

EVENT_ ARCHITECTURE

Enacting Spatial Exotopy in the Liminal Environment of Burning Man

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Abstract

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The Temple burns on Sunday, signaling the demise of an annual event that occurs on a dried-out lakebed in Black Rock Desert, Nevada. Permeated with impermanence, Burning Man gathers 70,000 people with a desire to belong—to a place, a time, to one another, and to a phenomenon that is greater than us. The pilgrimage to the desert begins the rite to sacred liminality—a state of transition fortified as you gain distance from social hierarchies and dwell where no objective or subjective structures survive. This thesis explores Burning Man principles, including radical self-expression, self-reliance, and immediacy by designing wearable structures that facilitate profound re-orientations in time and space to culminate in Exotopy -- a gestalt of remarkable interactions, narratives, and of people encapsulated in the event architecture of life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Vikram and Dr. Bob, my witches of wizardry - Thank you for guiding me through this labyrinth.

To Nicole Huber - Thank you for helping me find my voice.

To my family and friends - Thank you for keeping me true to myself.

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Figure 2: "Deep Playa" in Black Rock Desert

ACT I: INTRODUCTION

SCENE I. RITE OF PASSAGE

During the spring quarter of thesis preparation, my father passed away unexpectedly. He died in the Philippines, halfway across the world from the place he and my mother brought our family to live almost thirty years ago. My siblings and I spent our formative years as immigrants driving up and down the west coast of the United States getting the lay of this “land of the free” and enjoying the freedoms that came with pursuing the American Dream. With extended family scattered throughout California, Washington, and British Columbia, breaks from school were spent on road-trips exploring the American West.

It took decades of working and saving before my parents could afford to buy their first house. Prior to settling in a suburban area of the Olympic Peninsula, we moved almost nineteen times – eventually making the move from the Philippines feel insignificant compared to the constant packing and un-packing of our belongings, living in various apartments, or rental homes; and starting at a new school almost once a year. We went from being immigrants to nomads – our most constant sense of place was on the road.

It has been more than a decade since my family moved out of the house on the Peninsula – since then, we have been scattered by various forces such as school, jobs, relationships, and the inevitable yearning to move, something that feels as natural to my family as staying does to others. In some respects, I hope that my father felt that he was home when he returned to the Philippines. His death made me remember that “home” is a concept that lives outside of the built-environment. Home is designed by our memories, culture, traditions, and customs; in essence, where we feel a sense of belonging. With this in mind, I left my constructs of comfort and rituals, returned to my nomadic roots, and began a pilgrimage to Burning Man.

When you arrive at Burning Man in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada, volunteer Burners greet you with the words “Welcome home.” For one week in the late summer, 75,000 people from around the world gather in the middle of a dried-up lakebed in northwestern Nevada making the assembly the third largest city in the state for that week. Some return to this event every year and more than half are Virgin-Burners, all with the intent to survive the harsh alkaline dust, windstorms, brutal sun, and occasional rainstorms. Citizens of Burning Man are required to bring with them a structure to dwell in, clothing (optional), and a week’s supply of food and water – beyond that, as the local saying goes, “the Playa will provide.”



Figure 3: The Cacophony Society

ACT II: SITE INVESTIGATIONS

SCENE I. THE EPHEMERAL CITY

Burning Man is not what it seems to be. Today, it is a massive event, with incredible art in a desert regularly whipped by giant dust storms. Thirty years ago, it was an underground event put together by renegade artists in San Francisco. Once law enforcement deemed the gathering of a growing number of people to be a public safety issue, the founders of Burning Man--with the help of a local counter-culture group, the Cacophony Society--moved it to an unforgiving wind-swept dry lakebed in the Nevada desert. It slowly changed to become the \$20+ million event it is today. (Glade 7)

When Larry Harvey's 1986 Burning Man ritual in San Francisco moved to Nevada's Black Rock Desert, it morphed into an annual weeklong gathering of up to 75,000 people from around the world. More than a nomadic festival revolving around the burning of an effigy, it has matured into an experiment in urban planning, showcasing temporary housing made by its participants. The 8-foot tall anthropomorphic wooden figure that Harvey and a close group of friends made in a garage thirty-two years ago to burn on Baker Beach has transformed into the main event, at Burning Man in Nevada. It occupies the center of a horseshoe-shaped playa that is 40 miles long and 7 miles wide (Glade 7).

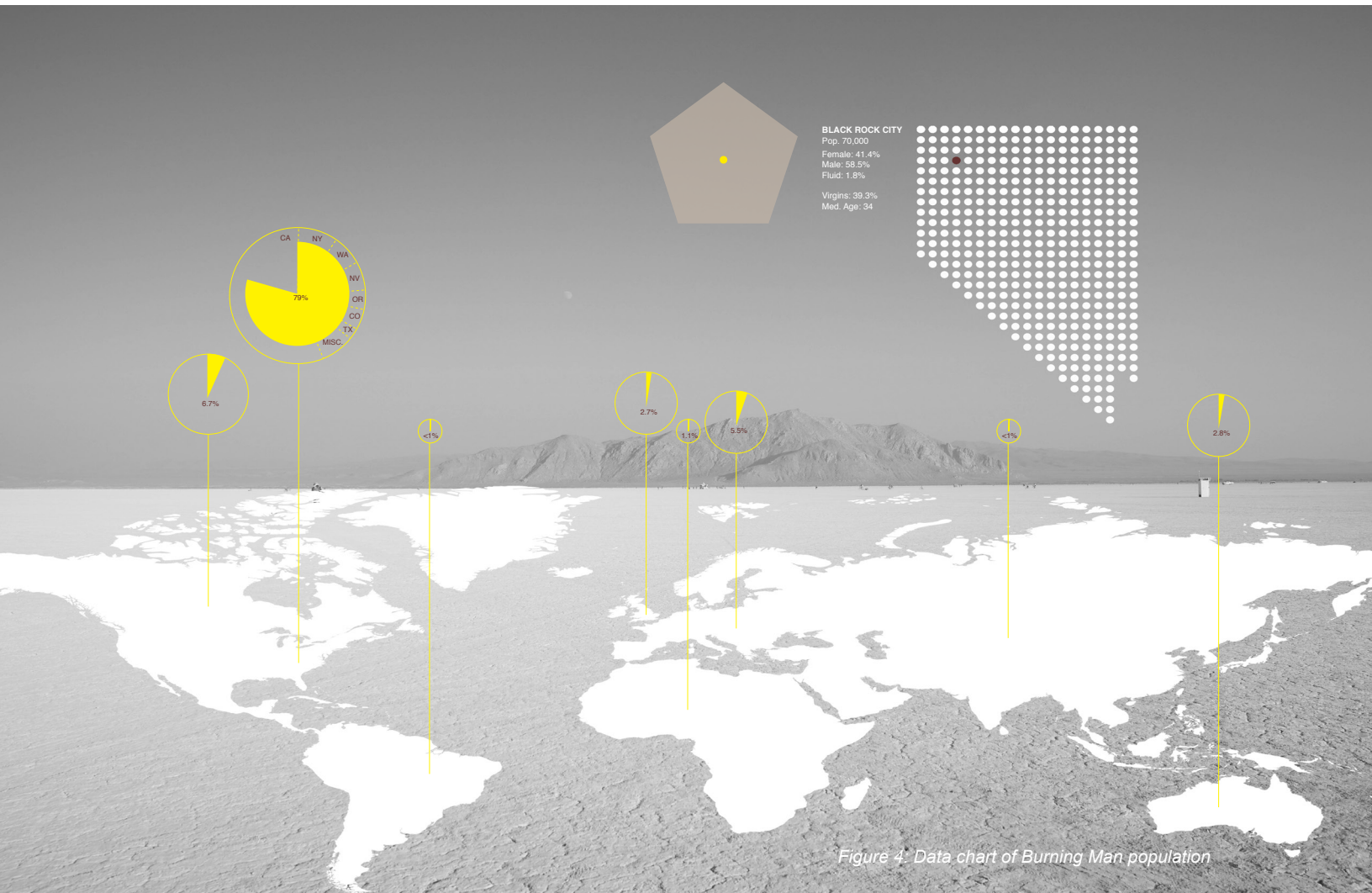


Figure 4: Data chart of Burning Man population

Figure 5: Larry Harvey and friends at Baker Beach San Francisco, CA



Burning Man may reveal itself as more than an eccentric expression of an old and new counterculture, but a harbinger of a new way of being. (Nash 9)

Reaching a height of as much as 100 ft. tall, the Man rises dramatically out of the flat Black Rock Desert floor. Around the Man, a placement team of twelve volunteers curates the city with zoning for interactive theme camps that serve as the fabric of the event, More than 150 volunteers from the Art Department work with the 300+ people of the Department of Public Works (DPW) to help artists put up the monumental interactive artworks that Burning Man is world renowned for.

The city is constructed in two weeks and over the next eight days; participants inhabit the plots between concentric streets that are named with words relating to the annual theme, moving inside to out alphabetically from A to L. The Golden Spike is placed at the center, marking where the Man will stand and from that point the radial streets emerge; the street names and the names of other city features are derived from the face of a clock and named after the time from 2:00 to 10:00. The very first concentric street is the Esplanade – the innermost border street forming a semi-circle from 2:00 to 10:00 around the Man. From there, plots between the streets are filled with inhabitants throughout the week as the urban fabric comes alive and becomes the third largest city in Nevada.

