EVENT HORIZONS

Burnerverse:
The Borderland, Midburn, and the Global Event Culture of Burning Man

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ABSTRACT

Otherwise known as Black Rock City, Burning Man is a remote fire-arts gathering in Nevada's Black Rock Desert that has catalyzed a global movement. An ephemeral community flowering in a desert, Burning Man is also a cultural proliferation of events that model and mutate the Black Rock City prototype worldwide. Cyclical and augmentative, replicable and mutable, Burning Man has evolved from a small cultural event into a transformative event culture. This article presents research from a longitudinal project addressing the ostensible "transformational" quality of Burning Man and its cultural archipelago of events. Informed by the complex spatialization inherent to Michel Foucault’s "heterotopia," it navigates the "hyper-liminal" dynamics of two "regional events" and their organization models: Midburn (Israel) and the Borderland (Nordic). The heterotopic process promotes insight on disparate practices within cultural "other spaces": here, Black Rock City and the events, or "burns," it has spawned. Tracking the storied career of the Burning Man ethos known as the “10 Principles” as this is transmitted via "ritualesque" and "carnivalesque" performances, the article sheds light on ways local circumstances refract, filter, and mutate Burner culture, from carbon-copied transplants to innovative independent solutions. In other words, the article explores how this transformative cultural movement undergoes transformation, specifically addressing how, as they mimic and mutate the prototype and its principles, regional burns are contexts for authorization and subversion. This multi-sited navigation of burn event spaces that are imitative and imaginative, and of a principled culture that is mirrored and contested, offers a unique contribution to the study of "transfestive" event cultures.

KEYWORDS

Burning Man
Heterotopia
Ritualesque
Carnivalesque
Transfeste
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**Introduction**

Burning Man is a participatory arts gathering reinstalled annually in Nevada’s remote Black Rock Desert. Regarded as the “largest Leave No Trace event in the world,” Burning Man is the template for a global network of “regional events” or “burns.” Over three decades, otherwise known as Black Rock City (BRC), Burning Man has evolved from a small-scale cultural event into an event culture widely understood to harbor an unparalleled transformational quality. A “transformative” architectonic has been observed within academia, in popular commentaries such as those promoting “transformational festivals,” and within the Burning Man organization itself. For example, in her 2014 appearance on TEDxTokyo, Burning Man CEO Marian Goodell announced that Burning Man was “a $30 million business and a worldwide transformational culture.”

That the liminal architecture of Burning Man is not one-dimensional requires appropriate conceptualization. To that end, Burning Man has been explored in previous work as an exemplary “event heterotopia,” an experimental “other space” in which the “default world” of participants is mirrored and contested on a seasonal stage. In that work, a complex spatiotemporality was found to render problematic BRC’s stature as a “transformational festival.” Michel Foucault’s “principles” of heterotopia were deployed to interrogate the heterogeneous liminal quality—the “hyper-liminality”—of Burning Man. Heterotopia has also been adapted to cast light on a unique stage for the performance of paradox.

While it has been shown that BRC is an “other space” that simultaneously echoes, defies, and subverts “default world” culture, in this article we demonstrate that this “other space” has, in turn, promulgated other spaces that simulate and mutate the prototype. Focusing on Israel’s Midburn and the Nordic event the Borderland and adopting an approach recognizing “ritualesque” and “carnivalesque” frames, regional burns are shown to provide a heteroclite assemblage of imitative, refractive, and mutative practices integral to “burning”—practices that combine to form the uniquely transformative profile of the “Burnerverse.” The study illustrates how the ethos of Burning Man—its “10 Principles”—is transmitted through variable acts of replication and innovation and builds a conceptual framework with applicability for the study of Burning Man and other “transfestive” (see this issue’s introduction) events and cultural movements. This approach to the proliferation of Burner culture benefits from qualitative research involving participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted in pre-COVID-19 longitudinal field research, along with an in-depth review of scholarly literature on Burning Man and analysis of Burning Man Project (BMP) media. The events under consideration were chosen since they were both within the geographical scope of the study and comparative ethnography indicated they are significantly disparate variations on the model.
The Burning Man Mosaic

It was on Baker Beach, San Francisco, summer solstice, 1986, that Larry Harvey and friends first raised and torched an effigy. The ritual was repeated annually over subsequent years, until 1990, when authorities intervened to outlaw the burning of “the Man.” That year, the San Francisco Cacophony Society invited Harvey to burn the effigy in Nevada’s Black Rock Desert, where Burning Man, and its recent “renegade” spin-offs, has been held ever since. With the inclusion of the pandemic that compelled the postponement of the official on-playa event in 2020 and 2021 (along with most in-person Burning Man regional events worldwide), this “impossible city” has weathered a spectrum of colossal adversities—a remote alkaline expanse, extreme weather conditions, health and safety concerns, law enforcement priorities, media stereotyping, volunteer coordination, and an excess of nonparticipants—to enable creative expression on an unparalleled scale. While the immediate background of this “ephemeropolis” is apparent in the surrealist and Dada-inspired events of the Cacophonists, deeper roots lie in West Coast North American freak and festival culture, other utopian experiments in California and elsewhere, the “metaphysical America” percolating in Chautauquas dating back to the nineteenth century, and a frontier settlement legacy integral to the American character.

The effort to identify, define, or classify Burning Man is confounded by its multiplicity. Burning Man is simultaneously a unique space (the Black Rock Desert playa); a festive fire-arts gathering with distinct burn rituals (notably Burn Night on which the eponymous effigy is burned and Temple Burn); a temporary settlement (in 2019, the population of BRC was 80,000, including 10,000 volunteers); a nonprofit organization (the BMP) with about 125 year-round employees and 800 seasonal employees; a global cultural movement (with a regionals program composed of 232 volunteer regional contacts in 114 regions in 34 countries); and a land steward (since 2016, the BMP has owned Fly Ranch, Nevada). That the BMP became a large property owner demonstrates that Burning Man is not only an event culture but also a phenomenon with a reach that extends well beyond the spatiotemporal parameters of a burn event. The cultural outreach of Burning Man is exemplified by the “community activation platform” Burners Without Borders (BWB) and in the activities of the Burning Man Arts Department’s Civic Arts Program, which holds the objective of “generating more engaged citizenship, more livable communities, and more participatory art in public spaces around the world.”

