning Ritual and Counterculture in the Burning Man Community: Communication, Ethnography, and the Self in Reflexive Modernism," (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2004), 10–11.

("brothel" and "colony") identified by Foucault, with some qualification. With the example of the brothel, Foucault appears to be highlighting the role of the imaginative and corporeality in other spaces. If our goal is to understand the other-space of *events*, a more telling example is not the brothel, but that temporary eruption of eros and licentiousness we already know as carnival. BRC is a carnivalesque production whose co-creators are permitted to act "as if" the world were different, an experimentalism casting prismatic light on what burners call the "default" world. The event space permits what Turner called the "subjunctive mood," which ranges from "scientific hypothesis to festive fantasy," the mood of *were*, as in "if I were you."¹⁴³ The queering of the familiar appears in liberating and disruptive forms of *Radical Self-expression*, such as public nudity and erotic pageantry,¹⁴⁴ "hetero-flexible" behavior,¹⁴⁵ and "gender terrorism." In a study of visible resistance to hegemonic masculinity on-playa, Green and Kaiser¹⁴⁶ make use of heterotopia to investigate the implications of a hyperbolic *camp*-site where men can without reserve "explore femininity, and articulate appearance styles that draw from multiple genders." Male outfits incorporating leather chaps with women's lingerie, "furkinis," spandex leggings, utilikilts, playa-skirts: such sartorial disruptions "deploy incongruity and ironic juxtapositions in order to produce new ideas...about gender, or perhaps, to even transcend gender altogether."¹⁴⁷

To address Foucault's other reflexive pole, while BRC is not a "colony" in the conventional sense, it is a frontier settlement sometimes likened in its early desert phase to a colony for Bay Area bohemians. Carved into the Black Rock Desert wilderness, where order was improvised upon a near-lunar landscape, the frontier event holds memories of other frontiers in the settlement of the American West. Among the most unique aspects of this "settlement" is that it is completely disassembled and then resettled annually (since 1990), with each on-playa "build" advancing upon previous editions. This recurrent re/settlement makes for a unique experience:

Black Rock City is an Impossible City....One impossible aspect about Black Rock City, and part of the nature of a city that is born every year, is that you can visit it at different times in its growth and development. Each and every year I visit, Black Rock City it is younger and younger. You can never visit New York when it was a colony or San Francisco before the gold rush, but you can do that with Black Rock City.¹⁴⁸

Of the earliest editions of this resettlement, Harvey has stated, "there was no context to define what you were doing. So with a few simple props you could create your own context and generate a world-ordering *gesture*." Then he added, "there was also some irony in this,"¹⁴⁹ something of an understatement given how satire has permeated the re-creation of civilization on-playa. As an environment where men wear skirts, where camps are camp, and where official culture is relentlessly lampooned, BRC has long been a carnival on the frontier. At the same time, the event scaled in response to requirements to manage health and safety matters, address the concerns of the local population and law enforcement, liaise with media representatives, coordinate volunteers, and develop civic responsibility. Along the way, Burning Man achieved diplomatic inroads in relations with local government and law enforcement. Moreover, through means civic and carnivalesque, the BMP has committed to "leaving a trace" beyond the event in the desert. Through the Global Leadership Conference (GLC) held in the Bay Area from 2007–17, and other annual meetings like the European Leadership Summit, the BMP fosters the culture of Burning Man reckoned by CEO Marian Goodell in her 2017 GLC plenary speech to be a "platform for change." Far beyond maintaining an outpost of the Cacophony Society, the BMP is committed to ensuring that "the values born of the playa" are transmitted, according to

152. Burning Man Regional Network, <https://regionals.burningman.org/>.

Conclusion

While this approach has room for development, this case study on the complex spatio-temporality of a transformational evental movement offers a valuable contribution to event

studies. Notably, through revisiting and revisioning the rites of passage model in which event studies is grounded, heterotopology assists comprehension of the dynamic vicissitudes of “transformation.” The heterotopic approach to event space enhances awareness of an event’s multidimensionality; of the confluence of freedom and governance, struggles over definition, disparate chronicities, contested utopias, zone disputes, culture wars, all contributing to the identity of an event. While *evental heterotopia* offers an approach for the study of intentionally transformative events, it has applications across the interdisciplinary study of events. To that end, the “principles” of heterotopia warrant further critical application in the ethnography of public events.

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