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Can Consumers Escape the Market? Emancipatory Illuminations from Burning Man

ROBERT V. KOZINETS*

This ethnography explores the emancipatory dynamics of the Burning Man project, a one-week-long antimarket event. Practices used at Burning Man to distance consumers from the market include discourses supporting communality and disparaging market logics, alternative exchange practices, and positioning consumption as self-expressive art. Findings reveal several communal practices that distance consumption from broader rhetorics of efficiency and rationality. Although Burning Man's participants materially support the market, they successfully construct a temporary hypercommunity from which to practice divergent social logics. Escape from the market, if possible at all, must be conceived of as similarly temporary and local.

After all the plans, dreaming, and anticipation, on August 31, 1999, I veer and bump my rented blue Malibu across deep desert scars, steering it into a stretch of Nevada desert nestled within a ring of mountains. As the Black Rock Desert's powdery dust swirls a distinctive alkali smell into my nostrils for the first time, I use my Visa card at the gate to purchase a \$110 ticket. This charge is more than a three-day adult pass to Walt Disney World, and the fact that I am purchasing it on my Visa card seems inconsistent with Burning Man's acclaimed status as a noncommercial event. Yet Burning Man's organizers justify the high price of the tickets

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"Rituals without Dogma," a videography of Burning Man, is available for downloading from the online version of *JCR* (<http://www.journals.edu/JCR/home.html>). This video represents the cultural complexity of the event in ways that transcend the format of theory-bound, written journal articles. Beyond its verisimilitude, the videography introduces new themes, representations, and interpretations that may be of additional interest to consumer researchers. VHS copies of a longer version of the videography (suitable for pedagogical use) are also available from the author. If interested, please contact the author at the address provided above or by e-mail.

by reference to government payments and the good of the Burning Man community. They emphasize that a not-for-profit, mainly volunteer, limited liability corporation runs Burning Man and justify their acceptance of Visa cards through an egalitarian appeal to accessibility and convenience. Yet the easy ka-ching at the gate makes me suspect that I'm entering a new adult theme park rather than the site of the new revolution. My sense of Burning Man as entertainment changes a bit as I read the ticket, which states the risks and rules of the event: "You voluntarily assume the risk of serious injury or death by attending this event. You must bring enough food, water, shelter and first aid to *survive* one week in a harsh desert environment. Commercial vending, firearms, fireworks, rockets and all other explosives prohibited. . . . This is not a consumer event. Leave nothing behind when you leave the site. Participants only. No spectators."

After pitching and thoroughly staking down my tent (in case the recent 45 mph windstorms should reappear), I voyage to the center of the giant campsite to see the Man, a 45-foot-tall effigy built of neon and wood. The Man is the physical and psychological center of the community, a gigantic piece of art shaped as a man. The burning of the Man is the central and unifying metaphor of the festival, one based on purification through fire. Participants are encouraged to consider an act of transference onto the Burning Man by concentrating, while the effigy is burning, on what they would like to eliminate in their lives, what they came to burn. On Saturday night the festival reaches its apogee when the Man is set ablaze, loaded with pyrotechnics. Masses of people drum and dance around its burning form, celebrating wildly, often until dawn.

The sun beats down. My shoes scratch over the parched and crumbling floor of fine dust. It is dinnertime, and the

smell of charcoal and cooking food joins with the omnipresent alkali scent of desert dust and burning kerosene. The clanking throb of hundreds of generators melds with the sounds of distant music, rhythmic drumming, and shouts. A walk on the wild side, the Burning Man festival is a radical departure, a feast for all the senses. I pass people in intricate costumes, with butterfly wings, helmets, huge hats, strange hats, body armor, leather bondage outfits, historical costumes, alien costumes. Others are colored blue or red or green, are nude or covered with glittering particles, or riding in strange vehicles that resemble animals, birds, insects, crustaceans, a Viking ship, a living room, a haunted house, a dragon. Along my walk, people call out “hi” and “hello” to me as if we are not strangers.