Adding to its depth and magnitude, the Burnerverse embraces the virtual, as has been evident in year-round activity on BMP’s website, on the digital platform Burning Man Hive, and across social media networks. Where boundaries were once more clearly defined, notably in the pre-internet era, the distinction between “playa” and “default” worlds, and between burn event and ordinary life, has eroded over time, as web, digital, and “social” technology has enabled planning, collaboration, engagement, and performance. The development of the Burning Man Regional Network has further enabled the realization of “Burning all year round.” While Burning Man has long had a presence in the virtual world of Second Life, the virtualization of Burning Man was augmented over 2020 and 2021 during the global pandemic when BRC and its global progeny of events were postponed or cancelled and the BMP pivoted to virtual burns. At the same time,
Burners used the internet, virtual reality (VR), and social media to enact, live stream, and archive burn rituals performed at home and in local communities worldwide during Burn Week.18

The complexion of Burning Man is further magnified with the advent of "renegade" burns. Popular unofficial events dubbed "Plan B" transpired on the Black Rock Desert playa in 2020 and 2021 (i.e., when the official event was virtual due to the BMP’s compliance with COVID-19 "shelter in place" restrictions) and in 2022 (a much smaller scaled event immediately following the official 2022 Burning Man). Attended by 15,000 people, and despite the absence of fire and large-scale art (all of which were not permitted by the federal agency overseeing activities in the region, the Bureau of Land Management [BLM]), the 2021 Renegade Burn was decentralized and reportedly more "authentic" than the official burn, a contention echoing a culture war waged since the mid-1990s over the direction of Burning Man, which critics have variously denounced as overregulated, micromanaged, and evincing artworld institutionalism.19 While this coincidence of (virtual and physical) Burning Man metaverses—which was also replicated in the regional movement—offers a further ripple in the already multidimensional Burnerverse and further illustrates how the meaning of "Burning Man" is subject to dispute, the restricted scope of the present article prevents further attention to this development. The 10 Principles hold a shaping influence across all of these corners of the Burnerverse, including the virtual and renegade events where internal disputes signified intra-event struggles to identify the "real" Burning Man, or an "authentic" Burner, with various actors perceiving their own actions as principled.20

If "transformation" is encoded in this phenomenon, it is far from one-dimensional. In the face of this convoluted aesthetic, heterotopia provides a useful heuristic for comprehending the vicissitudes of transformation. In contrast to utopias, Foucault identified real places that are "counter-emplacements" or "effectively realized utopias in which ... all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted." The understanding of these heterotopic sites as "absolutely other than all the emplacements that they reflect" aids comprehension of the interiority of spaces replete with paradox and uncertainty. Among spatiotemporal events, what Foucault identified as “festivals” are manifestly heterotopic. They “function fully when people find themselves in a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.” Contrasted with libraries and museums (i.e., heterotopic spaces that accumulate time), festive spaces are “linked to time in its most futile, most transitory, most precarious aspect.”21 While Foucault outlined six aspects or “principles” of heterotopia—all of which evoke festival spaces—this article will focus on his final musing, which addressed heterotopic reflexivity.22

It is our understanding that practices, symbols, ritual, and meaning in this heterotopic space are composite, contingent, and therefore contested. BRC’s Burn Night is illustrative. The BMP provides no authorized interpretative frame for the effigy destruction. Like the playa itself, the Man is likened to a "blank canvas" on which participants are invited to project meaning. Likewise, its destruction by fire is open to interpretation. The Man is itself infused with a mosaic quality, which aids understanding of the contempt for, if not general dissatisfaction with, popular signifiers, none more contested than “festival.” Contention escalated in response to creeping festivalization and a concomitant “culture of convenience” exposed in the wake of the so-called sherpagate crisis post-2014.23 These anxieties echo long-held concerns over spectacularization and its impact on a volunteer dependent participatory event. They echo tension resulting from an

Approaches


22. The six aspects are abridged elsewhere (St. John, "Ephemeropolis") as universality, mutability, heterogeneity, heterochronicity, zonality, and reflexivity.


The BMP’s repudiation of the “festival” profile is symptomatic of a contested space where struggles over meaning are dramatized via a variety of art forms. Less “festival,” BRC more closely approximates a “frontier carnival” featuring strangely imbricated ludic and civic drives. The tension between these motives appears in the creative collision of immediacy and administration, in commitments to cultural transgression and transmission, orgies and organization, stimuli and simulacra, ritual and carnival: a cavalcade of living contradictions embodied in coexistent principles like Radical Self-expression and Civic Responsibility or Immediacy and Communal Effort. The 10 Principles are a deep paradoxical weave that may only be confronted (and known) in situ and never finally resolved. Following Harvey, Burner philosopher Caveat Magister, who contends that Burning Man is “not benign,” discusses at some length the “creative tension” integral to Burning Man culture, which he states “avoids a larger, mandatory purpose”—like utopia or transformation—“in favor of encouraging authentic inspiration.” The crux of this tendency to refuse an epistemic narrative is that, while Burning Man cannot be singularly transformational, it does possess transformative potential. Before we compare regional inflections of this development, let us briefly describe elements integral to this potential.

“We are no longer staging an event,” stated Harvey after a decade in the desert, “we’re coordinating a global community.” The comment evoked Harvey’s desire to forge a transnational community, which was realized with the advent of a legible and transposable ethos—that is, the 10 Principles, formulated by Harvey and the Regional Committee in 2004. In the formative years on the playa, Burners made a distinction between life on-playa and the “default” world. The distinction grew increasingly spurious, however, notably as relationships in the default became integral to event operations. These are relationships like those forged and maintained with local shires and the BLM, which is tasked to ensure compliance with “Leave No Trace”—the wilderness area standard partly informing the Burning Man principle of Leaving No Trace. While this precept and praxis have been essential to the reproduction of the event on-playa, the desire to “leave a positive trace” in the world has motivated Burner culture off-playa—including within “playaspaces” outside the Black Rock Desert (see also Sarah Pike in this issue).

