

The background image is a composite. The top half shows a vibrant, colorful night sky filled with stars, nebulae, and a large, glowing celestial body on the left. The bottom half shows a wide, flat desert landscape at night. In the foreground, a large, circular crowd of people is gathered, illuminated by warm lights. The crowd is arranged in concentric circles, with a central area that appears to be a stage or a large fire pit. The overall scene is a mix of natural beauty and human-made spectacle.

BURN BRILLIANTLY

BURNING MAN IN QUOTES

Edited by Rohan Roberts

Burn Brilliantly
Burning Man in Quotes

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For

Good Rainbow

In 2016, I attended my first Burn. By August 2019, I had participated in my fourth Burning Man in Nevada, three AfrikaBurns, and designed and built the temple at the 2017 Netherlands Burning Man. The regional Burns are absolutely wonderful, but nothing compares to the real deal in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada.

I invariably get asked the question: "How was Burning Man?" Over and over again, it's the same question, "How was Burning Man?" I say to them, as Jamie Wheal would: "You have to go there to know there." But obviously, that won't satisfy the curious. So, I offer my spiel about how it was a transporting, transformative, and utterly transcendental experience. Then I mention how it's the Olympics of art; an apotheosis of STEAM; a permission engine; a crucible of creativity; a vortex of artistry; a whimsical fairyland; a Disneyland for adults; a spa for the mind; a metamorphosis of the soul; a theatre of the absurd; a counterculture critique; a hyper-freak show; a Liquorice allsorts of whimsy and play; a raging, surreal maelstrom of lights, colours, sounds, emotions, and experiences; and a heterodox hodgepodge of people's dreams pouring out into reality.

There was a moment at Burning Man when I stood gazing at everything around me and I

kept saying over and over again: "Look at this! Just LOOK AT THIS! It's amazing! It's amazing! It's amazing! It's amazing..." I said it over 50 times! I was *lost* for words! All I could say about the splendour and magic of Burning man was "it is so *amazing*." I didn't so much *say* it as *gasped* it.

Some people think it's a mutant version of Glastonbury or Coachella or Shambhala or any number of vapid, commercial, soulless mainstream EDM music festivals. Burning Man is not a music festival. Burning Man is unlike anything on this planet.

Wikipedia describes it thus:

"Burning Man is an annual gathering that takes place at Black Rock City—a temporary community erected in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada. The event is described as an experiment in community and art, influenced by 10 main principles, including 'radical' inclusion, self-reliance and self-expression, as well as community cooperation, civic responsibility, gifting, decommodification, participation, immediacy and leaving no trace.

"At Burning Man, the community explores various forms of artistic self-expression, created in celebration for the pleasure of all participants.

Participation is a key precept for the community – selfless giving of one's unique talents for the enjoyment of all is encouraged and actively reinforced. Some of these generous outpourings of creativity can include experimental and interactive sculpture, building, performance, and art cars among other mediums, often inspired by the yearly theme, chosen by organisers. The event takes its name from its culmination, the symbolic ritual burning of a large wooden effigy ('the Man') that traditionally occurs on the Saturday evening of the event."

However, that description above seems slightly desiccated.

When it comes to Burning Man, the pen falters, the lexicon fails, and the keyboard refuses to yield a better description. The Muses expire, Pegasus wilts, and language falls short and proves inadequate if I tried to use words to describe how AMAZING (that word again) Burning Man is.