Burning Man has been conceived by its organizers as an experimental project that seeks to temporarily create an experience of caring human contact in a society “whose economic and technological dynamic attrits and intrudes upon the integrity of the cultural process” (Harvey 1997). It began in 1985, when Jerry James and Larry Harvey, a San Francisco builder and landscaper, respectively, took a small group of bohemian friends to San Francisco’s Baker Beach to burn an eight foot tall figure of a man they had made out of wood (Harvey 1997; Stein 2000). As Harvey (1997) recalls it, at that first event everyone on the beach came running at the moment the man flamed up—“suddenly, our numbers tripled.” People began to perform, playing guitar, singing and dancing spontaneously. “What we had instantly created was a community” (Harvey 1997). After holding the event on Baker Beach annually for several years, attracting more people and attention each time, the event (along with the physical dimensions of the Man) grew so large that it was officially banned from the site. In 1990, Harvey and friends moved the event to the Black Rock Desert in Nevada: “400 square miles of nothing” (Harvey 1997). What began in 1990 with “60 people, maybe 80 people” (Harvey 1997) had grown by 2000 to an event that attracted 26,000. Burning Man 1999’s attendees were, on average, 30.5 years old. Sixty-four percent were male, 61% lived in the state of California, and 37% lived in the Bay Area (figures are from Burning Man organizers and the Ministry of Statistics—<http://www.dcn.davis.ca.us/~mos/>—a Burning Man theme camp that describes its statistical work as partially performance art).

A *Wired* coffee-table book on the event terms it “an experiment in community—‘sudden community,’” and an event that “previews what the twenty-first century will be all about: spontaneous, diverse communities—real and virtual—accommodating individual expression that is more powerful and imaginative than ever before” (Plunkett and Wieners 1997). With participants exhibiting a strong sense of identity as Burning Man participants (often calling themselves “Burners” and referring often to their “community”), sharing rituals such as burning the Man and traditions such as self-expressive participation, and affecting a remarkably strong civic engagement in their temporary city, Burning Man easily passes the threshold for the “three core com-

ponents or markers of community” laid out by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001, p. 412).

Burning Man therefore provides a useful ethnographic context from which to frame theory construction about community as well as consumer emancipation, informed by the ways the event’s ethos and practices can be differentiated from those normally accorded to the market. The article begins with a theoretical overview of related literature. The next section explores important discourse and practices used at Burning Man to distance consumption from the market. The discussion section then develops the implications of this ethnography for our understanding of the relations between consumers, communities, and markets.

THEORY

Markets and their “totalizing” and “growing influence” (Firat and Venkatesh 1995, pp. 245, 255) have been theorized to affect consumer communities as well as individual consumers. Markets cause the fragmentation of consumers into more isolated groups (Firat and Venkatesh 1995, p. 255), undermining important social institutions, such as community. Markets are also said to adversely structure individual consumers’ identities, causing them to become passive and less expressive (Firat and Venkatesh 1995, pp. 255–256). Markets’ effects upon consumer communities and individual consumers are interrelated in many ways. However, to prevent conceptual confusion, this section will consider these two related, yet distinct, issues. The first considers the relationship between markets and communities and informs our understanding of community. The second considers the relationship of markets to individual consumers and contributes to our understanding of emancipation.

Markets’ Effects on Communities

The notion of community is among the most important, complex, and contested in Western thought. Although most scholars recognize communities as extremely diverse, a certain type of community has often been held up as an ideal. This communal ideal can be characterized as a group of people living in close proximity with mutual social relations characterized by caring and sharing. Tönnies ([1887] 1957) evoked this ideal in his notion of “*Gemeinschaft*,” while Putnam (2000) similarly theorized community based on civic engagement, a sense of belonging, and social contribution. The origin of this caring, sharing communal ideal is in the deep trust and interdependence of family relations.

Markets are different. The ideal market is seen as more of what Tönnies (1957) termed a “*Gesellschaft*” type of phenomenon; it provides more formal, contractual, socially distanced relations. These relations are transactions-based and occur for the purpose of exchange (Weber [1922] 1978; Williamson 1975). In market transactions, the object is to increase one’s advantage, to get more than one gives. To simplify the contrast, ideal communities are about caring about and sharing with insiders while ideal markets are about transacting with outsiders. Although both involve power

relations and although they are interrelated or embedded in one another (see, e.g., Biggart 1989; Frenzen and Davis 1990; Granovetter 1985), marketplace exchanges focus more than communal exchanges on monetizing the exchange value of goods and services, and extracting excess value, or profits, from transactions. Throughout human history, markets have generally been constrained to particular places, times, and roles, and largely kept conceptually distinct from other important social institutions, such as home and family. With the rise of industrialization and postindustrialization, however, the influence of the market has increasingly encroached upon times, spaces, and roles previously reserved for communal relations. As the self-interested logics of the market have filtered into communal relations, they have been accused of increasingly undermining the realization of the caring, sharing, communal ideal.