Over the past two decades, no longer a remote space in a desert in Nevada, the “playa” mutated and proliferated. To repeat the phrase adopted by Goodell in her 2017 Burning Man Global Leadership Conference (GLC) plenary speech, through such initiatives as the GLC, which was held in the San Francisco Bay Area from 2007 to 2017, as well as its annual European Leadership Summits (ELS), Burning Man self-identified as a “platform for change.” In keeping with the commitment to cultivating a movement, in the 2018 Burning Man Annual Report, Goodell reaffirmed that the organization is “dedicated to amplifying and replicating Burning Man culture across the planet.” The strength of this proliferation lies in a network of events that are sanctioned affiliates of the Burning Man Regional Network. As of 2019, there were reported to be more than one hundred events holding standing as authorized affiliates of this network, the official status of which is established via a demonstrated accord with the criteria for regional events and an observance of the 10 Principles (fig. 1).
Ritualesque, Carnivalesque, and Burning Man

While this condensed background is useful for understanding the emergence of regional burns in general, it is also important for our interpolation of two burns undertaken with the assistance of Foucault’s musings on heterotopic reflexivity framed through a lens appropriate for festive events—and notably events with intentionally transformative profiles. In Foucault’s loose meditation, heterotopia possesses, “in relation to the rest of space, a function,” which is said to evolve between two extremes. While at one extreme, heterotopias 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 spaces that are meticulous and perfected contrasts to the disorderly spaces of everyday life.31 The brothel and the colony are said to exemplify these spatial types: the one a site of illusion and fantasy, and the other of replication and regimentation. At the confluence of these extremes are prismatic spaces where culture is illuminated and refracted, made transparent and distorted—like a hall of magic mirrors.

This provocative meditation inspires a perspective suited to the study of festive event spaces—notoriously ambiguous sites of governance and freedom. As echoed in varying interpretations of the people’s “second world” according to literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, the festal is at once disciplinary and liberatory, progressive and transgressive, civic and ludic.32 An empirically informed approach suited to Burning Man and other event phenomena subject to replication and remodeling recognizes a contested event in which the contrasting spatial logics of ritual and carnival are performed. The concrescence in the festive of what ritual theorist Jack Santino calls “ritualesque” and “carnivalesque” frames offers a useful heuristic for burns.33 At the same time, the model retains an approach to space that recognizes the confluence of imitation and distortion implicit to Foucault’s musings.

In Santino’s schematic, the ritualesque is the instrumental means by which social categories are constructed and reinforced. Symbolic action with enduring intentional consequences, ritual is considered the “agent of transformation.”34 From large-scale signature burn ceremonies (such as...
Burn Night and Temple Burn), to the rituals associated with various departments (e.g., Greeters and Lamplighters) and theme camps, to everyday practices (like “MOOPing”—i.e., clearing the playa of “matter out of place” integral to the principle of Leaving No Trace), BRC is densely layered with ritual practice. Practices that were once off-hand, spontaneous, or “jokes” crystallize over their iterations into conventions. The seasonal reenactment of these conventions is deemed essential to the reproduction of community identity. This process was self-consciously celebrated in 2017 when under the theme of Radical Ritual, the Man, then dubbed The Temple of the Golden Spike (fig. 2), became a sculptured embodiment of the “Golden Spike.”

Figure 2. The Temple of the Golden Spike (effigy design, BRC 2017). Photo by Graham St John.
The title refers to a gold-painted spike driven into the playa in a ceremony performed weeks before the gate opens at the site of the Man build. Once built, the Man in the form of a giant sculptured Golden Spike was encompassed by a viewing platform. Standing on the interior of a raised platform enabling Burners to gaze inward upon the eponymous omphalos, the golden effigy was designed to represent tradition. The conscious intention to commemorate the foundations of Burning Man was achieved through reflexive attention to the event’s own fundamental traditions, namely, its rituals and explicitly the rite that inaugurates the event in space and time. In his commentary, Harvey explains how the word “radical” in Radical Ritual was to be distinguished from its more popular denotation as the “breaking of boundaries and a shedding of restrictions.” In relation to the ritual building and burning of the Man (and indeed all other ritualized builds and burns in BRC), what was instead inferred was: “all that is fixed and fundamental in human nature.”

In addition to celebrating the Golden Spike ritual, the 2017 theme also offered a rich affirmation of Burn Night, the ritual pageant instrumental to the community’s re-creation. Finally, the hyper-reflexive theme gave tribute to the dense ecology of cultural principles that are seasonally reaffirmed through ritual practice.

While ritual is instrumental, carnival is primarily expressive. As Santino outlines, carnival “refers to celebrations of great abandon, social inversion, public excess, sensuality, and the temporary establishment of an alternate society.” Such transformed space licenses category disruptions, the eruption of eros, before the “world turned upside down” supposedly returns to normal. Where cocreators are permitted to act “as if” the world were transformed, BRC is again exemplary. On the remote interstice of the playa, Burners rupture convention, embrace the forbidden, break taboos (e.g., prohibitions on public nudity), exhibit “gender terrorism,” and entertain camp aesthetics. Playful experimentation permitted within this other space promotes irreverence, corrodes order, softens edges, and mocks that which is “fixed and fundamental in human nature.” Such playfulness cultivates the satire and derision that breaks convention, while catalyzing community re/formation. In BRC 2017, among the twenty "shrine" projects that were awarded honoraria and positioned around the perimeter of the Temple of the Golden Spike—a “surplus of signifiers” in the desert of the surreal—stood a large golden toilet. Another "shrine" consisted of a huge wooden hand that could be manipulated to raise its middle finger toward the Man. One could then cock-a-snoot at tradition from within its own wide parameters.

As BRC illustrates, the performance frames of carnival and ritual braid into a complex weave integral to the event’s transformative aesthetic. It is notable that burn rituals transpire within a recurrent celebration—a frontier carnival. This seasoned reoccupation of playaspace has enabled an intensely reflexive topos that casts prismatic light on what participants call the “default” world. The copying of official culture is not uncommonly permeated with an ironic sensibility designed to subvert categories, reminiscent of the Chinese “shanzhai” (see Ian Rowen’s contribution to this issue). While BRC may be likened, notably in its early desert phase, to a frontier settlement, and perhaps even a “colony” for Bay Area bohemians, such associations are typically exploited for satirical purposes. While many BRC “departments”—themselves born from mischief and irony—have evolved into actual departments with operational guidelines, leadership training programs, and identifying symbols and rituals, they often retain their eccentricities. As burns mimic and mutate the prototype, they become contexts for authorization and dissent. Within an efflorescent global burnscape, the 10 Principles are duplicated at one extreme and reimagined at the other, with the creative tension between the ritualizing and carnivalesque ethos of principles pivotal to the Burner mode of operation.