Figure 6: Plan: Burning Man Camps

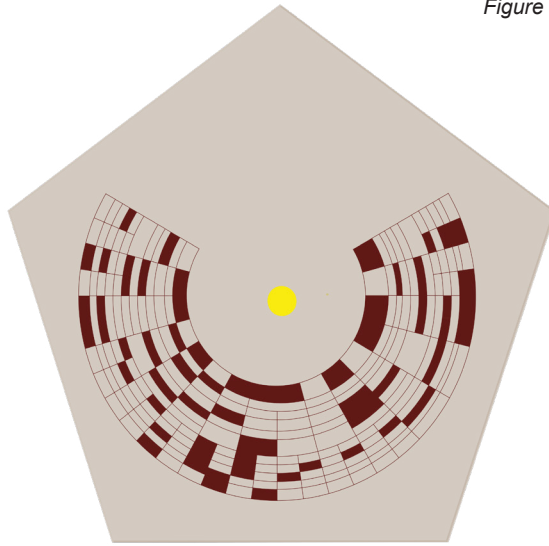


Figure 7: Plan: Esplanade

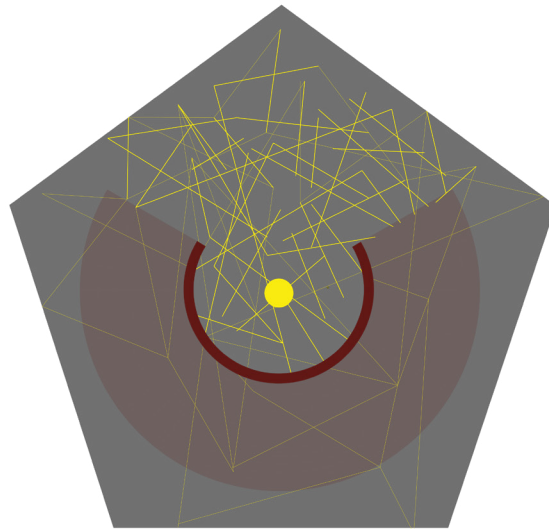
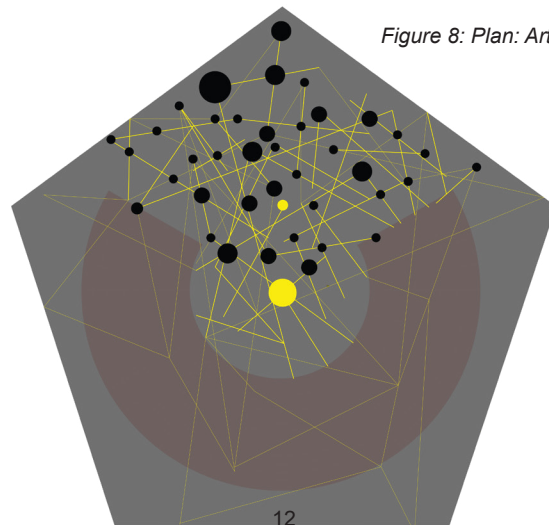


Figure 8: Plan: Art installations in "Deep Playa"



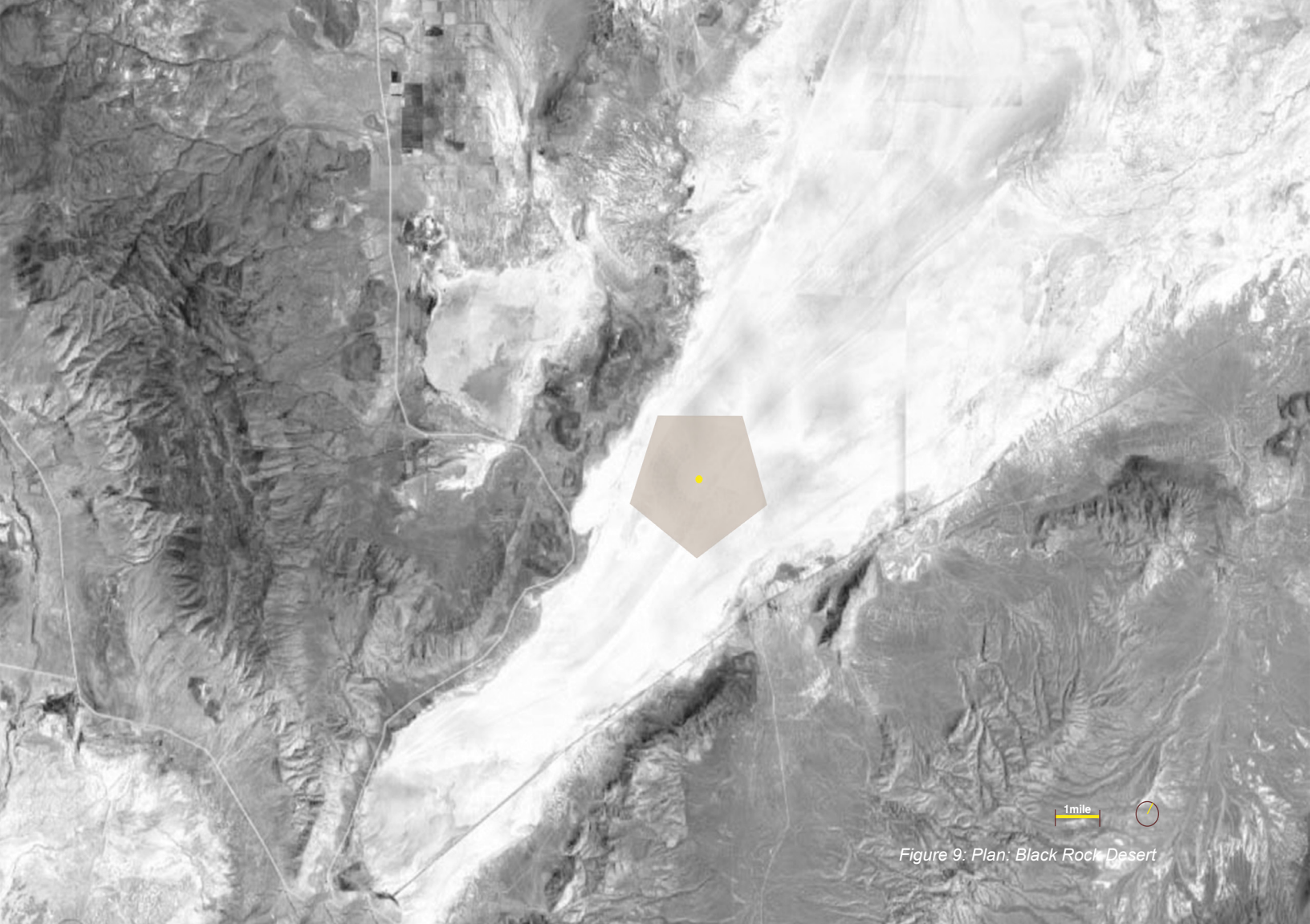


Figure 9: Plan: Black Rock Desert

SCENE II. RADICAL RITUALS

This ancient alkaline lakebed is inhospitable to living things, moreover human beings. Winds can regularly be up to 40 miles per hour – sometimes much higher. Dust storms can bring visibility down to inches, unexpectedly, and can last for days – and in some years are followed by rainstorms that cause the dust to settle into a muddy landscape making it impossible for Burners to drive their bikes, mutant cars, and vehicles around the Playa. Beyond the unpredictable ecology of the landscape, Black Rock City draws an immediate sense of belonging while simultaneously invoking awe at its majesty. Once the gates are open to its citizens (at 12:01am on Monday morning) residents of Black Rock City enter the REAL city that never sleeps and leave their default world behind.



Figure 10. Burning Man 10 Principles

Burners arrive and set up pretty much wherever they want—unless they are participants in theme camps that are pre-approved by the DPW. Camps are assigned to plots throughout various neighborhoods to anchor specific zones designated by established themes. The result: theme camps constructed by groups of longtime Burners fill the innermost circle with the best views of the Man; sound camps, which host parties from dusk to dawn, are on the outskirts of the city; kid/family friendly camps are given space away from the Esplanade where most of the nightlife activity begins and extends out into the Deep Playa beyond the Man.

Once you become a resident of Black Rock City, you take an oath to the Ten Principles of Burning Man. Unlike the default world, rules are few, but the city runs on one credo: NO SPECTATORS! Burning Man is a collective, participatory experience that is built by and for its residents. The Ten Principles form the city culture that help enforce the one rule and are as follows: Radical Inclusion, Gifting, De-commodification, Radical Self-reliance, Radical Self-expression, Communal Effort, Civic Responsibility, Leave No Trace, Participation, and Immediacy. Larry Harvey wrote the Ten Principles in 2004 as guidelines, crafted not as a dictate of how people should be and act, but as a reflection of the community's ethos as they had organically developed since the event's inception (Burningman.org).