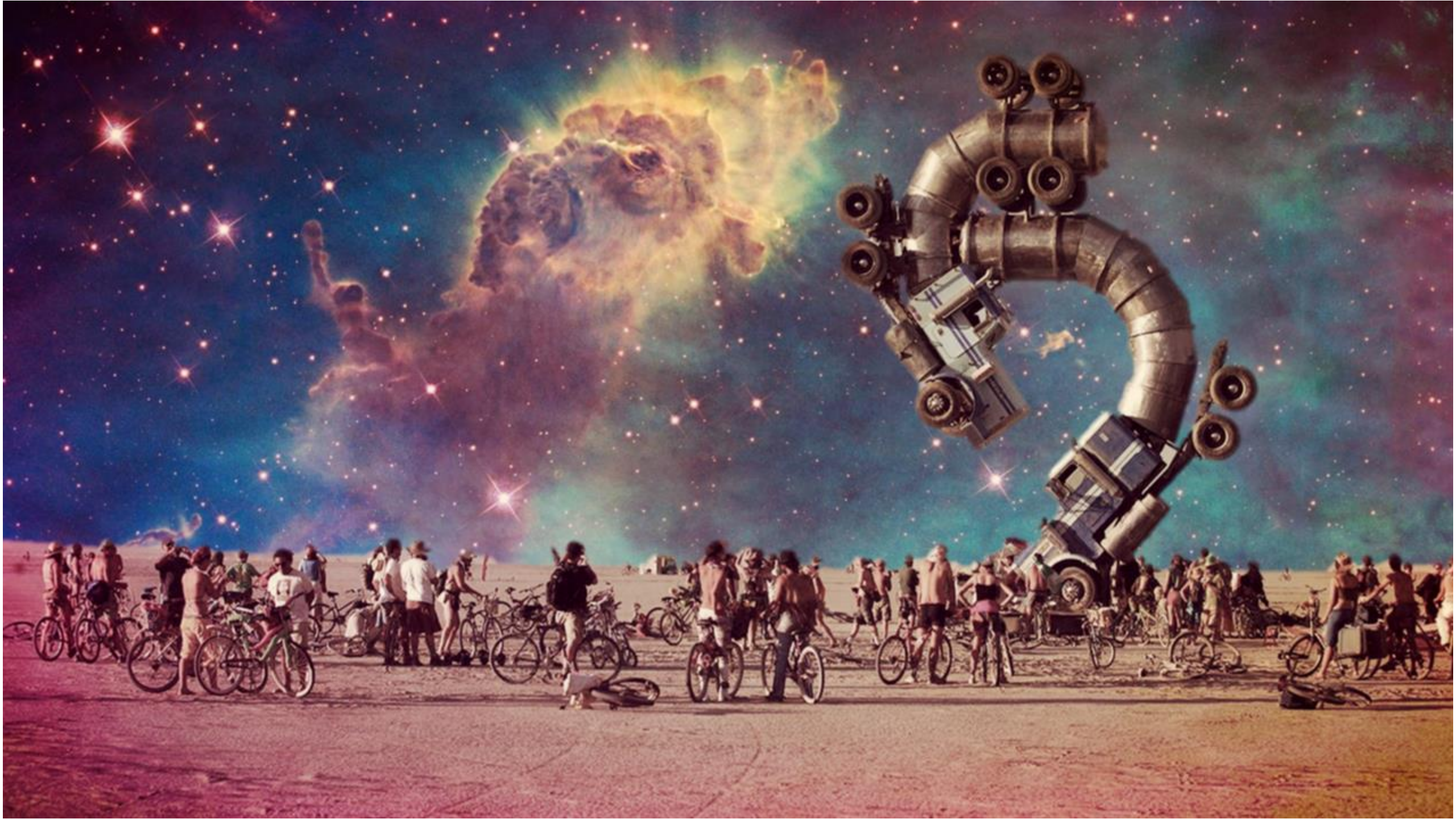
This compilation is an attempt to capture in the words of various people what Burning Man is and the magic that happens there.

Rohan Roberts
March 2021



"One often hears Burning Man dismissed as a theme park, but what's more important is that it contains thousands of theme parks: little pocket universes butting heads. Space-time itself seems to morph into a flea market, a masquerade of memes, or the Mos Eisley spaceport from Star Wars. Burning man is a promiscuous carnival of souls, a metaphysical flea-market, a demolition derby of reality constructs colliding in a parched void."

- Erik Davis



“People refer to Burning Man as technopaganism, or neotribalism, or modern primitivism. BM is a laboratory — a testing ground — a blueprint — for what we could do together as a species in a post-A.I. world of UBI where everyone is freed up to play, create, and have fun.”

- Astro



"At its core, Burning Man is an experiment in alternative living where you witness an outpouring of generosity. It is a celebration of the human spirit, human imagination, and human ingenuity and that experiencing it is like being slingshot through a wormhole to the centre of the universe only to emerge into an alien world where the kindest, most ingenious, creative, playful, innovative, warm, generous, ridiculous, and preposterous people live. "

- Astro



"Burning Man is a place where art is elevated to civic responsibility and gift-giving is a core principle. It is a place where the random flotsam and jetsam of human society and global cultures wash up for one week then wash out, as participants return to the default world physically drained, spiritually cleansed, and emotionally inspired."

- Anon.