38. Harvey, “Radical Ritual.”
40. Conversely, for a discussion of the limits to defying the Man, see the telling example of Paul Addis in St John, “Ephemeropolis,” 303.
That outlying communities must enter into a relationship with a centralized organization—that is, that assigns “regional contact” (RC) status to intermediaries—has been a noted bone of contention among protagonists. This tension exists given the echo with core-periphery power relationships associated with imperial (colony), corporate (franchise), and ecclesiastic (church) expansionism. For Gustaf Josefsson, past RC for Sweden and cofounder of the Borderland, the process holds resemblance to “building international expansion in a classic corporation.” We encountered Josefsson in Berlin in 2014 at the inaugural Burning Man ELS. Rankled that the 10 Principles held resemblance to the Ten Commandments, Josefsson challenged Harvey during the Q&A after his scheduled lecture. In a burlesque intervention, he wondered if Harvey hadn’t cast himself as a Moses-like figure emerging to shepherd the “lost tribes.”

Josefsson claimed that the Regional Network’s tendency to champion the prototype amounted to an absence of originality. With the increasing popularity of the hypermediated “mother event” and the commodification of its symbolic repertoire (signaled, for instance, by the international prevalence of uniform BRC paraphernalia), one must be, he contended, wary of the unquestioning simulation of tradition.

In terms of content creation (e.g., art grants) and event production, Josefsson is a strong advocate of decentralization, admonishing Burning Man as a “traditional, top-down event management organization.”

Such reprovals are not difficult to understand. Burning Man matured in a desert, a hostile physical environment and a hospitable social space shaping a movement whose figurehead—“Chief Philosophical Officer” Harvey—appears at a “leadership” event attended by European-wide cultural emissaries. To the outside observer, the RCs, event leads, and other “community leaders” gathering in Berlin might have appeared not unlike the minions of a monarch, cult followers, or brand loyalists. In quiet tones, Harvey’s response to Josefsson meandered across themes central to his presentation. Although the BMP has adopted a hierarchical structure, Harvey defended the organization, which he stated values consensus decision-making, is nondogmatic, and is scornful of organized religion. The 10 Principles are, he clarified, not “commandments,” with Harvey then expounding on views expressed at the advent of the Philosophical Society, when it was stated that the principles “do not precede immediate experience.” His position was that Burning Man is non-expansionist and profit was never a driving concern (no commissions are leveraged from regionals). It was also apparent that the BMP is not a conventional political movement. Harvey and others articulate their roles as “cultural stewards” committed to the ongoing interrogation of a malleable ethos forged in the fires of a remote desert. Nurturing a leadership model that values stewardship, for Goodell, “we have a business that’s completely dedicated in the nonprofit framework to taking that cultural experience and studying it, and helping replicate it, and teach others how to replicate it.”

Creative iteration characterizes the growth of an international event diaspora adopting and adapting a culture recurrently fostered in an ephemeral desert heterotopia. Through a profusion of ritual and carnival frames in which BRC is simulated and subverted, perfected and transgressed, progenic translations/mutations of the prototype demonstrate the complex evolution of Burning Man. Two islands in this cultural archipelago—Midburn (Israel) and the Borderland (Nordic)—are now discussed to illustrate this rhizomatic development.
Midburn: The Start-Up Burn

A portmanteau of the Hebrew word for “desert” (רֵדֶס midbar) and the English word “burn,” Midburn has operated at Sde Boker in Israel’s Negev desert since June 3–7, 2014. Midburn was founded as a nonprofit organization on December 31, 2012. A crew traveled to BRC in 2013 to build the large-scale interactive multimedia sculpture Hand of Inspiration, a project included among thirty-two regional effigies that traveled to BRC that year where they comprised the Circle of Regional Effigies (CORE) (see Rowan, this issue). Preceded by a series of events, the inaugural Midburn attracted 2,800 people, and by 2018, Midburn City had grown to a population of 12,500, among the largest and fastest growing satellite burns.47 Midburn City is among the closest replicas of BRC: dis/assembled in a desert; surveyed in a concentric half-circle layout with an open “playa” and a central effigy built mid-playa and destroyed in a prominent Saturday night fire ceremony; a remote Temple, also destroyed in a fire ceremony; hundreds of “theme camps”; encouragement of collaborative interactive art projects; and mutant vehicles (otherwise known as “art cars”) (fig. 3).

47. These earlier events included: a small gathering at David’s Farm, October 29, 2011; Mama Burn on Habonim Beach, April 6–8, 2012 (approx. 500 people); Octoburn on Habonim Beach, October 4–6, 2012 (approx. 1,600 people); and Contraburn, August 29–30, 2013 (approx. 1,000 people).


Additionally, Midburn departments, projects, and volunteer roles are modeled after those in BRC. For instance, the Nomads mirror the Black Rock Rangers, composed of volunteers who ensure public safety with nonintrusive methods, serve as internal community mediators trained extensively in dispute resolution, and act as mediators between Burners and law enforcement officials at the event while enjoying heightened legitimacy due to their insider/participant status.48 Another transmissible feature is cultural theming. Like BRC, each Midburn is themed. Midburn 2016, for example, was titled “Abra Cadabra: From Wasteland to Fulfillment,” and entrants were provided with a thick event guide (with English and Hebrew sections) that explained the 10 Principles and theme, listed the infrastructure and services, located the theme camps and their activities, and provided an art placement map (fig. 4 and 5). It therefore replicated the What, Where and When guide to which ticket-holding BRC entrants are traditionally entitled.
Figure 4. Midburn 2016 art placement map. From guidebook for Midburn 2016. Photo by Graham St John.

Figure 5. BRC 2016 art placement map. Courtesy of Burning Man Project.
That Midburn reproduced the prototype with such fidelity and efficiency is partially attributable to geopolitical and cultural conditions. According to volunteer spokesperson Eyal Marcus, as reported in the *ISRAEL21c* newsletter, “We are very good at dreaming big, being courageous and bringing big things to life fast.”

By adding that “Israel is the Startup Nation,” Marcus acknowledges Dan Senor and Saul Singer’s *Startup Nation: The Story of Israel’s Economic Miracle*, a book recommended to us by RC for Israel, “cultural entrepreneur,” and chairman of the Midburn Arts Foundation, Rei Dishon. Introducing the “special sauce” that explains the high-tech start-up boom in Israel—a small country with no natural resources, which by 2009 achieved a fiftyfold economic growth in sixty years—*Startup Nation* relates a story of persistence and tenacity in the face of adversity and is an overture to the immigrant’s propensity for risk-taking. The Israeli experience, according to Senor and Singer, exhibits collective goal orientation, an anti-authoritarian ethos, and a commitment to innovation coupled with a unique attitude toward (non-stigmatized) failure—all inflicted by a compulsory two-to-three years of service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) for most young adults. As Dishon explained: “We’re stubborn… And we’re learning from failure,… it’s embedded within our culture. It worked for start-ups, it worked for Midburn.”