Theory relating consumer communities and markets has appeared frequently within the corpus of consumer research. Suggesting that mainstream consumer communities have become overly structured by market relations, Sherry (1990, p. 27) argues that adjustments are required to make markets more social. In an ethnography that seems to address this need for adjustment, Jenkins (1992, pp. 278–284) notes how some media fan communities construct nonprofit trade relations as an attempt to create sharing communal relations. Pike (2001b, pp. 74–81) describes a similar tension surrounding the presence of commercial vendors at contemporary pagan festivals. Although merchants acted in many ways as caring, contributing members of the community, they were still viewed warily by other community members because of their association with market motives. Kozinets (2001, pp. 80–82, 85–86) explores similar disjunctures, theorizing that *Star Trek* fans' separation between the commercial and the sacred was symbolic of a broader cultural tension between consumer communities and markets.

Another stream of consumer research has found the relation less problematic. There are few signs of tension between consumer communities—or *communitas*—and markets in studies of river rafters (Arnould and Price 1993); Harley-Davidson subcultures (Schouten and McAlexander 1995); Harley and Jeep Brandfests (McAlexander and Schouten 1998); Macintosh, Saab, and Bronco brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001); groups of in-line skaters (Cova and Cova, forthcoming); and a Winnebago travelers' club (Peters and Grossbart 2001). For example, Schouten and McAlexander (1995, pp. 57, 60) describe the relationship between marketers and subcultural communities as potentially "symbiotic," implying mutual benefits. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 428) urge us to believe that communities built upon an explicitly commercial basis, brands, are legitimate communities "and generally a good thing."

Reflecting the diverse conceptualizations of community, these studies have not focused on the communal ideal of a caring, sharing community in their investigations. However, some of these studies do contain signs of broader tensions between the ethos of the consumer community and of the market. For example, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 419)

note that "community asserts a tension against the market, against hegemony, and against the growth of the brand." Brand community members are described as exhibiting weaker social ties and fewer mutually beneficial relations than those of traditional communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, pp. 425–426). The centrality of consumption and consumer behavior in this social struggle is noteworthy. It may signal the increasingly important role that consumer research can play in helping to understand widespread cultural tensions, such as the one existing between communal ideals and market logics.

Emancipation and Markets' Effects on Consumers

Beyond their effects on communal ideals, markets have been hypothesized to directly affect individual consumers by homogenizing them and suppressing their self-expressive capabilities. Negative effects of the market are present in Wallendorf and Arnould's (1991, pp. 27–28) theorization that nationally branded foods pose a threat to individual and familial uniqueness that must be discharged through deconstruction. The same types of tensions and the deconstruction practices used to address them are analyzed by Holt (1998, pp. 20–21) as indicative of the class-related tension between mass (conforming, homogenized) and singular (personalized) identities in general society.

The view that the market's impacts on consumers' identities are a phenomenon from which they can and should be emancipated reaches its apex in consumer research in the liberatory postmodern perspective. Building upon Murray and Ozanne's (1991) notion that consumers need to be emancipated from constraining forms of consumption, Firat and Venkatesh (1995, pp. 255–256) detail these restrictive influences and elucidate a vision of consumer emancipation. They assert that market influences constrain consumers' creative roles and identities, limit their human freedom by enforcing particular views of reality, and make their everyday life less diverse and more passive. These theorists seek to conceptualize and develop notions of consumer emancipation that would involve placing consumers outside of the totalizing logic of the market. A later related work theorized that emancipation can be found in communal, performative, self-expressive "alternative life mode communities," or "theaters of consumption," which maintain "an autonomy from the mainstream market culture" (Firat and Dholakia 1998, pp. 157–158). Questions remain about how to reconcile the apparently isolating individualism of emancipatory practices with the collectivity and communality of these theaters of consumption.

In postmodern liberatory conceptualizations, consumers and consumption are sensibly employed as bridging terms, as they will be in this article: **"consumers" are human beings, and "consumption" is the many human acts that people perform as they interact with the material world around them.** These postmodern scholars perspicaciously realize that unless consumers and consumption are conceptualized as terms that bridge social and economic realms, consumer emancipation is impossible. Yet further conceptualization of con-

sumer emancipation and of the nature of markets effects on consumers is necessary before we can compellingly assert that consumer emancipation is possible. As it currently stands, notions of consumer emancipation and theaters of consumption are inspiring and visionary, but abstract. They leave as an open question the processes by which (and even the mere possibility that) consumers can find a way to leave the market.