"Burning Man is often portrayed in the media as some wild, frenetic, carnivalesque, Dionysian orgy with drunken, drug-addled, naked people running around a fire. This is typical of lazy reporters who have neither the lexicon nor the gumption to adequately describe what Burning Man is. They often portray it as pagan, primitive, and tribal, while also declaring that it is the ultimate technological and postmodern happening."

- Astro



"The primitive survivalist aspects of the festival may seem to contrast with the digital world of its inhabitants; but Burning Man has become a pastiche of various parts of our culture and history. It has the spontaneous-gathering feel of Woodstock, the spirituality and temporary community of the Rainbow Gathering, the campiness, outrageousness and identity-transformation of the drag-queen scene, the edginess and danger of a Harley-Davidson convention and the burning and worship of, well, the ancient Druids."

- Michael Colton



"Burning Man is the most influential tribal-techno-feral-pagan-digital event, happening, rave or whatever in the world. Out there in the desert, witches, warlocks and wired sorcerers use technology as if it were some electronic crystal ball. It is a living post-postmodernist Hieronymous Bosch painting with a just a touch of Fellini."

- Alex Priedite



"Burning Man themes include spirituality absented from religion; ritual absented from dogma; performativity, ideology, and ethos; multicultural and hybrid religious symbols; immediacy and transformation; anti-commodification sentiments; and utopian discourses of social protest. It is a place of visceral transformative encounters that derives from a wealth of cultural sources: from wicker men to contemporary culture jammers and is choc-a-block full of compelling, provocative, and weird things."

- Lee Gilmore



“There are many ways to frame what Burning Man is. At the end of the day, Burning Man is a physical manifestation of a Rorschach inkblot: it can be whatever you want it to be.”

- Astro



"Burning Man is a heterotopia — an example of the adjacent possible. I daresay, it's the closest thing we've got to Utopia (literally, both 'good place' and 'no place'.)"

- Astro



"Burning Man can make or break relationships because all facades are stripped away. We truly come to know ourselves well as well as those around us for there is no room for trickery – all truth is revealed."

- Nikki Starr Noce



"Burning Man is a time to be unapologetically you. A time to dress exactly as you wish. Everyone is in the same mindset supporting you on your journey of freedom of expression, encouraging and celebrating the uniqueness of you!"

- Nikki Starr Noce



"Burning Man fosters generosity, giving, and receiving. There is no money exchanged. We give because of our hearts' desire to without agenda. We receive with gratitude and open arms."

- Nikki Starr Noce



""Intelligent people build intelligent civilizations. I now get what a society made of brilliant people would look like."

- Anon.



"Burning Man is a magical place. It seems like it is one of the only places on Earth where the spirit world and the physical world intersect and play with each other."

- Anon.



"It feels like people in this place bring their true selves. This is what happens when people's souls let their marvelous essences freely combine with each other."

- Anon.



“Among the many frameworks within which Burning Man can be situated – arts celebration, social experiment, or orgiastic revelry – of the experiences that it fulfills for many participants is ritual. In particular, Burning Man can be a venue for those who wish to express and ritualise individualised conceptions of spirituality but who wish to resist the doctrines and institutions of religion.”

- Lee Gilmore



"Burners ritualistically and self-consciously de- and re-construct ad hoc frameworks in which to create and perform self-reflexive spiritualities, which can become for many a profound life-changing experience."

- Lee Gilmore



"Burning Man is an interactive stage on which to perform, interrogate, and negotiate the meanings of religion, spirituality, ritual, identity, and culture, alongside a multitude of concurrent themes and possibilities."

- Lee Gilmore



"Burning Man can be seen as a quintessentially postindustrial, liminoid event as participants themselves tend to view it as a transgressive, marginal, and otherworldly space for "counterculture" resistance."

- Lee Gilmore.



"Burning Man provides opportunities for participants to peel away layers of default cultural messages and constructions of identity. In doing so, they may discover a core sense of self that is deemed somehow more authentic and construct new or renewed identities based on the performative cultural ethos of the festival."

- Lee Gilmore



“The Man remains a blank canvas – an open signifier devoid of explicit or fixed meaning – the amorphous image continues to be available for multiple interpretations, as individuals are invited to transfer their own impressions and feelings onto it.”

- Lee Gilmore



"People have come to hell and created heaven."

- "Eskimo"



“The placement of the Man at the centre of the city’s concentric semicircles and radial spokes readily suggests a template that the historian of religion Mircea Eliade called the axis mundi – a symbolic manifestation of the sacred centre of the cosmos and the location of hierophany, the eruption of the sacred into the profane world.”

