

Burning Man:

Mission Statement

Our mission is to produce the annual event known as "Burning Man" and to guide, nurture and protect the more permanent community created by its culture. Our intention is to generate society that connects each individual to his or her creative powers, to participation in community, to the larger realm of civic life, and to the even greater world of nature that exists beyond society. We believe that the experience of Burning Man can produce positive spiritual change in the world. To this end, it is equally important that we communicate with one another, with the citizens of Black Rock City and with the community of Burning Man wherever it may arise. Burning Man is radically inclusive, and its meaning is potentially accessible to anyone. The touchstone of value in our culture will always be immediacy: experience before theory, moral relationships before politics, survival before services, roles before jobs, embodied ritual before symbolism, work before vested interest, participant support before sponsorship. Finally, in order to accomplish these ends, Burning Man must endure as a self-supporting enterprise that is capable of sustaining the lives of those who dedicate themselves to its work. From this devotion spring those duties that we owe to one another. We will always burn the Man.

10 Principles

Radical Inclusion

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

Gifting

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

Decommodification

In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or

advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.

Radical Self-reliance

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

Radical Self-expression

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

Communal Effort

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

Civic Responsibility

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

Leaving No Trace

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

Participation

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

Immediacy

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

Viva Las Xmas

-- an excerpt from a speech delivered by Larry Harvey at Cooper Union

Two years ago at Christmas time I decided to visit Las Vegas. I wanted to see the great mother retail entertainment destinations (known in trade journals as R.E.D.'s). Now, I will admit to you that I dislike the Yuletide season. This great orgy of buying, selling and forced consumption strikes me as the ultimate perversion of what a gift should be. Instead, I engage in whatever activity feels like the opposite of Christmas. Thus it was that in late December of 2000 my girlfriend and I embarked on a holiday. We decided to call it our *Viva Las Xmas* tour.

We stayed at the home of a friend who was out of town, and one day an acquaintance of his called. I answered the phone, thinking it might be our host. Instead, I was talking to the proprietor of what had been Las Vegas's last and only artist's coffee house. He told me it had just gone belly-up. He sounded like a man who had just lost a daughter to diphtheria. Apparently, his enterprise could not compete with casinos. And yet, on this very same day, the Guggenheim announced its plan to open a gallery as a magnet attraction at the Venetian. This is what retail entertainment journals style *edutainment*.

That evening a young woman representing the museum appeared on local television. She described this venture as a form of public outreach, a nod on high saluting the demotic. An art critic also materialized, looking very much as if he'd just swallowed a snifter of quinine water. He was actually wearing a turtleneck, and he talked about the postmodern implications of this innovative social experiment. My favorite spokesperson, however, was the actual developer. Instinctively, I liked this man. He wore a hard hat and looked working class — in sensibility, anyway. Looking straight into the camera, he bluntly declared, "This project is classy, classier, classiest... *one of those!*"

You see, over the last 20 years Vegas has re-invented itself as a thoroughgoing R.E.D. It is now a center of edutainment, infotainment, eatotainment — any kind of *tainment* you desire. They've torn down all the old facades and, in their place, they've erected palaces that offer up the Holy Trinity of market synergy. We wandered amid these complexes. We loitered in the shadow of animatronic

sculptures. We witnessed musical fountains and beheld the Pharonic mysteries of ancient Egypt at the Luxor. At Caesar's Palace, I actually bought an ashtray. My favorite spot, however, was the Rio. Here we discovered a riverboat that had been mounted near the ceiling and attached to curvilinear track. It was filled with performers who danced and sang, and every time it came around they'd wave at us. Looking up from the surrounding slot machines, we would wave back.

