

Daily Planet



WE come to nowhere

By Rod Allen

WHETHER you're a Burning Man virgin or a Playa old-timer, Greeters at the Gate always receive you with the words 'Welcome home.' Home is the temporary community of Black Rock City in the Northern Nevada desert that is each year created and destroyed; everywhere else is the 'default' world — average, ordinary and very much whatever you want to make of it.

Tutus and Benders

But 'home' is—as you might expect—very different to different people. The experience of Black Rock City varies wildly from person to person. For some, the opportunity to wear a tutu for six straight days is attraction enough; for others, the opportunity to remain intoxicated for six days straight is hard to resist. For us journalists on the Black Rock Beacon, life is much the same as it is at our places of work, except that the dress code is somewhat different—and there are no phones, which is a difference that only becomes apparent when you realize that to talk to a contact you have to get on your bike and go see them.

You are expected to be

participatory in some way or another. For many, of course, being involved in an art project fulfills this requirement. For others, there are plenty of volunteering opportunities in and around Center Camp, where you can serve coffee or sit at an information desk. Default-world nurses and doctors do heroic jobs at the medical centers, where they can always use another pair of experienced hands, and there's even a daily run into Gerlach for prescription meds. Real or wannabe journos are most welcome at the Beacon. Would-be disk jockeys can try their hands at any number of on-air radio stations on the Playa—and if you're an air traffic controller on annual vacation you'd be very welcome at Black Rock International Airport, which rises and falls, Phoenix-like, in the desert each year. There are, so the publicity suggests, no spectators in Black Rock City, even though there are many phenomenal spectacles at which you are required only to look and wonder.

You are also required to be 'radically self-reliant' which is in many Burners' views an attractive phrase without much

real meaning. Yes, of course you should bring enough water (3 gallons per person per day, if you want to shower), and you should prepare for hot desert days and cold desert nights, and it would be impolite not to have a decent supply of condoms, and it's tremendously important to wear lights at night, and so on. But actually among the true delights of the Playa are the ways in which people care for each other, giving away meals, drinks, shelter, shoulders to cry on, human warmth or tiny but delightful tshotchkes, without any reciprocal expectations.

No spectators but phenomenal spectacles

Schwag it Forward

The economy at Burning Man is a gift economy—not a barter or exchange economy. You give people things without expecting anything (except just possibly a hug) in return, and people give you things on a similar basis. This can, of course, mean that you end up with impractical amounts of schwag, but remember that regifting is not counter to Burning Man etiquette.

Black Rock is a temporary community, but it is not a city, as is sometimes claimed, in any real sense. It has minimal



Back in June, 35 or so British burners celebrated the second Brighton burn on the beach at Brighton, Sussex, in an event organised by Euroburner Yom Yom. The burn was held just by the terminal station of Volk's Electric Railway, the seaside ride which is the oldest working electric railway in the world. And the name of the terminal? Black Rock Station. Spooky, or what?

public services, no communications infrastructure and—most important—no elected officials, or democratic institutions of any kind. Larry Harvey is a sort of mayor, but you didn't vote for him, or anyone else in the Burning Man organization. That might be something worth thinking about for the inevitable post-Larry future.

Synchronicity

We are constantly told we must 'leave no trace', which

is of course nonsense. Oh, of course, we should clear up all our garbage, and not tip cigarette ash on the desert floor, and haul our gray water away. But if the Playa experience leaves no trace on your psyche then you haven't been here; if it doesn't affect you in some profound intellectual, emotional and/or physical way, then you will have been fast asleep all week (not that there's anything wrong with that). The traces that the journey to the Playa leaves on

your mind are life-changing, as anyone who's been here will tell you.

Some of this is ascribed to the numinous nature of the Playa, a magical place of coincidence and synchronicity that is sometimes claimed for the City. The other view is that Black Rock City's magic is brought to the Playa by the Burners themselves; and in this view the most important thing is to be there, for without the Black Rock collective there will be no magic. 🐉

You Find Yourself at the Heart of Black Rock City

By Rockstar

As mythological precincts go, "Metropolis" might not seem at first like a perfect fit for the sun-soaked temporary small town around you. Whatever bits of Bauhaus and expressionism await inspection on the Playa this year, most Burners' immediate surroundings look more like a gaily bedecked gypsy parking lot than anything out of the 1927 film or even Superman comix. Diverse a lot as we are, most Burners tend to be urbanites on loan, often from cities nearly as nightmarish as any 20th-century parable of industrial soullessness. High-gloss and chromium-sleek our pre-modern Dogpatch ain't.