- Lee Gilmore



"We ask that the participants commune with themselves, that they regard their own reality, that essential inner portion of experience that makes them feel real, as if it were a vision... No one can say what that vision might be. We just ask people to invent some way of sharing it with others."

- Larry Harvey



"In this simultaneously imaginal and physical space, they could be reborn through the cleansing fires of the trackless, pure desert, framing the experience as a rite of passage."

- Michael Michael



“People go to Burning Man to play with alternative experiences, identities, and spiritualties. In so doing, they individualistically and idiosyncratically draw on a diverse and limitless pool of global cultural resources and engage in a la carte mixture of the world’s various faith and symbol systems in order to piece together ad hoc and hybrid frameworks through which to perform their personal spiritual beliefs and aspirations.”

- Lee Gilmore



"In their collective resistance to conformity and hierarchical authority, Burners also engage in creative critiques wherever they perceive that authenticity has waned, especially as the event has evolved and grown.

- Lee Gilmore



"Burning Man is not a religion. What self-respecting New Age cult would operate with no priests, no tithing, no doctrine, not even a shared belief in a higher power? BM employs ritual, but it is ritual removed from the context of theology. Unhindered by dogma, ritual becomes a vessel that can be filled with direct experiences. Burning Man is about having that experience, not about explaining it. In fact, if you can explain it, you're probably not paying attention."

- Stuart Mangram



"One of the greatest thrills at Burning Man is the first sight of art that shouldn't exist. Art that is too big, too absurd, too breathtaking, too defiant to follow the laws of reason, or gravity, or expectation."

- Jennifer Raiser



"[The art installations at Burning Man is] are huge, dazzling pieces meant to evoke wonder – pieces that invite you in, on, around, above, and below. These are pieces of presence that dare you to appreciate them in the present. They amaze you by the sheer audacity, originality, or absurdity. They take your breath away. And then they invite you to come and play."

- Jennifer Raiser



"Art lies at the literal and figurative center of the Burning Man experience. At the core of the festivity, libation, and bacchanal, there is a shared belief in creativity, community, and generosity. Without art, Burning Man would be a marvelous party, but it would not resonate in the same powerful way."

- Jennifer Raiser



"Like the earliest paintings in the prehistoric caves of Lascaux, art at Burning Man fulfills a basic human need for expression and explication, for storytelling, and for making our mark. In this prehistoric lake-bed [the playa on which Black Rock City is temporarily built] populated by meandering tribes of dusty, body-painted hominids, the essential role of art becomes abundantly clear. Over the course of seven days, art is what sets hearts and minds ablaze."

- Jennifer Raiser



"At Burning Man, the practice of art unleashes individual creativity, gathers collective endeavor, and galvanizes a community."

- Jennifer Raiser



Leave no Trace.

"[Burning Man's Black Rock City] temporarily dominates a landscape that offers equal measures of exquisite beauty and punishing brutality. It defies an economic art market that equates price with quality, and success with sales. It repudiates the notion that art should be curated, protected, and observed behind the safe distance of a stanchion."

- Jennifer Raiser



"At Burning Man, art is valued according to the perception and participation of the individual, not by a critic, gallerist, or collector."

- Jennifer Raiser



Play.

"Bohemian renegades, outliers, and visionaries from the nascent Silicon Valley technology industry were attracted to the wide-open space and original thinking. People living on the fringes of society were attracted to the free-for-all philosophy, where resources were shared out of necessity. Word spread about, and "that thing in the desert" encouraged ever more outlandish activities and attracted more seekers, many of whom became adherents."

- Jennifer Raiser



"Participants often tell me, 'Burning Man changed my life.' We know that transformation happens when people leave their comfort zone. Immersed inside an unfamiliar environment, confronted with the forces of nature, participants often question their assumptions and abilities. They have to summon ingenuity, adjust ingrained routines, form new affiliations, and to have a lot of trust. And in the midst of this upheaval, they discover inclusion, whimsy, generosity, and their own creativity. Burning Man doesn't actually change their lives, they do. But it opens them up to the possibility, and then they want to share it with other where they live."

- Marian Goodell



"The experience of Black Rock City is complex and varied. Participants – meaning everybody, because there is an explicit prohibition against 'spectators' – are encouraged to engage with the art, the desert, and one another."