SCENE III: WOMAN ON THE MOON

At any point during the event, thousands of people are enacting their own visions of what Burning Man ought to be. In effect, Black Rock City is inherently plural and constantly changing. Some people believe that Burning Man is an arts festival: a gallery of invention that grows in the desert dust. Some say it's an experiment in community – a test drive for new models of human interaction. “There are others who treat it like it is a spiritual journey, a sex romp, a pyrotechnic potlatch...” or an excuse to run around for a week wearing clothes that look like costumes from ‘Blade Runner’ or on occasion, completely naked. (Bruder xii)

People call it the best party of the year, while others consider it a political statement against consumer culture, or rather a self-absorbed ode to decadence, or an oddly inconvenient vacation. Architects and wanna-be designers have used PVC pipe, canvas, and rebar to build the most elaborate hexagonal and geodesic structures anyone has seen outside of an urban city. Technology giants (ahem, Mark Zuckerberg) show up to make thousands of artisanal grilled cheese sandwiches and gift them to fellow Burners before dancing to House music streaming from mutant art vehicles adorned with millions of dollars in laser projectors, LED lights, and sound systems.

When definitions fail, people describe the scene as a confusing kaleidoscope of references, “Burning Man is Fellini directing Alice In Wonderland on the set of Mad Max in one of Italo Calvino’s Invisible Cities, with props by Duchamp and Dali, second-hand costumes from Barbarella, The Beatles, and Ringling Bros., casting by Hieronymus Bosch, and a planned premiere on Tatoonie”. This is all an elaborate way of saying, “You had to be there”. (Bruder xii)

As a virgin to Burning Man, there were moments that made me feel like I was the first woman to land on the moon, consumed with questions as to why I was there and why I traveled so deep into an unknown territory. The answer is told through a collective journey: how people get there, what they do, and how they integrate a week’s worth of dust, ashes, and narratives into their lives after the last fire goes out.



Figure 11: 'Woman on the Moon'

ACT II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SCENE I. LIMINAL SPACES

LIMINALITY

In many societies, rites of passage are essential to the process of growth and transformation. Our self-identities are often tied to milestones; we are defined by our accomplishment of these pre-defined rites. Beyond the religious section of society – those who carry a specific set of beliefs--there are the citizens that live outside the domain of a set value system, and for whom rituals are contracted as a matter of choice rather than a universal corporate ascription.

French folklorist Arnold Van Gennep formulated the concept of rites of passage as he examined tribal cultures and articulated them as a tripartite processual structure. He defines rites de passage as “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age”. Gennep states that the rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and re-aggregation. The phases separation and re-aggregation speak for themselves – they detach ritual subjects from their societal structures and return them inwardly transformed after conquering the middle (marginal) phase (Turner, *Blazing* 48-9).

The margin phase is a concept Anthropologist, Victor Turner borrows from Gennep and examines in more detail. Turner focuses on the purposes this phase serves to the ritual subject, describing it as a, “...threshold, but at least in the case of protracted initiation rites or major festivals it is a very long threshold, a corridor almost, or a tunnel which may become a pilgrim’s road, or, passing from dynamics to statics, may cease to be a mere transition and become a set way of life, a state, that of the anchorite or monk”. This is Turner’s definition of what he names, “liminality” and the ritual subjects, respectively, are called “liminaries” (49).

In tribal societies, Turner associates Liminaries with symbols of death because they evade classification within the structures of their community and are instead, “...classed with spirits, ancestors, or painted black,” to communicate their place outside of the boundaries. Turner gives an example of liminal classification via circumcision initiation rites for boys in Central Africa. This ritual phase is called; “the place of dying” and the novices are identified as, “polluting” because they transgress classificatory boundaries. During the process of bringing these boys into manhood, they can, “revert to nature by letting their hair and nails grow and their bodies get covered with dust”. The Liminaries lose their pre-liminal names, clothes, and are forced to learn a liminal vocabulary to indicate their structural invisibility (49).

SEPARATION
FROM
STRUCTURE

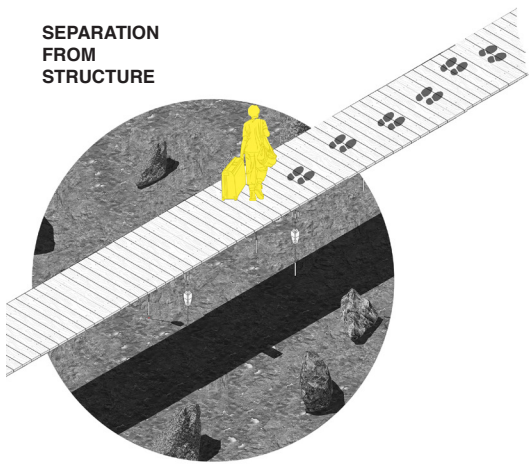
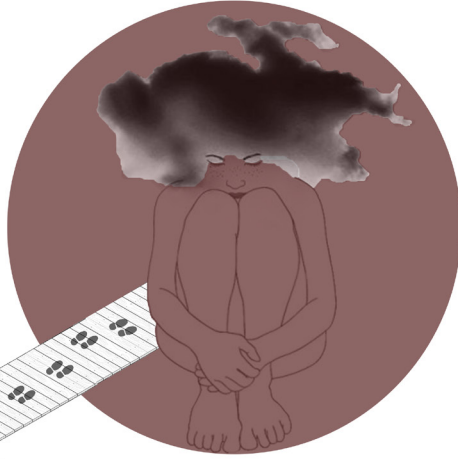


Figure 12



LIMINALITY

Figure 13

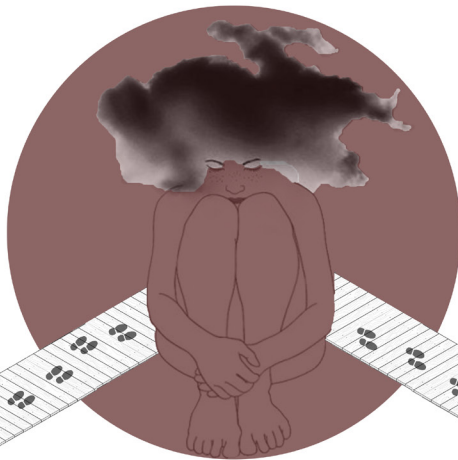
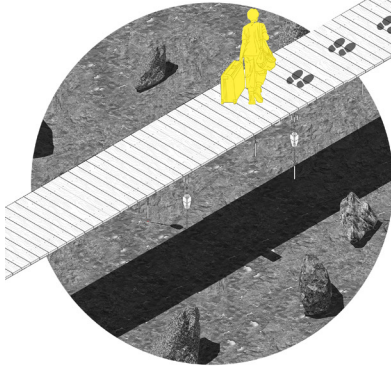


Figure 14

RE-AGGREGATE
WITH
SOCIETY

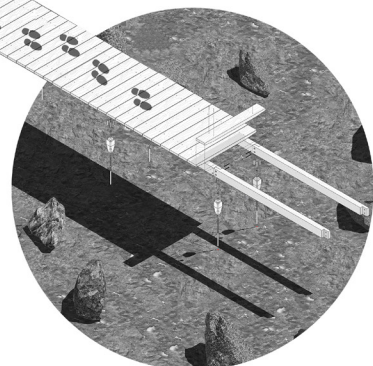
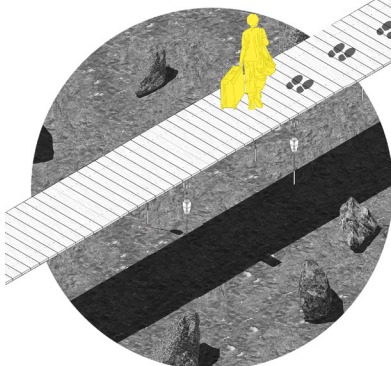


Figure 15: Liminal encounters



Very Often, masked figures invade the liminal scene – usually framed in a sacred enclosure, cave, temenos, or other sequestered site – these masked figures being themselves liminal in their bizarre domination of human, animal, vegetable, and mineral characteristics. (Turner, Blazing 50)

Death and limbo are emblems used to portray the status of these Liminalities “being grown” into their post-liminal state of being. The ritual subject may be treated as though they are in a womb – embryos that exist in a state between being born and the inevitable process of dying. Turner’s characterization of the liminal state is symbolized with paradox, “of being both this and that”. Liminality produces androgyny and ambiguity -- Liminalities act as both living and dead, as ghosts and babies, human and animal. The homogenous matter allows differentiation among the Liminalities to be refashioned and constructed into a specific attribute of their post-liminal status and state (Turner, *Blazing* 49).

COMMUNITAS

Among the numerous qualities of the Burning Man experience that contribute to a collective experience, the journey to the Black Rock Desert is one that is required for all attendees to endure. Some may call this a pilgrimage – a journey that begins a rite that can provide transformative religious and spiritual outcomes. Lee Gilmore, professor of Religious Studies, examines this process of 'Ritual, Pilgrimage and Transformation at Burning Man' in her essay, *Fires of the Heart*. Influenced by Turner's theories, Gilmore asks the question: "what is it about this journey that engenders such widespread feelings of transformation for so many" (43)?