Collectivism is a signature commitment of Nir Adan, Midburn’s founding CEO and former bodyguard for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Accustomed to collaborating on mission-orientated teams—for example, in kindergarten, kibbutz, scouts, university, and notably military service—Israelis, Adan said, are “born into communities.” As evident in art builds, theme camps, and departmental operations, burn events benefit from the kind of teamwork provided by training in the military, where teams are typically composed of individuals from a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. “Discipline, accuracy, sense of responsibility, execution, planning”: military training “sure helps from an organizational point of view,” he stated.

Former head of Midburn’s Department of Strategy and Development, Giora Israel is also a DJ/producer, certified police officer, and meditation teacher embodying the “bitzu‘ist”—Hebrew for someone who “gets things done.” When we encountered him at the 2016 GLC in Oakland, California, Israel related his role at Midburn in resolving a permit crisis the year prior. When police escalated event licensing terms, Israel worked with a team to negotiate with the chief commissioners of police and representatives from the parliament and municipalities to obtain a permit days before the gate was scheduled to open. “I know the language, and I know how they think,” recalled Israel. “I brought all my negotiation skills to the table.” A combination of tenacity and receptivity proved foundational to a unique partnership in which the police agreed to operate largely outside the event. In language reminiscent of a military operation, all parties were compelled to understand that they were “on the same side” with a shared goal: to ensure “everybody is coming home in one piece.”

Midburn illustrates how national and cultural conditions shape the appropriation of the Burning Man model, and notably the interpretation of the 10 Principles. Ensuring the survival of an event that must be sanctioned by authorities in order to maintain legitimacy (i.e., granting a permit), this example of high-level brokering is an expression of Civic Responsibility, the principle that underlines how community members must “assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with local, state and federal laws.”


51. Rei Dishon, interview by authors, Skype, November 21, 2016.

52. Nir Adan, interview by authors, Skype, July 11, 2017.


54. Giora Israel, interview by authors, Skype, January 10, 2017.
Gifting illustrates another principle that is both universally adapted and assigned meaning locally. "Partinspiration" is a term invented by Adan to evoke the power of playspace to inspire participants, especially "virgins," to engage in ways that generate gratitude in others. Giora Israel's motivation to engage with authorities in defense of the Midburn community is recognizable in this light. The term "partinspiration" connotes the logic implicit to the "spirit of the gift" that remains in circulation. In Burner culture, acts of service and unconditional gifting sustain a community whose members are motivated by gratitude and whose own commitments and projects inspire others to participate. As a testament to the way Midburn replicates Gifting, as Adan clarifies, Midburn "is an engine of inspiration for better neighboring, gifting, observing things differently and connecting hearts." 56

Captivated by his first encounter with BRC in 2001, Adan later sought to import the model whole cloth. That the Black Rock Desert playa accommodates "so many people ... different from one another" and permits participants to express those differences made a lasting impression. As a country comprising near seventy different nationalities, Israel, he felt, was prepared for an event model that can be a vehicle to "connect people from such a diversity of religions and cultures" and be "a safe environment for all cultures and nationalities." 57 In 2018, Midburn reported that nearly 10 percent of the population of Midburn City were non-Israelis traveling internationally (over 1,000 people), a statistic currying favor with the Ministry of Tourism. The figure resonates with the principle of Radical Inclusion, with some reservations. Although no census data exists to provide a clear picture of the ethnic background of Israeli participants, Arabs represent a very small minority of the event population.

As a result of such exclusivity, the non-representation of Arabs (17 percent of Israeli citizens) renders the principle of Radical Inclusion something of a failed enterprise or false promise at Midburn. This circumstance mirrors this principle’s mythic pretensions within the BRC prototype. Despite the championing of “inclusion,” in 2013, only 7.3 percent of the surveyed population of BRC identified as a person of color, as revealed by BRC census data. Although this is not the place for in-depth analysis, after years of dissensus and inactivity around this issue, in 2021, the BMP formed Radical Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (RI​DE), a cross-departmental stewardship and advisory group responsible for prioritizing, managing, and advocating for diversity and equity, while implementing anti-racist and anti-discriminatory strategies across the organization and throughout the Burner community. 58 Over the next year, new outreach and support programs demonstrated a new culture of diversity in which those who previously felt unwelcome were provided necessary support and access. For twenty-eight-year Burner, person of color, and RIDE committee member Patrice McKay (aka Chef Juke), these efforts were starting to have an impact in 2022, which saw “the most people of color in Black Rock City ever.” 59 It remains to be seen if and how Midburn will demonstrate similar self-reflexivity toward creating a diverse community and thereby living up to the principle of Radical Inclusion.

Inclusivity aside, a symptom of a concerted effort to model the prototype, Midburn suffered from the pressures of accelerated simulation, leading to the postponement of the 2019 event. 60 As Midburn City was flooded with inexperienced participants in 2016–18, a significant proportion of the population was uneducated about the ethos that distinguishes a burn from a music festival. Not unique to Midburn, this concern was raised by Iris Ronly Riklis, who assumed the direction of Strategy and Development in 2018. Riklis lamented the avalanche of "touristic" visitors and the
shortfall in volunteers. Additionally, in each year of its presence at Sde Boker, Midburn encountered more local opposition. The desolation of a fragile pastoral ecology caused by 12,000+ habitués was chief among the concerns, as was residential sound complaints. Riklis gestured toward the root of the problem, stating that members of the Midburn community were beginning to question the "copy-paste" approach. While identifying elements of the received "format" that are essential to operations—for example, the Rangers/Nomads, the Gate, and the 10 Principles—"we need to start finding our voice," she added. To that end, Riklis spoke of a desire to establish "a philosophical center" to explore "the culture and the principles and their meaning, their deeper sense to us Israelis."^61