- Jennifer Raiser



"Variouslly described as a 'summer camp for adults., 'an annual reboot for a complicated life,' and 'the cheapest trip to Mars you'll ever take,' the playa offers a vast array of diversions, distractions, and pleasures."

- Jennifer Raiser



"My daughter describes Burning Man as a place where 'adults can play like kids.' I'll take this one step further and remind us that playing is one of the most rewarding forms of experimentation toward learning – that's why kids do it. That's what so many adults rediscover at Burning Man – spontaneous, inspired, non-judgmental play. Thank god for the young ones at Burning Man showing us how and why."

- Harley K. Dubois



"Black Rock City is both a playground and a classroom – learning is an inevitable byproduct of participation in the grand, lively experiment that is Burning Man. Beyond the innumerable micro-lessons one gleans from individual interactions, there is immeasurable value in being surrounded by thousands of people from across the planet – to be so unified by the shared experience of becoming 'playafied'; covered in dust – momentarily blurring the lines that ordinarily separate."

- Zippy Lomax



"For one precious week a year, we share the same address, each seeking our own experience, yet joined in our mutual vulnerability to the elements – an incredible metaphor for our interconnection as a species, facing global uncertainty, together."

- Zippy Lomax



"We want our children to know that what they imagine can be realized. On the playa, not only do they see this as possible, but they also get to experience the imagination of others. We see it as getting to step into a wondrous picture book."

- Tim, Sarah & Indie



"At Burning Man, where people are so generous with their art and imagination, stepping into another world is possible. All this, coupled with the respect of personal space displayed by the community, makes for an unparalleled experience."

- Tim, Sarah & Indie



“Taking our kids to Burning Man was an experience we’ll never forget – even my youngest who was 4 at the time. As radically different as the playa is or us adults, it just made sense to our kids. Why shouldn’t the day be about having fun, surprising, and novel experiences? Why shouldn’t we be able to climb on anything we like and play for free, not for pay? “

- Dustin Urban



"I think that the people at Burning Man are a lot kinder and more free than in regular life... and that they are more generous and open. I feel the art is more expressive than the art I've seen before. The stuff at BM has more meaning and is less about trying to show off. I love the dust – the desert is my favorite place to wander and see new things."

- Zohar



"The dumbest myth of all revolves around the Man itself. Whether it represents Larry Harvey's grandmother or seventh grade teacher or ex-lover or whatever, how does that possibly concern you. The art stands on its own, period."

- GGALLIN13



"The best way to describe the vibe here is that a guy can go to a thrift store and buy the ugliest fucking dress ever – and he'll get a compliment when he wears it on the playa."

- Penfold



*"If you haven't seen something that offends or bothers you, then
you haven't seen enough of Black Rock City."*

- Penfold



"I like going to Burning Man, for example. That's an environment where people can try out different things. I think as technologists we should have some safe places where we can try out some new things and figure out what is the effect on society, what's the effect on people, without having to deploy kind of into the normal world."

- Larry Page



"It's impossible to say that live art enjoys any single status in the information age—there are versions of live art that are still primarily art-world phenomena, others that appeal to much broader audiences. The Burning Man festival is a case in point—an event featuring performance that is itself a performance, which partakes simultaneously of frontier mythology, a counter-cultural impulse, and popular cultural visibility."

- Larry Page



"I made a conscious decision to take my life and career in a different direction. I started working on a play, and also, by attending Burning Man for several years, I was incredibly stimulated by the art there. I increasingly wanted to be a part of it, and focused on what I wanted to say as an artist."

- Scott Cohen



"Burning Man will change your life... You just do not know how yet."

- Scotto



"Everything you take to Burning Man including yourself will never be the same."

- Scotto



"You can vacation in say Jamaica and see things that millions have seen before you and millions will see after you...Or you can trek yourself & stuff to Black Rock City and see things that will only be available for one week to see."

- Scotto



"Burning Man is an art gig by tradition. Over the longer term it's evolved into something else; maybe something like a physical version of the Internet. The art here is like fan art. It's very throwaway, very appropriative, very cut-and-paste. The camp is like a giant swap meet where no one sells stuff, but people trade postures, clip art, and attitude."

- Bruce Sterling



"People come here in clumps: performance people, drumming enthusiasts, site-specific sculptors, sailplane people, ravers, journalists, cops. I'm a journalist and a newbie, but even I can tell the pros from my fellow newbies. The veterans have brought their own pennants, bicycles, flashlights, and tiki torches, plus enough water for anything."