Gilmore's theories invite many comparisons to certain attributes of the Burning Man festival. She surmises that the phases of rites of passage-- separation, liminality, and re-aggregation--are made available to those who attend Burning Man through their interactions with one another, the art, desert, and event ethos. She is not the first to apply Turner's theories to the Burning Man event and even postulates that the theories "serve to define the context in which such an event has taken shape" and appear to have permeated popular culture with his ritual framework. Gilmore gathers narratives from participants of Burning Man in order to address this question and proposes that *Communitas*, an experience that Turner describes as an effect of liminality, is cultivated through the sense of connection attendees feel with one another during and after the event. She notes participants are often, "marked by feelings of communal unity and egalitarianism that disrupt the structure of normative hierarchical relationships" (44).

In *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Turner writes that traditional liturgy and sacraments of the Catholic Church often fall short in terms of providing the experience of liminality that he and his wife, Edith, observed in societies of Central Africa. In the Christian phenomenon of Pilgrimage, however, he perceives a process of "antistructure, and Communitas in action" which he finds to have some of the attributes of liminality:

...release from mundane structure, homogenization of status; simplicity of dress and behavior; Communitas; ordeal; reflection on the meaning of basic religious and cultural values; ritualized enactment of correspondence between religious paradigms and shared human experiences;...movement from a mundane center to a sacred periphery which suddenly, transiently, becomes central for the individual, an axis mundi of his faith... (Turner, Image 34).



Figure 16: Art Installation 'Tree of Tenere'

Gilmore recognizes that many Burning Man attendees access these aspects of liminality and *Communitas* in their own experience through a strong sense of connection among participants. Via ritualized enactments, moments of ordeal, and reflections of their own cultural values, Gilmore states that, “participants may encounter transformations of perspective and identity that reach deeply and unexpectedly into their lives in an enduring, even permanent, fashion” (Gilmore 45).

RITUAL WITHOUT DOGMA

Beyond Turner’s ideas on liminality and pilgrimage, Gilmore believes that Burning Man can be seen “to reflexively embody other theories of ritual and religion” that are worth noting in order to illustrate “how these theories are reflected in the rites of Burning Man and its collective events.” Gilmore suggests that the opportunity to perform ritualistic acts without dogmatic meaning or attachment can provide context for attendees to “tap into a vast, multicultural well of symbolic resources,” something that is generally absent in most western religious processes. A longtime participant of Burning Man wrote to Gilmore: “Burning Man employs ritual, but it is removed from the context of theology. Unhindered by dogma, ritual becomes a vessel that can be filled with direct experience. Burning Man is about having that experience, not about explaining it” (45).

Regardless of Burning Man's apparent lack of affiliation to a specific religious denomination, Gilmore recognizes that academics "cannot resist the tantalizing opportunities Burning Man presents for analysis and explanation, and these ostensibly 'empty' ritual contexts offer themselves up for explication". Gilmore points out, that while events at Burning Man are void of orthodoxy, organizers provide "orthopraxy" by way of clearly delineating social and environmental responsibility among attendees at the event. Since 1996, annual themes have been promoted as a framework for artistic expression that "provide a mythological starting point by teasing out various symbolic threads that are embedded in our culture(s)". Art installations, mutant vehicles, performances and costume tend to manifest in alignment with the theme provided, although, the totality of creative expression throughout the event can hardly be described with a unified title (45-6).

The most important value set forth by Burning Man organizers to forge a community ethos is the emphasis on participation. As one of the ten principles, the principle of participation encourages a community ethos during the event with this mission statement: 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. (*Burningman.org*)

Although, the specific means or manner of participation are limitless, Gilmore observes that some attendees demonstrate their commitment to the community by volunteering for civic roles during the event, while others create or participate with the numerous and often ambitious, interactive art installations: "Through art and performance, festival participants engage in a reflexive process that engages syncretically with global cultures" (46).

A wide range of costumes can also be observed at the event as extraordinary ways to display participation at an individual scale while fulfilling another one of the ten principles, radical self-expression. Dressing up or down (nudity and body paint are common and legal at Black Rock Desert) allows individuals to "perform a host of cultural symbols such as horned demons, winged angels, and blue-skinned fairies, as well as aliens, clowns, and Santa Clauses. The endless variations by which participation manifests at Burning Man can in themselves be seen as a form of ritualization" (Grimes 73).



Figure 17: Burning Man virgins

A MOTH TO A FLAME

Of all the rituals that permeate the Burning Man culture, fire operates as both a symbol and as an agent of transformation. Gilmore recalls the days preceding the burning of the wooden effigy, the climax of the event, as drawing a rise in participants' collective levels of excitement and anticipation, "fostering heightened expectations and charging perceptions of the moment with elevated significance" (46). Gilmore describes the conflagration of the Burning Man effigy as a choreographed production involving fire performers, dancers, and explosives designed to detonate in a carefully orchestrated sequence. Iterations of the effigy generally correspond to the annual theme and over the years have been designed as complex artworks that display the Man on top of lofty platforms. Gilmore gives examples of these elaborate artworks: a 47 ft. high red and gold pyramid, a temple featuring niches around its perimeter in which participants could sit and thereby manifest avatars of their own fanciful conjuring. With titles such as "Vault of Heaven" or "Observatory," the Man is featured in dioramas of alien worlds that participants can inhabit through theatrical performances. The Man burn is arguably the main event of week. Thousands watch the large-scale effigy consumed in a blaze of glory as participants dance and celebrate around the central bonfire (46-9).



Figure 18: Crowd at Temple Burn



Figure 19: Art installation: 'Step Forward'

Burning Man, however, has long featured other large-scale, sometimes extensively choreographed, ritualistic performances involving fire. Gilmore gives the example of the orchestrated “operas” around various religious and mythical motifs created by San Franciscan artist Pep Ozan. Rejecting the idea that audience members saw operas as a spectator event that prohibited participation, Ozan devised ways for members to interact or contribute to the performance. In his opera *Le Mystere de Papa Loko* (1999), participants were guided through a “portal of life and death” where they witnessed a performance that culminated in a “rite of transformation” in which performers (participants) passed through three stages. In the first, stage, “Requiem for Time,” performers were “taken out of the world of time, responsibility, and individuality.” The second stage, “The Breach”, can be described as the liminal stage that situated participants betwixt and between the positions assigned by life and society—“being likened to death, a womb, invisibility, bisexuality and darkness.” In the last stage, “The Ordeal,” participants emerge from the liminal phase “deprived of all information” and shed their clothes along with other objects of adoration and throw them into the fire as their last rite to liberation: “They are reborn at the time of the origin of man, naked and bewildered ready to descend into their ancestral subconscious” (49-50). With language inspired by Turner’s work, Gilmore adds that the libretto of this opera was based upon actual translations of ancient Sumerian and Akkadian hymns to the Goddess Inanna/Ishtar. The dialogue of the opera offered a highly structured and illustrative opportunity for participants to experience the powers of ritual and performance that is available at Burning Man (61).



Figure 19: Wedding at Múcaro

Rites at an even smaller scale happen throughout the Playa at Burning Man during the days and nights leading up to the Man and Temple burn on Saturday and Sunday, respectively. The individuals involved are usually enacting more intimate and personally significant acts that provide meaning to their communal rite. Weddings, engagements, and even “conscious uncoupling ceremonies” – a modern process that allows coupled individuals to terminate their relationship with a ceremony like ones arranged to forge a commitment or union--are common and typically attended by camp mates and other passersby. Aside from the desert setting, these ceremonies and rites are performed in similar ways to their urban archetypes. So, why remove yourself from a conventional structure to perform similar rites of passage? Gilmore says that the pilgrimage to Burning Man can generate a wide variety of rituals intended to manifest transformations – whether in recognition of or hope for some change in individual or group status--or simply in an effort to achieve mindful awareness of the moment and experience which so often escapes us in daily life. (51-54)



Figure 20: Art installation: 'Talk to God'

But, what of the journey itself and the transformative capacities of pilgrimage? Gilmore defines pilgrimage as a ritualized journey to a specific location that has been tintured with cultural meaning, which is “intended to connect individuals to a shared experience of something outside their ordinary existence, an experience frequently described as having ‘sacred’ or ‘spiritual’ qualities” (52). As Gilmore describes, the process of rites and rituals at Burning Man resonates with Turner’s description of the phases of pilgrimage; participants leave behind their mundane urban contexts, enter into the para-urban festival setting of Black Rock City (liminality), and often return home with a changed perspective or renewed understanding of themselves in relation to the world (Gilmore 44).

Enduring the harsh environment of the desert combined with the enormous commitments of time and resources allocated to one week out of a year gives participants a sense that they are performing ritualized behaviors and enacting a kind of pilgrimage. When participants encounter the environmental elements of a surreal desert sanctuary filled with an other-worldly atmosphere, it is no wonder that feelings of social, emotional, and cognitive liberation are associated with internal transformation. The question is, can one maintain these feelings of transformation beyond the confines of Burning Man, when the dust has cleared and the city disappears until the next annual gathering? Gilmore answers: “even those who have experienced profound life adjustments and transformations through Burning Man often outgrow what was once a deeply radicalizing experience” (57).