Since its protean dis/assembly in the Negev desert, Midburn has been more than a mere replica of the Burning Man prototype. Occasioning carnivalesque responses, modifications, and subversions of Israeli and Burning Man traditions, the event has accommodated culturally embedded and site-specific art projects, perhaps the most prominent being its central paired male/female effigy embodied by Adam and Eve until 2017 (fig. 6). Various large-scale burnable artworks illustrate how the mythological heritage of the "Holy Land" is interpreted by local artists. In 2016, a variation on Noah’s Ark—No One’s Ark—both celebrated and subverted Judeo-Christian mythology.^62 Additionally, the design aesthetic of the Midburn 2016 entrant’s guidebook was "biblical" in all but name. With its page margins designed to look like worn and faded parchment paper, the guide was intended to appear Bible-esque—a tongue-in-cheek allusion to BRC’s What, Where and When guide, colloquially known as “the bible” (fig. 7). Echoing distant hopes for *Radical Inclusion*, in 2018, a spectacular wooden sculpture, The Flying Camel, emerged from the desert landscape, modeled after the emblematic statue of Tel Aviv’s Levant Fair symbolizing progress and East/West (economic) cooperation in the 1930s.^63

Figure 6. Midburn 2016 playa (with the Temple in foreground and effigy in background). Photo by Yair Garfinkel.
Some camps explicitly transgress public order codes apparent within Israeli society and enforced on-site. Participating in the sex-positive Free Love camp in 2018, one of our interviewees organized erotic workshops as gifts to the community, aligned with the principle of *Gifting*. While her efforts were acclaimed by Burners, Nera mentioned that unlike BRC or European burns, nudity is not tolerated in public areas of Midburn, with authorities requesting the erection of a yurt wall to seal her camp off (theme camps are not normally surrounded by walls and include easily accessible, open guest areas).

Conversely, the Israeli burn also features subversive projects that would likely meet resistance in Nevada, such as the Dadaist experiments of Midburn's oldest running Shithole camp. As explained by cofounder Monkey, the camp was designed in creative response to the country’s hugely popular psytrance scene, implementing a range of provocative workshops and performances satirizing “hippy” festivals. This provocative approach explained the blending of Ku Klux Klan dress code with hippie batik colors during the 2015 Hippyhate March. This incident triggered the ire of a visiting BMP representative while authorized by the Midburn CEO. As we have discussed elsewhere, similar artistic subversions were apparent at Midburn 2018, produced by Shithole members and other conceptually affiliated artists.

The transplanting of the Burning Man playa into the Negev desert is enabled by unique regional circumstances: environmental, cultural, geopolitical. Furthermore, as we have noted, the prologue to the Midburn saga had originated in prior attendances at the "mother event," which urged the founders to initiate, as Adan formulates, “a community that grows an event on a certain point.”
Aided by collectivist values and commitment ingrained in Israeli society, the rapid development of this community/event has paralleled that of BRC, with Midburn sharing not only the 10 Principles of Burning Man but some of its struggles as well. As we will see in the following section, the Nordic burn, the Borderland, modulates the prototype through very different trajectories, many of which can be traced back to the Swedish prelude to the event.

The Borderland: Between Dream and Reality

The Borderland is a Swedish-origin community operating an annual event held in various locations in Sweden from 2011 to 2014 and subsequently in Denmark in Boesdal Kalkbrud, a disused limestone quarry on the Baltic Sea south of Copenhagen from 2015 to 2017 (and in 2018–19 in Hedeland, Denmark) (fig. 8). While also overwhelmingly white and middle class, the Borderland represents a sharp contrast to Midburn’s modulation of the prototype. For Josefsson, who had attended Midburn, replicating the BMP’s top-down control model, Midburn “felt like Burning Man, but smaller.” Franchise-like imitation is deeply ironic for a culture celebrating innovation and diversity, he thought. It was disturbing to him that one could travel “halfway across the world” only to enter a simulation. With the goal to “create our own identity,” Josefsson committed to cofounding a local event that, while inspired by BRC, was designed to break what was understood to be a troubling pattern of imitation.

Many original participants in the Swedish Burning Man community met in 2002 at Futuredrome, a live action roleplaying (LARP) event involving costuming, live music, performance, and film and virtual components. With 1,500 participants, this formative *allkonstverk*, “total artwork,” was mounted in an abandoned quarry in Kinnekulle, Sweden, the stage for the post-apocalyptic Drome City where an artificial intelligence (AI) kept the population in thrall to “the perpetual party.”
As Josefsson explained, “You were a connoisseur, you were a dancer, you were a decorator, you were a propagandist, you were a bureaucrat that went around rating all the parties, or you were, you know, a kamikaze partier or an aristocrat, and everyone had their own role in the party.”

Futuredrome organizers and participants drew inspiration from the Mad Max films, The Matrix, and Burning Man documentaries (no one had yet attended BRC). As Futuredrome co-organizer and film director and later Borderland cofounder Mathias Gullbrandson explained, Futuredrome had an original story design that failed. According to this narrative framework, performing improvised roles and enslaved by an AI-controlled party, Drome citizens were confronted by a “savior” who awakened them to their place in an illusory matrix beyond which there exists a “real” world. The awakened masses were expected to stage a “revolution” to overthrow the oppressive party machine. Alas, the people rejected the revolution and emphatically resisted the bursting of their bubble. “They just wanted to continue the party forever.” As Gullbrandson surmised, “we were ‘victims’ of our own story.”

Joseffson made first contact with BRC in 2009, returning to the Nevada playa in 2010, working with Olle Bjerkås and Jon Wingborg and their project Grand Flat Piano. That year, a team of twenty-eight Swedes kick-started BRC’s Nordic Camp. Subsequently, Josefsson was driven to cocreate a playa-inflected version of Drome City called the Borderland, a place “between reality and dreams, where you can dream big and be any character, and explore your potential.”

The result was a unique ripple in the Burnerverse. Stewarded by the nonprofit membership organization Föreningen Gränslandet Österlen, the Borderland has a robust autonomous identity. Embodying this independence, Borderland board member and creator of the Dreams grant platform Hugi Ásgeirsson is circumspect about Burning Man culture. “We are allies, and we have adopted the commandments of their Prophet of the West, but you might find rifts in reality that you were not prepared for.”