Investigations of consumer communities can now move beyond considering how particular communities consume and how marketing and brands have infiltrated communal forms. Despite the many contributions theoreticians have made to understanding the consumption patterns of communities that are situated within market logics (i.e., the qualities of markets that structure social action), central tensions between the logics governing markets and certain kinds of communal relations remain unexplored. Thus far, we have developed only the most rudimentary conceptual tools to investigate the underlying motivations and processes whereby communities of various forms resist and attempt to distinguish themselves from markets. Much empirical work remains to be done in order to thoroughly conceptualize, describe, and assess the limits of consumer emancipation. Consumer research theory is currently unequipped to answer questions about the extent of consumer emancipation that can be achieved and the types of social practices that can be used to distance consumers and consumption from the market. What are those practices? What motivations and social processes underlie them? Are communities built on these bases sustainable? By exploring and problematizing the effects of markets on individuals and communities in this ethnography, this article answers these questions. The insights gained will help consumer researchers reformulate the way they think about the relations among communities and markets, consumer resistance, and consumer emancipation.

METHODOLOGY

My investigation of Burning Man and its community began in October 1996. At this time, I began informal observation of the very active Internet community of Burning Man participants. I downloaded and analyzed Burning Man-related photographs, articles, documents, reminiscences, computer-mediated communications, and other cultural data available through mass media channels and on the Internet. After approximately three years building a knowledge base, I intensified my research with six days of participant observation at the weeklong Burning Man 1999 event. Following this, I maintained e-mail contact with several participants I had met and interviewed. Participating as a member of the community, I created and maintained a Burning Man Research Web site, actively surfed online sites, and subscribed to and participated on three major Burning Man mailing lists. This year of intensified online activity

was followed by a further six days of participation-observation at Burning Man 2000.

Prior to, during, and subsequent to my immersion in the events, I kept detailed written fieldnotes. Observed events and ethnographic interviews were recorded with a digital video camcorder, from which several videographies have been created (see Burning Man video section of this article). I filmed the videography after receiving formal approval from the proper Burning Man authorities and while displaying public proof of this certification. All individuals who provided informant information granted their informed consent after being informed verbally of my affiliation and intent. All individuals providing informant information also granted permission for their filmed responses to be used for research purposes.

A tape recorder was also used for some in situ fieldnotes and some interviews. Over 300 photographs were taken. The ethnography encompassed interviews and interactions with several hundred Burning Man participants. Semistructured interviews with more than 120 informants (in one-on-one and group formations) were conducted and videotaped. The interviews and interactions were of varying duration (videotaped interviews ranged from seconds up to one hour). Male informants constituted about 60% of the sample. Most were Caucasian and American, but there were also some Asian, European, African-American, Native American, and East Indian informants. Where vocational and age information was obtained, most informants were employed in professional or technological vocations, many worked in information technologies industries in and around Silicon Valley, and almost all were between the ages of 25 and 50. Between interviews, and particularly during the evenings, I left my camera behind and participated: wearing a variety of outlandish costumes, being initiated into new religions, drumming, meeting new people, riding on strange vehicles like UFOs and Viking ships.

Videotaped observations, written and recorded fieldnotes, Internet interactions and artifacts, and transcribed interviews were coded, read in detail several times, and analyzed using constant comparative analytic techniques (e.g., Glaser and Strauss 1967). The evolving ethnography was posted in its entirety on an Internet Web page in late 1999. Online member check feedback was received from nine members of the Burning Man community. These comments have been supportive of the veracity of the research. Participant comments improved the factual and historical accuracy of the recounting. This recounting emphasizes the relationships among consumers, community, and the market, the central themes to which this article now turns.

ETHNOGRAPHIC THEMES

Burning Man is a weeklong communal gathering that alters participants' consumption meanings and practices through discourse, rules, and practice. The entire community's consumption experiences are socially constructed as

distanced from, or even outside of, consumer culture and the market. To achieve this, several discursive acts and ritual practices are employed. These acts are as follows. First, prevalent discourse about marketing, corporate greed, and passive consumption attempts to discharge the threat of consumer culture and to argue that Burning Man is an effective, albeit temporary, antidote to it. Second, marketplace logics that usually drive acquisition of goods and services are constructed as absent within the borders of Burning Man through the employment of alternative exchange modes. Finally, as Burning Man participants produce a variety of consumption experiences for one another, they attempt to re-enchant or "re-mystify" the social world (Barber 1995; Weber 1978) by discursively constructing a myriad of forms of production and consumption as forms of self-expressive art. By positioning production and consumption as expressive rather than productive, the rational efficiency motive that drives marketplace production is discursively disabled, and opportunities for re-enchantment emerge. Through these practices of discursively neutralizing marketing and corporate greed, enacting alternative exchange practices, and re-enchanting production and consumption by relating it in discourse and practice to art, various products and services are effectively disarticulated from market logics and rearticulated onto communal ethos and subcultural ideologies. These discursive and enacted consumption practices are explored in the following sections.