Figure 21. Pilgrimage to Black Rock Desert

The cross, or whatever other heavy burden the hero carries, is himself, or rather the self, his wholeness, which is both God and animal – not merely the empirical man, but the totality of his being, which is rooted in his animal nature and reaches out beyond the merely human toward the divine. His wholeness implies a tremendous tension of opposites paradoxically at one with themselves, as in the cross, their most perfect symbol. (Jung, Transformations 303)

SCENE II. THE HERO'S JOURNEY

The hero has played a seminal role in the history of western culture, specifically the myths surrounding the hero's attempt to overcome a symbolic death. This process is typically expressed as a boy's initiation into man-hood prompted by his heroic impulses, which are often described as the epitome of masculinity in folklore. This obsession with masculinity of the traditional hero figure reveals much about the mythologizing of the Hero's Journey and how it has influenced the West's inability to provide current ideas of a rite of passage into manhood.

The West has had a long history of idolizing figures that embody the heroic characteristics narrated by folklorists and valorized by mythologists such as Joseph Campbell with his theory of the 'monomyth'. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell describes his 'monomyth' as:

...a magnification of the formula [represented] in the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are then encountered and decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (31)

The English word hero is a derivative of the Greek word heros, meaning defender or protector. In *Heroes and Jungians*, Mark Levon Byrne writes that the hero narrated by the early Greek poet and mythologist, Hesiod, is a demigod – the offspring of a god and a mortal woman--“emphasizing the hero’s role as a mediator between the divine and human realms” (5). Themes we can gather from the Indo-European mythologies of Hercules, Gilgamesh, and the like, reveal a prophecy goes like this: “the hero will cause the death of his father, abandonment or attempted murder at birth, raising by peasants or animals, a journey to a far-off land, battle with a monster, return to the hero’s homeland, marriage to a princess and crowned as king, sometimes after usurping the father” (6). This narrative has become so paradigmatic that since the late seventeenth century English dictionaries have largely defined hero as “the most important male person in a story, play, poem, etc” (4). The European tales of heroism in lieu of a traditional rite of passage have been so successfully exported that heroic literature in other languages, and even indigenous peoples, have come to see their own lives in terms of heroic struggles against oppression (e.g., James Miller. *Koori: A Will to Win: The Heroic Resistance, Survival and Triumph of Black Australia.*)

Philip Slater, in *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family*, introduces another theory concerning the origins of the hero. Slater argues “large age differences between husbands and wives contributed to strongly Oedipal mother-son bonds, which (in the absence of strong father-son relationships) sons attempted to break out of by rejecting their mothers” (Byrne 8). In this context, the absent father is the catalyst for the hero’s aggressive plight to separate himself from his mother (womb, nurture, comforts, and rituals) in order to initiate him into manhood. This theory speaks to Campbell’s mythic equivalent of the novice’s journey: departure, adventures and return representing the novice’s separation, liminal experience, and reincorporation into society, respectively. Again, a symbolic death (the male attachment to his mother) is presented as synonymous with the male rite of passage. Death here involves being confined to a dark cave, hut, or tunnel; scarring, circumcision, or whipping; being told to kill a wild animal or “take a head;” being “killed” by the “great father;” being covered in ashes or forced to sleep in a burial ground; and so on (Byrne 9). Only after conquering these symbolic deaths can the boy be reborn into the world of manhood.

Carl Jung’s work in psycho analytics has put the hero figure at the forefront of the quest for psychological maturity, while also subverting the patterns and themes mentioned above. In Jung’s first major work, *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, he gives a psychoanalytic interpretation of four “lucid dreams or fantasies” recorded by Miss Frank Miller, a young American woman who traveled and studied in Europe in the 1890’s. Jung described Miller’s fantasies as a way of producing explorations of myths, narratives, and iconography related to sun heroes and their battles with dragons, sea

monsters, and the like. To Jung, these battles represent an individual's struggle between their two streams of libido – one regressive and one progressive. As an example, he uses the iconography of Mithras' slaying of a bull (Jung, *Transformation* 302) in which he presents along with hero myths as evidence of an "ancient need to sacrifice one aspect of the libido to liberate another" (Byrne 11). The image of Mithras slaying the bull, according to Jung, symbolizes a culture's and individual's need to sacrifice the regressive libido. Jung's assessment of Miller was that she was incapable of entering into adulthood because she was unwilling to detach from her regressive libido – an assessment further supported by Miller's fantasies in heroic idealization of the father imago. (11)

Themes surrounding the father imago and separation from the mother are found again in *Transformations*, this time, introducing a different picture of male psychological development, that of the "anti-hero" complex. (Byrne 15) Jung explores this theme specifically in Miller's fantasy of the Aztec hero, Chiwantopel, who is killed by a snake in her vision. Jung interprets this example as an "infantile figure who must be sacrificed, symbolizing the author's giving up the connections with the mother, relinquishing all the ties and limitation which the psyche has taken over from childhood into adult life" (*Transformations* 303-304). Jung announces in the final chapter: "I therefore take it as wise counsel, which the unconscious gives our author, to let her hero die, for he was really not much more than the personification of a regressive and infantile reverie" (414).

This is not the only time Jung suggests ambivalence towards the 'hero' figure; he states that "all of us carry, in a hidden recess of our heart, a deadly wish towards the hero" (Hinkle 20). The heroic mode of separating from the mother, according to Jung, is a slippery slope: "the longing for this lost world continues...for whoever sunders himself from the mother longs to get back to the mother" (Jung, *Transformations* 236).

Languages of heteroglossia, like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world, force us to guess and grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi-leveled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language or a single mirror. (Bakhtin qtd. in Burton 39)

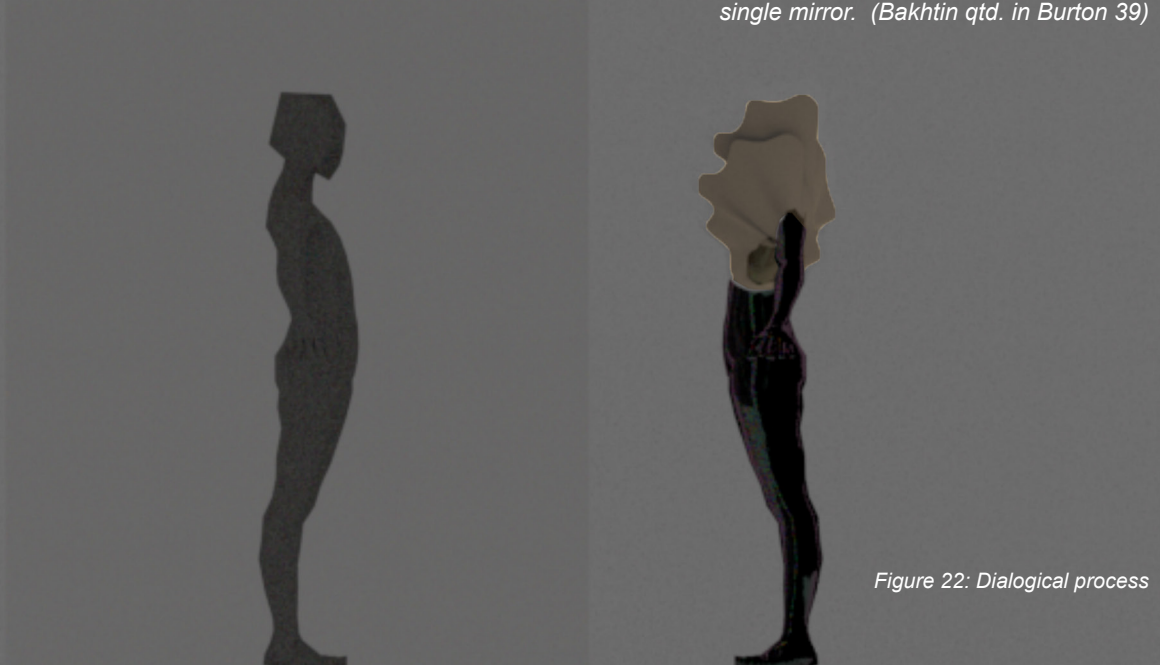


Figure 22: Dialogical process

SCENE III. DIALOGICAL SELF

Multiplicity in narratives is, Mikhail Bakhtin argues, the only truth in reality. In Samuel Kinser's description of Bakhtin's concept of Chronotopes, Kinser assesses that, "languages are masks, and no discourse can claim to be an unambiguous representation of the self or of some other objective reality" (Kinser, 303). In *Chronotypes and Catastrophes: The Cultural History of Mikhail Bakhtin*, Kinser states that writing (like all other acts of communication) even at its most artistic, always concerns the representation, reporting, and discussion of social practices. (302) The written genre of fictional novel is the ultimate expression of this dialogical exchange in that there are multiple voices at play at any point in the narrative. This form of authorship is in direct opposition with the monological way of treating the rival concept of "heteroglossia" – defined as "another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (Wikipedia).

"Chronotopes" is a term Bakhtin creates to define how various configurations of time and space are represented in language and discourse. The "Neologism Chronotope," literally "time-place," is designed to draw attention to the way assumptions about time generate a certain articulation of space and "to a significant degree the image of man in literature" (Kinser 304).