- Bruce Sterling



"Burning Man is a standard hippie tribal thing, except for the highly nonstandard fact that it is not kitschy '60s nostalgia. This event is very '90s, very big, and very much alive. It's a Tim Leary, Wavy Gravy, Deadhead caravan, grab-the-mike-at-Woodstock kind of event. Feels lovely and enormously persuasive."

- Bruce Sterling



“Nonbureaucratic, participative, solidarity-driven, noncommercial, arty. With all those manifest virtues, you have to wonder why a setup like this can't seem to last any longer than a Labor Day weekend.”

- Bruce Sterling



“People think it's good that Burning Man is difficult and rather dangerous to reach. This keeps the gawking frat boys and the sodden alcoholics at bay. To get this far out here you've got to pay some dues and take some risks.”

- Bruce Sterling



"Gotta live on the edge, at least a little. "Survival is a matter of personal choice," as the Burning Man official tabloid puts it. But when there are 10,000 people making risky choices, cold statistics dictate that some will surely croak."

- Bruce Sterling



“Pagan hierophants in tall headdresses and silver lamé march in slow step, toting flaming standards of arcane device. Swarms of nude dancers, male and female, caper up in bizarre sword-and-sorcery bondage gear. The soundtrack switches to repeated, insane, bestial screaming. An awe-inspiring insect goddess — a hunchbacked bug on red stilts — comes towering and tipping and tottering into the firelight, like a mad Kafkaesque advent. It's like a cross between Vatican ceremony, Cirque du Soleil, and a necro-erotic cannibal mantis mating ritual. The performers seem ready to burst into a flagellant orgy at any instant, in front of a solid milling crowd of at least 3,000.”

- Bruce Sterling



"This sure isn't the sort of thing one sees every day. It's something that a desperately horny sci-fi fan might see on acid and cough syrup. Then the performers set fire to the set."

- Bruce Sterling



"There are lessons here. Las Vegas is a major family destination. Nevada casinos have become American family values now. It's considered just fine to go into one of these windowless scary gambling-malls, drink yourself silly, lose your ass at roulette, and then go ogle showgirls with breast implants. Republicans do this now. Working-class folks do it in polyester stretch pants. It's normal. Meanwhile, if you want to get high and be a naked hippie, you're under suspicion of engaging in the moral equivalent of terrorism. You've got to haul out into the middle of some godforsaken desert and hope that not too many people find out about it."

- Bruce Sterling



"I went to Burning Man. I took my kids. It's not scary, it's not pagan, it's not devilish or satanic. There's no public orgies, nobody gets branded or hit with whips. Hell, it's less pagan than the Shriners. It's just big happy crowds of harmless arty people expressing themselves and breaking a few pointless shibboleths that only serve to ulcerate young people anyway. There ought to be Burning Man festivals held downtown once a year in every major city in America. It would be good for us. We need it. In fact, until we can just relax every once in a while, and learn how to do this properly, we're probably never gonna get well."

- Bruce Sterling



“Well it seems to me, that all real communities grow out of a shared confrontation with survival. Communities are not produced by sentiment or mere goodwill. They grow out of a shared struggle. Our situation in the desert is an incubator for community.”

- Larry Harvey



"Our preoccupation has always been to craft space in such a way as to induce social interactions that would in turn generate a sense of community and a culture, but starting from the very immediate issue of how action influences perception."

- Larry Harvey



"I'll believe in utopia when I meet my first perfect person, and this community is made up of 70,000 imperfect persons."