For Ásgeirsson, the exploration of “the borderland between dreams and reality” supersedes any imported principles. Converse to the hierarchical model of the BMP (and Midburn), the Borderland has experimented with decentralization and transparency. With a system that values peer relationships and with structures and practices in which participants are afforded autonomy in their domains and are accountable for coordinating with others, the organization has committed to Teal self-management practices and a supporting digital platform. They implemented a rotating committee of board members and a chairperson. Additionally, all participants are recognized as “members,” with the public annually invited to buy “membership” in a lottery (about 3,200 memberships were available in 2019). Successful “lottery winners” become legitimate cocreators of the event. That participants purchase “membership” and not “tickets” is proclamatory, given that ticketing is typically associated with a produced experience consumed within an entertainment marketplace—in other words, the standard festival experience. With Borderlings holding membership, the Borderland also actively challenges the potentially elitist “volunteer” status. Not only does this practice distinguish the Borderland from a “festival,” but the framework is also distinct from BRC, where, in the absence of such participant membership, the potential for formal (within the staffing structure) and informal (between volunteers and non-volunteers) stratification prevails.

A decentralizing philosophy is practiced within the Borderland community across the management of artistic content (a crowdsourcing granting platform called “Dreams”) and
in digital self-governing organizational structures (called “Reality” and “Talk”). The Dreams platform is a tool that enables approximately 70 percent of funds—in 2019, 170,000 euros—to be awarded to community art project proposals through membership “grantlets.” This distributive approach to arts granting contrasts with the BRC model where “honoraria” are awarded by select committees of the Burning Man Arts Department. Intended to encourage growth and inhibit elitism, Reality is a nonhierarchical project management tool devised to enhance the co-creation of event production, which incorporates “Reality Guides,” coaches and mentors who are experienced with a variety of practical roles and responsibilities in the organization. Talk is a digital platform that is integral to an “advisory process” that enables existing practice, process and roles to be contested, and alternatives proposed and discussed among peers, and that holds a consensual outcome as its ideal. The combination of these methods and tools comprises a “digital co-governance platform.” Since this is designed to enhance the transparency of decision-making, not only in matters effecting planning and production but also in relation to the organizational model itself, the platform has the potential to represent a truly co-creative, or co-governmental, and not merely “participatory,” model.

For Josefsson, these tools build long-term organizational capability, increasing the possibility for spin-off events and “the potential for a more distributed, a more networked, powerful community that can create a diaspora of events.” As Josefsson further stated:

> Because we bring more people into central organization, we’re actively teaching organizational skills to all our participants... Burning Man is now talking about a hundred-year goal, but you’re still sitting with the fact that you have the same founders now as before... I believe that if you are really for the culture that is not built on hegemony or the kind of worship of the old, and the worship of leadership, then that has to be broken apart quickly... So to me it was also important to build a long-term community that needs to live without me, that needs to live without the other Borderland founders. So we need to get ourselves out of the equation as soon as possible.77

As its exponents clarify, the Borderland exists in the liminal zone between Dreams and Reality, a zone enhanced by decentralized processes that are never settled or finalized but always undergoing improvement. Other commentators describe this endeavor as “spreading the power, spreading the decision making and spreading the responsibility out towards the community and away from the Board.” Hierarchical structures, by contrast, “disempower people to accomplish their full potential in participation.” “The Borderland is self-organized and applies something called Consensual Do-ocracy for decision making. This means that decisions are neither managed through commands and control of a central authority, nor direct democracy. Instead, the general principle is that anyone can make any decision regarding The Borderland.”78

Practicing decentralization is not without its challenges, as underlined by the following example. The Borderland lost its location shortly before the 2018 event, and the then chairperson (“Chairmonster”)—an ardent advocate of the Teal system—called for the engagement of Borderlings instead of taking a firm top-down initiative in the emerging relocation crisis. Although paved with good intent, the initiative met with resistance as the chairperson was alleged to have acted non-collaboratively in accord with his own vision of the event, ostensibly undermining the ethos of a self-organized community. The resulting controversy was dramatized in a mock “Tribunal” staged at the 2019 ELS in Aarhus, Denmark.79 Echoing the Borderland’s roots

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77. Josefsson, interview.


in interactive theater, this eighty-minute performance, complete with judges, a prosecutor, witnesses, and about fifty members of the audience (composed of community stakeholders), was rich in carnivalesque and ritualesque elements. Illustrative of the former, “witnesses” were sworn in on a solemn pink unicorn’s horn, and a secret conspiracy between prosecutor and defendant upended the verdict in the last minute. Besides these satirical elements, the performance provided a therapeutic framework for conflict resolution where the Chairmonster and other community stakeholders had the opportunity to elaborate their visions and opinions. The defendant was found “guilty” on one charge (prioritizing his dream of implementing the Teal system above the reality of the crisis) and “acquitted” on the other (not assuming enough operational responsibility). The Tribunal seemed to exemplify the way event management crises and their concomitant “social dramas” are performed within “redressive artopias”—in other words, through the redressive potential of “cultural dramas” enacted in event heterotopias. Furthermore, it demonstrated the direct accountability of the Borderland’s board members and served to reinforce a decentralized management model alternative to the BMP.

In a further distinction from BRC (and Midburn), rather than adopting the community safety model provided by the Black Rock Rangers, the Borderland features Clown Police. These clown-gussied members are modeled on their Futuredrome predecessors who were, as Josefsson recalled, “arresting people and locking them up for not having enough fun.” An email to the authors (St John) introducing the role to prospective Clown Police in June 2019 explained that, as pranksters trained in emergency protocols, “we are not professionals, nor are we rangers—we are clowns!” The Clown Police are “more than a community safety force, it is a proactive community engagement force, that promotes a sense of caretaking and social responsibility both from and within the community itself.” Clown Police are a dramatic embodiment of the ludic and subversive aspects of carnival crossbreeding with the civic and orderly aspect of ritual. The result is an uproarious hybrid of disparate figures: one officiating compliant conduct and the other an improvisational provocateur. For the duration of the event, these fun officials patrol the boundary that separates the sensible from the nonsensible, acting toward its dissipation, often with amusing outcomes. For example, at Borderland 2017, as a typically alternate means of achieving civic ordinance, Clown Police were responsible for distributing official notices under the windscreen wipers of vehicles parked outside of designated areas. “PIMP or MOVE: This car needs to be pimped beyond recognition or moved to the designated car park.”