Figure 23: Montage of moments

The narration of the hero in a fictional novel is developed through specific chronotopes and the relationship the reader and author develop with this narration is how Bakhtin understands culture to be both wedded to and semi-autonomous from social process. Bakhtin explains in detail the value of the relationship between the author, the narrative, and the reader through the description of these chronotopes. All of these factors play a significant part in what is being revealed in the narrative. It is a constant interaction between the author, characters, and the inevitable interpretations of the reader: ...anything narrated is communicated simultaneously on two levels, that of the author and that of the person speaking at any given point in the narrative. The author thus narrates with a “double voice,” since his words must “pass through” other voices. That is, when an author offers the words of his heroes in direct or indirect discourse, he is not simply reporting what someone said, but is infusing those words with his narrative purposes. (Kinser 305)

Internally persuasive discourse, a discourse “half-ours and half-someone else’s, a world born in a zone of contact with unresolved contemporaneity,” is a technique in which the author mixes together voices embodying conflicting norms in reporting the “inner speech” or stream of consciousness of one of his characters (306). In this type of discourse, it would be

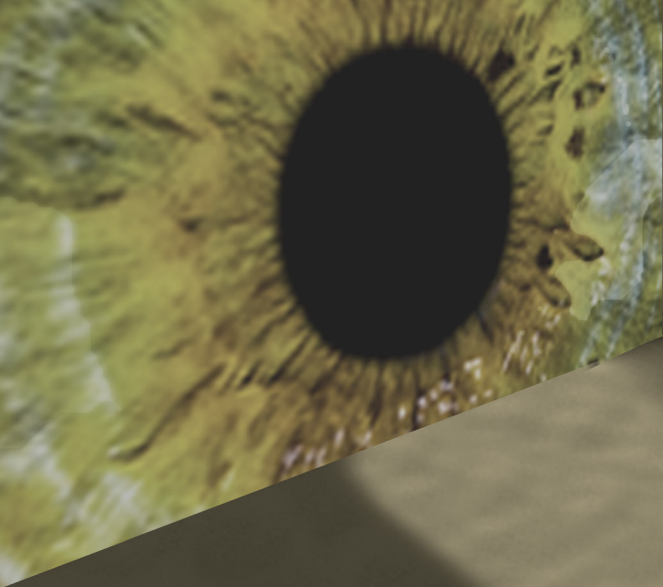


Figure 24: Observing yourself through the Other



Points in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse. Time takes on flesh and becomes visible for human contemplation; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time and history and the enduring character of a people. ... Chronotopes thus stand as monuments to the community itself, as symbols of it, as forces operating to shape its members' images of themselves. (Holquist qtd. in Basso 62)

impossible for the reader to remain unaffected by that discourse; by agreeing to read, he simultaneously obliges himself to take up a position toward the narrator and the narrator's subject. The discourse, at this point, is the essence of George Herbert Mead's pragmatism within the context of Bakhtin's work on the Dialectical process. Similar to the theory behind internally persuasive discourse, the narrative is developed and perpetually changed by the relationship between reader and author, that is, the reader and author are simultaneously positioned as constitutive of the narrative of the self:

The notion "Dialogical self" is a composite concept. It weaves two notions, self and dialogue, together in such a way that a deeper understanding of the interconnection of self and other is realized. (2)

The novel enacts the living process of dialogically shaping and understanding one's chronotope: "What is realized in the novel is the process of coming to know one's own language as it is perceived in someone else's language, coming to know one's own belief system in someone else's system" (Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 365). In Bakhtin's essays, the novel is the way art most authentically approximates the diverse contradictory ways in which language and thought develop in real experience. Through the gestures made in every discourse, signs are dialogically presented for reinterpretation from a circuitous point of view and thus the past will continually act on the present in new and unpredictable ways, disallowing a dogmatic absolute past.

REFLEXIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

Multiplicity in the context of socio-cultural narratives is important in order to develop a rich understanding of a culture—one that the media (from an outside/non-participatory perspective) often writes off and which, in effect, prohibits social understanding among its subject and its audience. A sizable split now separates the narrative given by mainstream commercial media and the personal accounts written by Burning Man participants. It is seen as a countercultural spectacle by the former whereas participant driven accounts are more personal, culturally aware, and socially significant.

Anthropologist, Jeremy Hockett understands Burning Man as a mode of communication that transmits a unique kind of knowledge about societal structures and the ways in which they might be reinvented simply by imagining and enacting other ways to live our lives. He writes in his essay, “Participant Observation and the Study of Self: Burning Man as Ethnographic Experience”, that the classical ethnography during most of the 20th century has chauvinistically imposed our own understandings and interpretations on the cultural practices of other peoples and societies. Much like the Hero’s Journey that has been narrated by western cultures, our understanding of a developed culture is fabricated in part by ethnographic details promoted by a biased social narrative. (Hockett 66-67)

Hockett employs his own Burning Man experiences and critical understanding of societal structures to promote what anthropologists call “reflexive ethnography” in an attempt to overcome at least some of the difficulties presented by such critiques. Hockett emphasizes the value of reflexive ethnography while acknowledging that any ethnography says much about the perspective of the ethnographer as it does about the people being studied. That said, he also believes that individual experience at Burning Man is a personally reflexive process, “as new roles are played over the course of the week and free association begins to break down the routine of mundane life in an environment of playful language and aesthetic intensity”. In effect, social reflexivity at Burning Man helps individuals engage in the ritualistic activity generated by the heterogeneous landscape. The result is the reintegrated “new” individual into an also re-formed social dynamic achieved by the total ensemble for the burgeoning community. The experience serves to present the participant with an alternative reality that becomes juxtaposed with the so-called real world, as it is reentered. (67)

Hockett’s theories locate Burning Man as an environment that is geographically and culturally distanced from the so-called normal world, temporarily manifesting as an alternative to a culture of commodity. Thus, “the event inherently promotes a critically distanced, self-reflexive understanding of both the individual self and the culture of signification within which



Figure 25: Reflexive moment at 'The Temple'

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interpretations and actions take place". Distancing has been identified as a fundamental aspect of "cultural reflexivity" by many postmodern theorists, which entails the ability to distance oneself from what is given as "normal" or "natural" in order to examine the structures within which one lives and acts. Hockett argues that the capacity to remove oneself from a given context to reflect upon that context has been eroded in our contemporary culture of commodity, "characterized as it is by the reduction of human creativity to the pursuit of profits and expanding markets". To Hockett, Burning Man gifts the means to gain such a perspective through what he calls a "reflexive ethnographic experience" (67).

THE COUNTERCULTURAL OTHER

Hockett associates media coverage on Burning Man events as a classical portrayal of "countercultural others." Conversely, Burning Man participants' accounts of their cultural contexts is a reflexive mode that he describes as "de facto ethnographers of their own sociocultural conditions". Hockett explains that a personal account of Burning Man can "tell us as much about the state of our 'mainstream' culture as they reflect any 'essence' of Burning Man". Using the lens of anthropology, Hockett presents the dichotomy in which Burning Man is viewed. The direct observations make clear "how deeply Burning Man's ritualistic and carnivalesque environments impact their perceptions of the world and their place in it". However, outside perspectives of observers who have never attended the event show relatively shallow interpretations that "recapitulate and reinsinuate stereotypical notions of a counterculture" (67-68)

That said, Hockett believes the media aims to sell a sensational and spectacular representation of Burning Man to the public, whereas participants have a deeper connection to their personal experience and their depictions of the event exhibit this significance. "The media assumes an interpretive role in our multicultural society, such that it can be said to be the ethnographic mediator between a normative 'us' and the many cultural 'others' in our midst," Hockett explains. The media's reading of the event is further contrasted to a direct perspective in that they assume an "informative mode of communication," whereas individuals at the event express a "performative mode of communication." The two perspectives reveal the gap between a mediated experience and a direct experience, respectively. (68)



Figure 26: Experiencing the Other

TEMPORAL DISTANCING

Anthropologist, Johannes Fabian conceived the notion of “temporal distancing” to describe the ethnographic tendency to distance “cultural others” from the western world by portraying the objects of anthropology, so-called “primitives or savages,” as existing in a time of “our” past, occupying a position in “our” culture and society held previously (Fabian, *Time* 32). Hockett applies this phenomenon to the context of Burning Man to highlight the media’s stereotyping that results in the distancing of “countercultural others” from mainstream culture. Terms such as hippie, freak, party, and weirdo permeate the media’s definitions of Burning Man participants, rendering the event and its attendees as abnormal – distancing from what is presumed to be normal. (Hockett 69)

Literary critic, Frederic Jameson wrote that our “society transforms ‘the real’ into many pseudo-events in which countercultural forms of cultural resistance and guerilla warfare...are all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed,.” In effect, we reduce them to spectacles (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 49). The notion of reality is thus constructed by what we perceive as “normal” and we use distancing techniques to qualify those who live outside that reality as “counterculture”. Hockett claims that these distancing techniques are used by those who observe Burning Man from outside of its participatory sphere to reduce the event to “nothing more than a highly entertaining diversion peopled by largely marginal types seeking to escape reality rather than to change it by experimenting with alternative ways of being in the world”. Hockett’s counterpoint paints Burning Man as much more than an escapist’s reality; he believes the environment lends itself to alternate social realities enacted by performative ethnographers that may have significant practical applications (69).

Hockett proposes that one of the more pressing issues motivated by subjugating Burning Man to trivializing, simplistic and superficial representations of counterculture is that it often conceals what this event can provide: opportunity for the simple and practical experience of reflexive ethnography. Media that labels Burning Man as “a place where Silicon Valley ‘digerati’ come to play with their toys, and is portrayed as cutting-edge debauchery and avant-garde excess,” attract a population that generates a diversion from a, “lived experience that results in and reflects a deeper understanding” (70). Hockett presents an example of this prohibitive superficiality via a published account of Burning Man written by an associate editor for the Weekly Standard:

...for all the highfalutin talk, it's hard to avoid the obvious: The counterculture remains as it has always been, a sort of shell game. It's considered bad manners to say so, but the art is often just decoration for a lot of sex and drugs.