- Larry Harvey



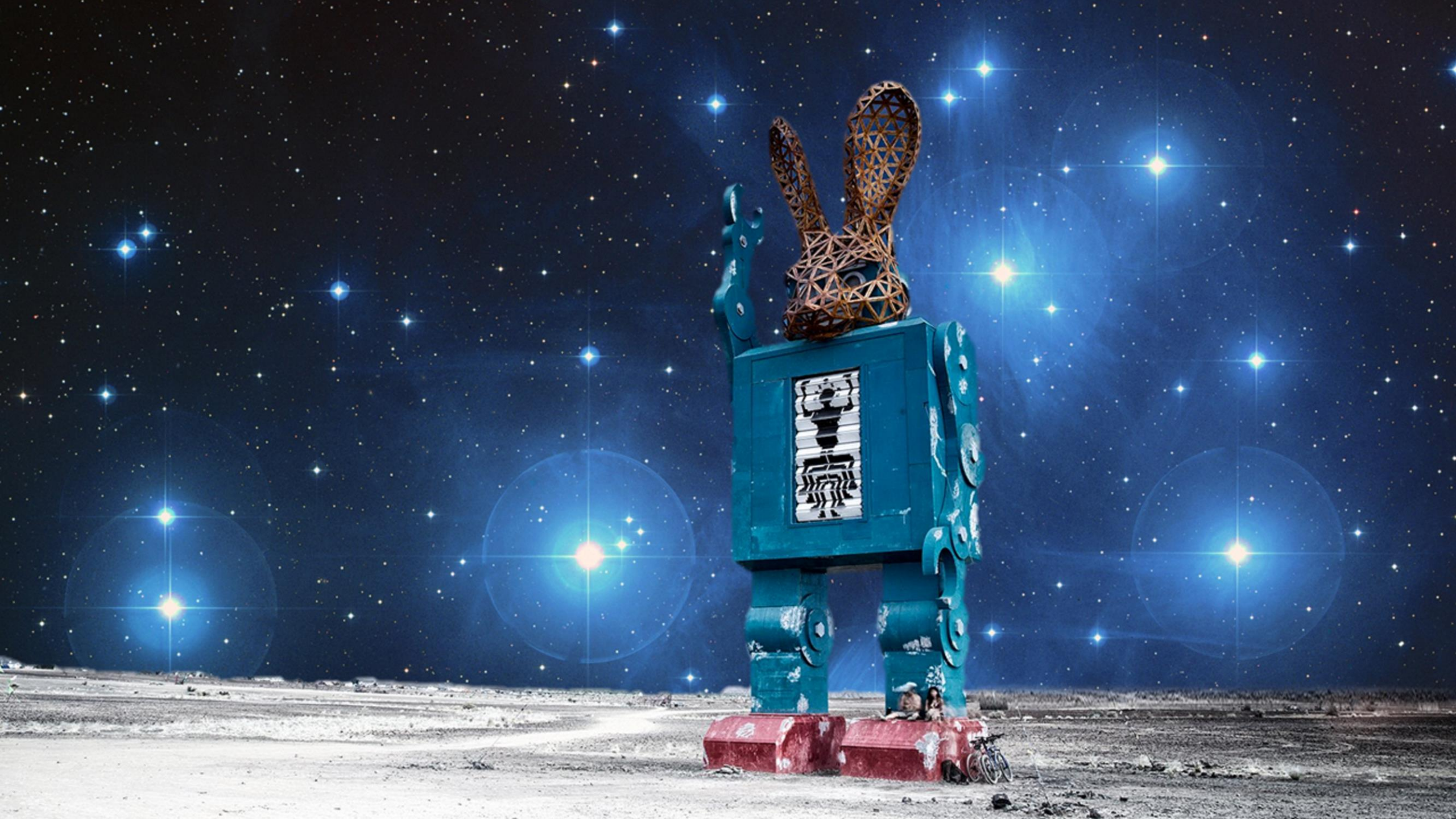
"People out here build whole worlds out of nothing, through cooperating."

- Larry Harvey



"We've been civilized from the beginning. In the desert, it's a baroque city like Paris or Rome."

- Larry Harvey



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.

- Burning Man Principle



"People give because they identify with Burning Man, with our city, with our civic life. The idea of giving something to the citizens of Black Rock City has enormous appeal to them because it enhances their sense of who they are and magnifies their sense of being. That's a spiritual reward."

- Larry Harvey



"You are not lost. You are here. Welcome Home."

- Anon.



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

- Burning Man Organization.



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

- Burning Man Principle



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

- Burning Man Principle



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

- Burning Man Principle

"Burning Man is an annual gathering that takes place at Black Rock City—a temporary community erected in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada. The event is described as an experiment in community and art, influenced by 10 main principles, including 'radical' inclusion, self-reliance and self-expression, as well as community cooperation, civic responsibility, gifting, de commodification, participation, immediacy and leaving no trace.

Burn Brilliantly is a collection of quotes and digital art that aims to capture the awe, and wonder that so many Burners feel at the event.

The excerpts and citations in this book have been curated from various sources including, overheard conversations, blogs, Reddit threads, and an eclectic set of authors who've written about Burning Man and have experienced first-hand the magic of Black Rock City.

The astronomy-themed digital art have been selected to capture the whimsy and other-worldliness of the Burn experience.