Despite the divergences and resistances, the Borderland is a member of the Burning Man Regional Network and remains a burn in the calendar of this network. BRC is a source of inspiration for many Borderlings who often identify as “Burners” in this and other contexts, burn an effigy or effigies, refer to their event space as “the playa,” and seek to transpose the mood or vibe with which they are familiar in BRC. Many practices translate and iterate those from Nevada without being carbon copies. Burn Night offers a case in point. Echoing a BRC tradition—long abandoned on Burn Night, though evident at smaller art project burns—at the Borderland 2017, a great many participants danced naked around the Burn Night fire. Partly as a response to the proximity of residential properties and consequential sound complaints, the event also featured a “silent disco”—DJed music experienced through headphones that featured three separate channels with varying styles of music. Channels were indicated by unique color LED flashing on the headphones. With many revelers wearing nothing but headphones, Borderlings exhibited techno-primal hybrids. This technological accompaniment to raw human embodiment is one...
illustration of how Borderlings “iterate” the model without simulating it. At the same time, the orthopraxy of this principled culture is transferred and contested through carnival and ritual frameworks. From the conflict management of the Tribunal to the community engagement practices of the Clown Police, the Borderland exhibits elements that blend into and highlight the heterogeneous liminality of the Burner event horizon.

Discussion

If BRC mirrors and mutates the “default world,” its prismatic diaspora modulates the prototype. Burning Man is not only an “ephemeropolis” in Nevada’s Black Rock Desert that represents and contests the default but also a proliferation of centrifugal “other spaces” that have variably transposed the “playa” in regions worldwide. Complementary to accompanying work resulting from longitudinal research on the Burning Man movement, the article has shown that Foucault’s musings on heterotopia offer a useful opening to the transformative complexity of BRC and the global network of events reimagining the prototype. In particular, we have explored the implications of his musings on heterotopic reflexivity for the study of transformative gatherings, festivals, and events. Enabling insight on tensions endogenous to transfestive spaces that simultaneously mirror and distort the lifeworld, this dynamic principle has been found useful for understanding the “frontier carnival” of BRC, as well as regional frontier events for which BRC represents the evental default.

The article addresses two satellite burn communities that iterate the BRC model, their translations shaped by distinct local, regional, and national circumstances. While each event in the global Burner diaspora is a unique variation of the prototype in Nevada, with unique regional—cultural and environmental—circumstances influencing how the 10 Principles of Burning Man are interpreted and applied, the events in this study illustrate imitative and innovative tendencies. While Israel’s Midburn has replicated the Burning Man model with the aid of operational capabilities acquired through compulsory military service, the Nordic event, the Borderland, is a unique experiment in decentralization shaped by LARP events. Copying the BRC prototype, Midburn adopted a ticketing model associated with broader trends in festival-going and has encountered similar difficulties related to rapid growth and spectacularization. The Borderland has developed a membership model that not only enables the crowdsourcing of art grant allocations but also facilitates event self-governance through “consensual do-ocracy” and transparent decision-making—practices that are designed to circumvent stratification and elitism. The Borderland demonstrates as much indebtedness to Futuredrome as it does to Burning Man. Whereas the enlightened participants of Futuredrome failed to overthrow the decadent party machine, as a cocreated event community, it appears that the Borderland eventually enacted the desired “revolution,” albeit informally and while also remaining among the more autonomous regional events in the Burning Man Regional Network.

These events cannot, however, be pigeonholed as automatons on the one hand or innovators on the other. While mirror-imaging BRC and its principles, Midburn also possesses unique traits with dissident and heterodox elements. Midburn artists were found to exploit an interactive art framework to unsettle and disturb the prototype. At the Israeli burn, the region’s “Holy Land” heritage provides mythological materials to sculpt the model, which is translated, dramatized, and iterated through cultural and historical frames. And although the Borderland, among the
most autonomous and unique regional events in the Burning Man network, has sought to break the mold, resisting an implicit center-periphery dynamic, BRC remains an abiding inspiration. We have shown how interactive art projects—the hard currency of an event-centered community arts diaspora—modulate the “Burner” way of life. The article has demonstrated that interactive and satirical projects like the “Tribunal” permit the reflexive performance of Burner principles and culture through ritual and carnival frames, frames that contextualize the variable transmission and subversion of Burner identity. Through a comparative lens, the article has begun to demonstrate how transfestive events variably model and mutate—in other words, transform—cultural tradition.

As with the prototype event, regional burns are themselves cultural mosaics shaped by multiple and competing interests. Demonstrating unique trends in the Burnerverse, these burns are uniquely contested sites. While the various facets of the BRC mothership are replicated in the regional burns, each event presents its own set of complications; its own roots and development; its own unique origin myths, influences, and constituents; and its own way of translating Burning Man and interpreting the 10 Principles. Each burn has a unique way of expressing and contesting Burner identity or lampooning the social world outside. For example, as indicated by our field research of German burns, organizational procedures, event workshops, and participant interactions may satirize local bureaucratic procedures or reveal the limits and challenges of adherence to the principles. Further attention to how Burning Man is modulated and transformed by way of its regionals would be useful, as would research addressing individual events—like those explored here and other events in the Burnerverse—as sites that provoke, challenge, and transform their “Burner” identity.

While “islands” in a cultural archipelago, the events under consideration are not isolated. There is considerable dialogue between burns and their organizing bodies, affiliates of which participate in forums like the GLC and ELS, which have served as cultural exchange hubs. Through such exchanges, Midburn representatives have, for example, eschewed the “copy-paste” mentality and, among other regional communities, have adopted a variation of the Dreams arts grant model developed by the Borderland. It should also be noted that not only do regional events modulate BRC, but progeny events also stimulate further satellite event communities operating seasonally within their regions. For example, the Israeli and Nordic communities are each composed of several annual events, from small-scale Israeli burns such as Midburnerot to Stockholm’s Urban Burn, modulating Midburn City and the Borderland.

This article has contributed to the emergent field of transfestive studies by addressing the internal dynamics of Burning Man, the world’s largest prototypically transformative event culture. By focusing on two regional event communities with attention to their unique background, cultural context, design, and interpretation of Burning Man ethos, the approach is a mere sketch of a complex event culture mosaic. It is our hope that future research of this global network will further investigate the diverse methods by which BRC-inspired events and initiatives model, mutate, and transform Burner culture. How national, cultural, and spatial contexts shape regional event design in the post-COVID world will be aided by appropriately designed comparative ethnographies. Studies that address the distinct ritual and carnival frames inherent to burns will be useful, as will studies addressing how Burning Man cultural principles are transmitted and transgressed through the performance of hybridized frames. Such future research should add to our picture of the internal dynamics of a transformational movement.
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