(Skinner 14) The editor of the publication does not define what he terms “counterculture” and, in effect, socializes the event to himself and others as a “sexually promiscuous, drug-using” culture. By the editor’s account, his experience at Burning Man did not provide a view counter to his assumed prejudices about “counterculture..” (Hockett 71).

While Burning Man, in fact, engenders an atmosphere of celebration, radical art, and hedonism, Hockett contends that wild characterizations of the event “carry with them specific signifiers and cultural associations that act to marginalize and distance Burning Man – as an event and as a community – from the realm of reality (or to the realm of the hyperreal), separating it from mainstream normative life” and thus distorting its image in such a way that prohibits its newcomers and attendees the opportunity to take the event seriously and find utility in the experience it provides (70).



Figure 27: Cultural crashing

OBESERVING THE SELF BY EXPERIENCING OTHERS

James W. Carey writes in his book *Communication as Culture* that, “we [remain] possessed by that which we no longer [possess]: rituals and narratives that are in the strict sense anthropological. We understand that other people have culture in the anthropological sense and we regularly record it – often mischievously and patronizingly, but when we turn critical attention to American Culture, the concept dissolves into a residual category useful only when psychological and sociological data are exhausted” (2). American society has been examining westernized interior myths and realities for several years and this can be said to constitute a modern re-evaluation. Hockett supports this notion by stating that Americans believe they are “above superstition and ignorance,” reserving anthropological discovery for our interactions with the “rest” of the world. We, then, construct meanings from their rituals and traditions as if that data can fill a void left by the loss of our ritual modes (Hockett 73).

Hockett believes that “we” (Americans/humans?) generally employ psychology and sociology to analyze ourselves, but regard traditions or rituals of other cultures to be products of superstition or the supernatural, thereby reserving the anthropological process to make sense of them. The result being that the individually focused western society rejects the need to create and maintain ritual traditions aside from capitalistic pseudo rituals like Christmas or the Super Bowl. Events which, according to Hockett, “no longer fulfill a reflexive role – yet infinitely entertain and divert, typecast and pigeon-hole – we have filled the ritual void left by the steady progression of scientific knowledge”. The ritual traditions of modern western societies have been co-opted and overwhelmed by the scientific revolution and commodified, “a process by which culture itself is transformed into a set of ‘product lines’ to be consumed for profit”. Hockett calls out this phenomenon as



Figure 28: Philip in the 'Tree of Tenere'

a culture of commodity that “reinforces the structures in which it is embedded, creating a virtually invisible ideology of consumption, with scant recourse to reflect upon its framework” (73-4).

Victor Turner’s ideologies make another appearance in the context of Burning Man when Hockett borrows his concept of “performative reflexivity” to describe how Burning Man allows participants to perform or act out alternatives to expose “the system” and its inherent resistance to scrutiny. Hockett points out that by the nature of its collective ethos and social obligation, Burning Man presents options to secure a “sacred liminal ritual” for a secular community. He recognizes that participation is inherently optional, but believes that choosing to engage in a “civic duty” can engender an emotional investment in the community and “this then extends back to the everyday world by heightening the social awareness of values and norms” (74). Hockett relates this process to a sort of reconfiguration or adaptation to emerging conditions and an agent of change that is expressed through “performative reflexivity”:

[Performative Reflexivity] is a condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other socio-cultural components which make up their public “selves.”

(Turner, Anthropology Performance 24)

SCENE IV. THE LIMEN, THE MYTH, AND THE WARDROBE

Until recently, men in the West were made largely by the heroic attempt to conquer death, (whether literally or symbolically); in the post-feminist age we are in danger of rejecting this model in favor of a transition towards adulthood in which the confrontation with death plays little part. History has shown us that heroics are often a defense against experiences of symbolic death, but if the tension of opposites such as death and birth – a liminal state-- can be held, then a transformation of consciousness might take place. As Jung wrote in *The Transcendent Function*, “the confrontation of the two positions generates a tension charged with energy and creates a living, third thing”.

If liminality has the potential to point to a third element in architectural praxis, how can we re-engineer theories and mythologies to better guide us on our current quest to conquer this transitional space that is meant to construct us as “whole”? As mentioned in my explorations of Bakhtin’s work on the formation of the “dialogical self” – narratives (spatial relationships) must be developed between physical attributes and different temporal, philosophical, political, social, and historical dimensions. It can also be read as an attempt to articulate a psychotherapy in which holding the tension of opposites is thought to be a potentially creative and healing process, even though difficult and often painful at times. The introduction of the “other” due to their spatial relationship to the subject is a necessary element in the process of dialogue and awareness of the self. As Bakhtin states:

Creative understanding does not renounce itself, its place in time, its culture; it does not forget anything. The chief matter of understanding is exotopy of the one who does the understanding –in time, space, and culture – in relation to that which he wants to understand creatively. Even his own external aspect is not really accessible to man, and he cannot interpret it as a whole; mirrors and photographs prove of no help; a man’s real external aspect can be seen and understood only by other persons, thanks to their spatial exotopy, and thanks to the fact that they are other. (*Dialogical Principle* 109)

The logic of male initiation rites of passage should be considered in the mythologizing of heroics – in the first half of life we are overcome with an a-perspectival condition of the ego and must confront the symbolic death of that ego in order to experience a balance in midlife and subsequent feminizing of consciousness. Thus, completing the journey of becoming a man (adult) means not sacrificing the hero to find the anima (soul), but the reverse: liberating the ego from archetypal masculinity – whether it is termed hero, warrior, or whatever – and allowing the oppressed group to use their marginality to subvert the hegemony of authority. Following the narrative of a hero to the state of liminality can be an effective way of understanding ourselves as long as we recognize the dialogical process of authorship.



Figure 29: The 'Man' Burn

ACT IV: DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

SCENE I. BURNING IMPRESSIONS | EXOTOPIC ETHNOGRAPHY

Cultural performance can be understood as an active method of enlisting exotopic ethnography—an essential process for our growing secular and global environment. As people of Western cultures gain distance from traditions, customs, and belief in magic, superstition, and the supernatural, opportunities for cultural reflexivity – for the purpose of this thesis, termed exotopic ethnography--recovered by the Burning Man community and environment are essential for growth and transformation. Burning Man makes available exotopic rituals that invite participants' observation of themselves with the 'other', as individuals find space to reflect on their own culture, and their roles in constructing that culture.

As I have presented with theories of Victor Turner and Mikhail Bakhtin, along with analysis from Lee Gilmore and Jeremy Hockett, the establishment of critical distance from normative culture, in order to reflect on our own culture, can be thought

of as one of the primary functions of certain ritual modes such as carnival, initiation, and rites of passage. In a democratic, technological, and individualistic society, where critical self-reflection and social awareness are paramount values in the process of culture building and making meaning, it may become imperative for citizens to engage in collective performative practices. Furthermore, these practices must provide distance from the mainstream in order to allow us to effectively evaluate our circumstances and heighten our social awareness of how values and norms are constructed.

Burning Man should be promoted as a catalyst for exotopic ethnography; it is a part of the “praxis” of western society and is an optimally situated environment for reflexive self-discovery through the eyes of the other. Amidst a foreign landscape, we can begin to study ourselves through an anthropological lens, in ways that we have historically reserved for studying unfamiliar cultures and, in effect, produce a cultural reflexivity that positions intimate interactions with the ‘other’ at the center of understanding ourselves.

It is my observation that many Burning Man attendees seek ways to communicate what they have learned and experienced during the event, yet, the myriad of moments are often too complex to describe or take meaning from. Because the heterotopic landscape offers a multitude of scenarios that are designed for “radical self-expression” and “participation,” attendees can become desensitized to what is frequently present yet overlooked in the moment – exotopic ethnography. Ethnography in our current age, as described by writer Tom Driver, requires the following:

...both the marking of known ways that are worthy of repetition and the groping for new ways in situations with scant precedent. Humanity’s ritual traditions are rich but they were not devised to deal with the split atom, nor space flight, nor the hole in the ozone layer. Neither were most of them fashioned to uphold sexual, racial, cultural, and social equality. (50)

In the abstract and diverse canvas of Burning Man’s reality, a performative mode of communication that stems from a lived transformative experience is a language only developed through a process that anthropologist James Clifford calls “ethnographic surrealism – making the familiar strange and the strange familiar” (50). The collective ritual, festal, and carnivalesque aspects of Burning Man provide the framework for the “groping” and “marking” that can fashion its participants to deal with an increasingly complex and ever-changing socio-cultural landscape. (Hockett 81)



Figure 30: The Playa at night during the Man Burn

SCENE II. EYELID OF NIGHT | SITE CONDITIONS

By design, the Burning Man environment encapsulates the paradox of nature versus human nature—a creature of contradictions. Covered in sun and alkaline dust, the conversation one has with the desert during the day is limited to survival. Days are spent seeking refuge from the harsh sun and inevitable dust storms. This practice is a necessary rite of passage for Burners. Those who endure these unforgiving conditions are rewarded with the threshold to the desert at night. Deep in the Playa, 75 thousand people on bikes, scattered among art installations, and roaming in mutant vehicles adorned with millions of lasers and LED lights, exude a cacophony of sounds overwhelming you with a longing to make the most of the compassionate darkness of the night sky.