Zone Trip #4

Burning Man, ancient lore tells

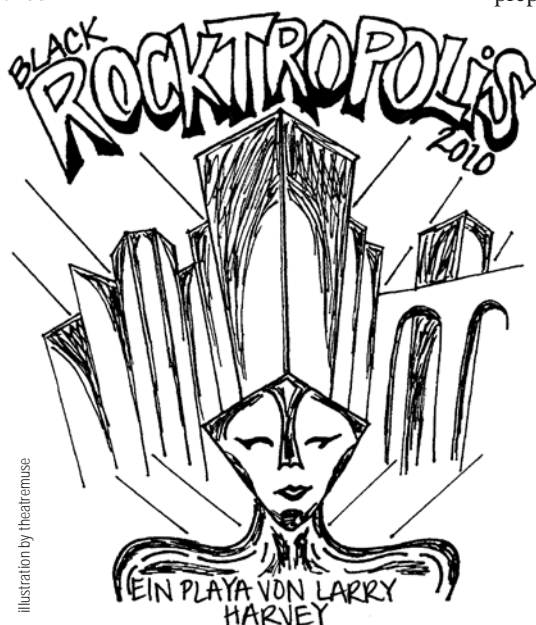


Illustration by theatrehouse

us, came out of Zone Trip #4, a 1990 Cacophony Society event held in the Black Rock Desert to which Larry Harvey hauled his Man after harassment by Baker Beach authorities. Out of this rolling experiment in ad-hoc hedonics came Black Rock City, a place that was not so much born as grown out of the ex-

ternal necessities of cops and legal liability. The former are readily visible parked in Center Camp and at the other end of all those drug-sniffing dogs; the latter, as our ever-arcane laws tell us, is you.

Believe it or not, the chaos you've driven into is the outcome of meticulous planning and striated muscle. Crews have been out here since June prepping for the event and most non-virgin Burners well understand that, while serendipities abound on the playa, little out here happens by accident. So, the BMORG might be onto something when they bid us imagine the tent-and-RV sprawl of BRC "as magnetic hubs of social interaction" and the Metropolis theme's "function as a micro and a macro-scope, an instrument through which we will inspect the daily course of city life and the future

prospect of civilization." It's not like most of us don't do this already, whatever the theme, so regarding BRC's entire protean, always building, ever-collapsing sprawl as a weeklong mechanical organism isn't much of a stretch.

Planners vs. Workers

This year's theme gains additional resonance with this past year's release of the definitive restoration of "Metropolis," the 1927 film by Fritz Lang about a city uncomfortably divided between planners and workers. More than 20 minutes' running time thought forever beyond the reach of archivists turned up as part of a miraculously complete 16-millimeter print that had been corroding in a shuttered and obscure museum in Buenos Aires.

In one of the seemingly endless historical ironies around this cinema classic, the revival comes just as our own hugely impersonal, oligarch-ridden industrial civilization slows to a debt-clogged, hyper-militarized halt. Many of you temporary Nevadans just drove past enough underwater real estate in this ravaged region to rival what happens to the fu-

turistic city in the movie's last reel. Recent biographers have noted director Lang's imperious temper and highhanded disregard for life and limb in pursuit of art, but these are traits few Burners may disparage without blushing. Lang used his extras roughly and almost incinerated Brigitte Helm, but that's simply putting safety in its properly tertiary place.

Festival organizers quote Mark Sebastian's neck-gritty Beat lyrics for The Lovin' Spoonful's 1966 hit "Summer in the City," so the mind runs irresistibly to other songs with worse words to say on the subject. Given all the bitching from old-skool Burners about the nonstop dance-dance mis-sighs of the sound camps, it's perhaps inevitable the inner ear should bend to Jefferson Starship's 1985 stadium rock anthem "We Built This City." Heard today, this synth-heavy anti-disco rant has all the pump-your-fst retro-charm of any Journey or Foreigner single but Bernie Taupin's goofy and much-reviled lyrics invoke the corporate power-plays and default-world cor-

ruption so many rail against these days. Yet not even a bumper of ayahuasca could elucidate the meaning of "Marconi plays the Mamba, listen to the radio/Don't you remember? We build this city on rock and roll." Still, there's something rooted and E.F. Hutton about the very sound of this generation-old oldie, as if rock music could and did make itself immortal through sheer ballyhoo, a fate which may yet overtake this festival.

Faux Teutonic Marvels

So, the "takeaway," as they say in Hollywood (another intentional community with notable fashion sense), of this year's theme is celebration of the city itself as temporary artifact. This is not the kind of thing you'd likely forget while checking out such monstrous improbabilities as Ein Hammer or any other faux-Teutonic marvel strewn across the Deep Playa this year. Unlike Fritz Lang's dystopic masterpiece, YOU are the Heart Machine. 🐉