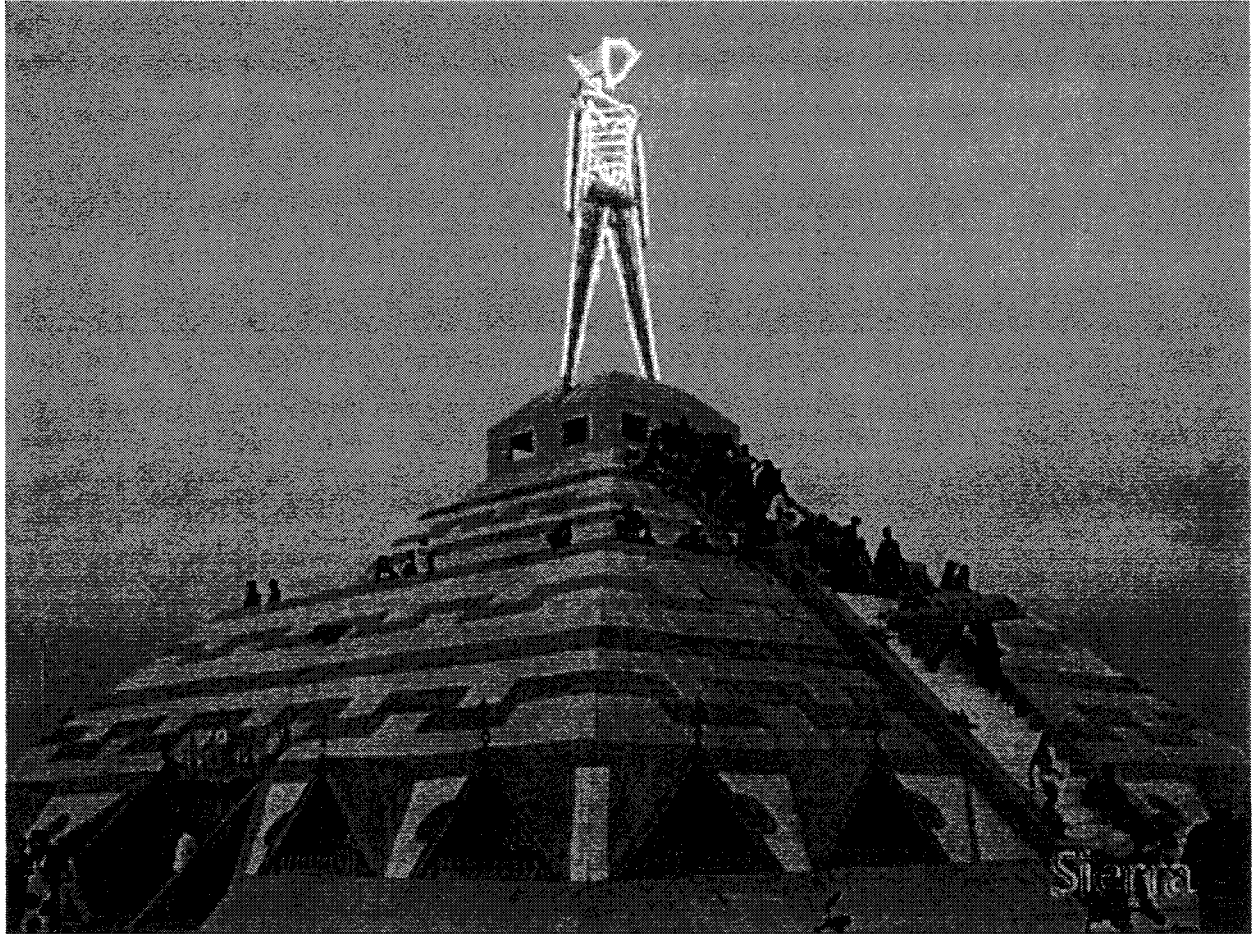
In fact, this type of interactivity is typical of R.E.D.'s. Let me read to you my favorite quote from a trade. The article explains that ambient entertainment is a key component of 'immersion environments'. "Free street performances, another form of ambient entertainment, strive to replicate the spontaneity of the archetypal, if not mythical, marketplace. Yet because they work independently, their performance can be unpredictable making them potentially disruptive to both visitors and tenants. Thus authentic performances are not commonly allowed on the private property of destination complexes." Instead, they hire performers, and typically these performances are of short duration. You see, the reason R.E.D.'s create these faux civic spaces, and the reason they are filled with such apparently civilized amenities, is to cause consumers to linger in a retail environment. They've studied this and found that maximum spending typically occurs during a three to four-hour interval. That is why these ersatz interactions are so brief.

Near the end of our tour we encountered a great animatronic statue of Neptune. It was set in a courtyard that, in a weird cartoon kind of way, might have been in Florence. It could have been a plaza in an Italian hill town; a public square, a lively civic setting. This robotic Roman deity addressed us for about five minutes and attracted many people. But, when it ceased to operate, the crowd dispersed — and where did all these people go? Right into shops strategically surrounding this magnet attraction, and every one of them was a brand name high-end retail outlet selling goods at a 200% mark-up.

You see, these settings are engineered with the precision of a hermetically sealed engine. Though they may look like urban settings, you'll find no posters pasted to the lampposts, as you would in my neighborhood in San Francisco. You will not discover any pocket parks that have been hidden away as true amenities of leisure. You will experience none of the spontaneous encounters that are the lifeblood of community and culture. No clinging tendrils of association mar these hardened surfaces. You *will* see people trudging forward in a *Day of the Locust* sort of way, giving nothing of themselves to the world that surrounds them and receiving no inspiration from it.

What you will also discover is what we encountered: the people chute. This is the last feature of an R.E.D. that I'll describe to you. My girlfriend and I became fascinated by this aspect of our environment. In the process of reinventing itself, Vegas has built an elaborate system of pedestrian transportation. They've located large parking complexes on the periphery of the Strip, and people are funneled through casinos by an integrated system of escalators, bridges, elevators, tramways, and an endless succession of barriers. These public spaces are designed to keep consumers moving. Whirling through this slalom course, we realized we were never more than ten feet away from an opportunity to purchase something. It was virtually impossible to escape these encounters. The space of one casino bled seamlessly into the next. Finally, we decided to amuse ourselves by looking for some crack, some break, some fissure in this plumbing -- and, at last, we found it. Escaping from the chute, we fled gleefully across the street while holding hands, running through the traffic of the Strip like giggling children.

At the very end of our stay we took the elevator to the penthouse of the Rio. We walked into the Voodoo Lounge, strayed out onto the terrace, and there, spread out before us, was the Strip: this great evil drive train glittering in the desert night. And suddenly I thought, *this is just like Burning Man!* We, too, create a scene, a fantasy environment. We produce an annual art theme. We believe that public narratives help people to belong to one another. The telling and re-telling of a story manifests identity. This provides artists with a medium through which they may collaborate, co-operate and share resources. Moreover, Black Rock City is filled with interaction and ambient entertainment. Spread out upon the desert floor, this glittering metropolis becomes a capsule world that obliges people to *linger and loiter in an immersive environment*. The only difference between Las Vegas and Burning Man is that you cannot buy or sell things. The only difference is that you must struggle to survive. The only difference is that you are seldom more than ten feet away from opportunities to interact with art and other human beings. The only difference is that you must give of yourself. The only difference, finally, is that it is *real*.



The Man and the Great Temple, 2003. Photo by Ron Halbert