SCENE III. VANTABLACK | MATERIALS

True black has no hue; it represents the complete absence of color. Nothing is older than black in mythological and religious lore. To scientists, it was there, alone in the incomprehensible non-being that preceded the Big Bang. The primordial Greek deities Nyx (night) and Erebus (darkness) were preceded only by chaos. The Hindu goddess Kali, worshipped as the “mother of the universe,” takes her name from the Sanskrit word for black (darkness). The Abrahamic religions also gave darkness its due: “Let there be light,” said the Lord in the Old Testament, and the primal void was illuminated.

Black has long been in fashion. It is the color of the timeless little black dress. Queen Victoria draped it on in regal luxury, whereas Puritans, finding no bleaker option, cut from it their stoic uniform. Black were the hats of spaghetti western villains and the dominatrix’s second skin of latex. Black is the costume of death, worn in mourning, and the color of every umbrella at an English funeral. Black plays a number of roles in the history of classical painting, whether in the horrifying gloom of Goya’s *Saturn Devouring His Son* or in the mesmerizing topography of Rauschenberg’s *Black Paintings*. Alex Berggruen, a specialist in Post-War and Contemporary Art, notes: “Black, as a color, was not really used by the impressionists, yet after them the cubists took a more somber approach. They embraced black as a sacred color, and used it in the service of multidimensionality, ushering it into the age of early modernism” (Ross, *Everything Nothing* 21). In reference to cubism, Berggruen states “the power of black, in consort with the elements of the foreground, allows dimension and color things to pop out and be appreciated” (21).

It is easy to associate black with endings, but it is also an alchemical force that can reveal things in their fullest. In his architectural essays, Juhani Pallasmaa talks about darkness as a metaphor for existential uncertainty. He believes that all creative work must come from a place of “unknowing, silence, solitude, and even boredom,” as a process of understanding self-identity—a pre-requisite for all creative work (Encounters 6).



*Figure 31: Asif Khan PyeongChang Pavilion
painted in Vantablack*

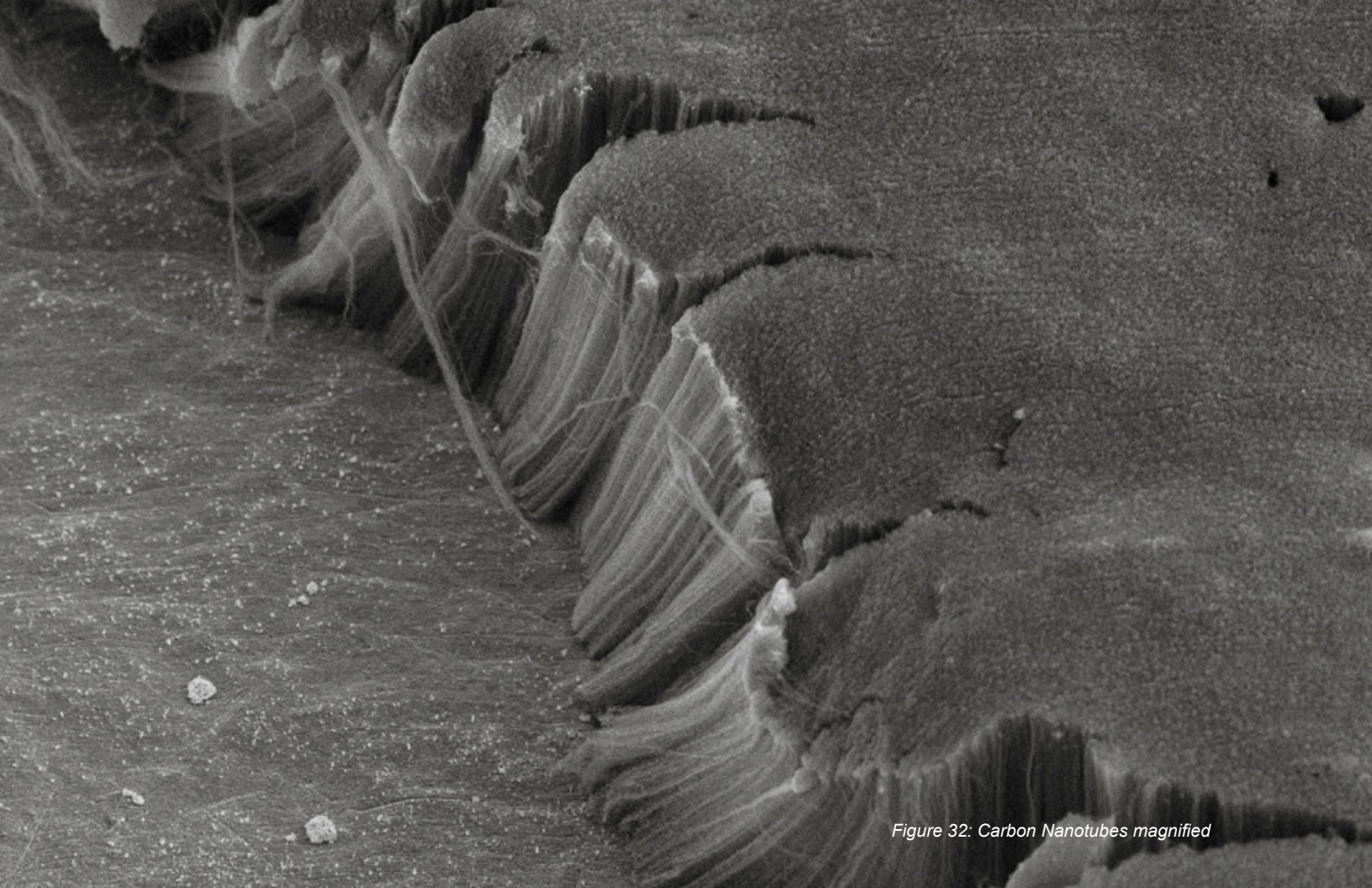


Figure 32: Carbon Nanotubes magnified

Scientists have recently manufactured the darkest black humans have ever produced. Named Vantablack – an acronym for Vertically Aligned Nano Tube Arrays--this man-made substance absorbs 99.98% of the light that strikes its surface. It is composed of a forest of vertical tubes so tightly compacted that when light strikes the substance, rather than bouncing off of the surface, the light is trapped and continually deflected among the tubes until it is fully absorbed and dissipated into heat. Thus, Vantablack is not a color, but actually the absence of color. (surreynanosystems.com/vantablack)

The application of Vantablack is being tested in various forms to further science explorations and for military applications. Due to its superior light absorption, visual encounters with the substance simulate a black hole, one that sculptor Anish Kapoor says is so black that “as you walk in you lose all sense of where you are, what you are, and especially all sense of time” (npr.org). A sprayable paint form of the product (Vantablack S-VIS) has been exclusively licensed to Anish Kapoor’s studio. Kapoor, known for his fascination with exotic materials, says “they make you feel...something happens to your emotional self and in disorientation one has to reach in for other resources” (theguardian.com).



Figure 33: Exotopic structure deployed

SCENE IV. TECTONICS OF ATMOSPHERE

For my project, the design of the structure along with the application of the Vantablack substance applied as a fabric will perform the following:

- 1) Wearable and sculptural to house the body(ies) of a variety of users, while maintaining its structural integrity when deployed so as to function as an enclosed space
- 2) Isolate its occupants from the peripheral distractions of light and visual chaos of Burning Man at night
- 3) Magnify the interaction of the user with an 'other' to support an optimal environment for an exotopic exchange

Contrasted against the light and sound pollution of Black Rock Desert at night, the wearable structure made of Vantablack would create a backdrop of the deepest black and have the potential effect of an illusory void moving among the art cars, lasers, and LED lights surrounding it. Structurally sound, these exotopic enclosures can be placed in the Playa ready to be worn by a variety of user. Once deployed, the user can invite another person to occupy the structure along with them.



Figure 34: Wearable Exotopy



Figure 35: Exotopy structure extends



Figure 36: Vantablack fabric unfolds



Figure 37: Attach fabric to structure

FINAL ACT | EPILOGUE



Figure 38: Search for enclosure

A lack of enclosure, pause, or silence resounds, making the desire for human interaction deafening amidst the chaos of apathetic vastness and thousands of people yearning to disclose their truths.



Figure 39: Exotopy awaits

You find the sculpture of skin
suspended in regality like
Cleopatra's cloak.
You step in.



Figure 40: Search for the 'Other'

A backdrop of the deepest void
you have ever encountered
summons a structure of forces
spanning and contracting
into a theatre of the absurd.
The invocation of a primal pulse
and imminent pause of
hidden pressures and
internal resistance leads you to an
Exotopic Event



Figure 41: Event Exotopy

Engaged with an elusive
Other
you are gifted a sacred
moment of clarity.
This is Event Architecture.
Tectonics of atmosphere
made through connection
through sharing culture,
narratives
and conquering
liminality.

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