Discursively Positioning Burning Man's Community against the Market

In this section, we explore discourse used to separate communally oriented consumption from negative characteristics ascribed to the market. To do so, we begin with a brief historical genealogy. In 1987, several members of a San Francisco neo-anarchist group named the Cacophony Society became affiliated with Burning Man and, in 1990, suggested the successful relocation to the Black Rock Desert. Beginning as a reincarnation of a club based on a class of San Francisco's Communiversities, the Cacophony Society was dedicated to staging and performing strange, edgy events. Those early, cacophony-inspired years of Burning Man were a pyromaniacal anarchy without rules. In attempts over the ensuing years to improve and manage the rapidly growing event, the event's organizers increasingly encoded social norms in rules that they publicized in written, broadcast, and Web-based communications. The result is an event structured by rules. A local volunteer police force, the Rangers, enforces the rules. They are trained to be diplomatic but can and do use expulsion and physical force. Because of the rules, several important Cacophony Society members have shunned the event. My fieldnotes include several explicit statements by Burning Man old-timers (who had been going to the event for eight or more years) lamenting that the event had become far too rule-bound and had lost its wildness.

Emphasizing the No Vending Rule. As of 2000, the

rules most often mentioned included No Spectators (an injunction to participate), Radical Self-Expression, Radical Self-Reliance, Piss Clear (an indicator that body hydration has been maintained by drinking water frequently), and Leave No Trace (ecological responsibility for removing your own garbage). The rule most important to this investigation is the No Vending rule, which forbids any type of selling by participants at the event. In the opening edition of the *Black Rock City Gazette* for Burning Man 1999, the rules against vending were extended to include suggestions to "mask, hide or disguise the eye-sore logos that get in our faces constantly and without our consent when we are in the 'normal world'" (Fang 1999, p. 1). These injunctions against commerce and displaying brand names are ubiquitous at Burning Man, posted on public signs, publicized in documents, mentioned frequently.

To understand the purposes that the No Vending rule and its Mask the Brand Names extension fulfill, we must explore the connection between markets and what Burning Man organizers and participants term "community." This relation is apparent in the five signs of a community published in the Burning Man Organization's (2000) most important document, the required reading "Survival Guide." The first sign of a community is mutual recognition of each member's unique abilities versus the tendency of "commerce and the public sector [to] define us on the basis of deficiency and need" (Burning Man Organization 2000). The second sign is cooperative, collective effort, as opposed to being "made passive" when consuming a service or being part of a mass market that consumes or views "in complete isolation from one another" (Burning Man Organization 2000). Lack of persuasion and overt exploitation is the third sign, in which transactions take place without money, advertising, or hype. Local myths or the use of stories as opposed to the use of formal business reports is the fourth sign. The fifth sign is a spirit of celebration in which, because of its intensely social character, "the line between work and play is blurred" (Burning Man Organization 2000). Analyzing the distinctions of the "Survival Guide," it is evident that it is not exchange per se that is being rejected as anticommunal but the exchanges of large, impersonal markets, markets where power is used to persuade and exploit faceless others. Monetary transactions in these markets are associated with persuasion and exploitation. Less directly, market exchange is related to passivity, social isolation, and joylessness, and defining consumers based on dehumanizing and deficiency-laden terms.

To understand how Burning Man's rules and ideology filter down to the festival's participants, consider the words of "Crucifix George," a former advertising executive in his forties. It is traditional at Burning Man for people to adopt a pseudonym, or "nom de playa" (Burning Man Organization 2000) for the duration of the event. This provides recreation, a degree of anonymity, and a type of decoration. To provide informants with anonymity, I have not used actual names or actual pseudonyms but have attempted to capture some of the flavor of their noms de playa in their

ethnographic pseudonyms. I interviewed Crucifix George while he was masking out the brand name of his RV with duct tape. After identifying myself and gaining permission to videotape him, I asked if he was simply following the rules, or whether he really believed in them.

I really believe in them. You can see all this shit [advertising and brand names] all the time, anyway. You can see it on TV. You can see it in the telephone book. Why don't you come out here and look at something that you *haven't* seen before? There's so much creative energy here that you don't need the stuff, the symbols that are imprinted on your brain on a day-to-day basis by marketing people who come out of schools such as the one that you go to. Okay? You can create a whole fucking world like this if people were open. But they're not. They like to sit and watch their TV in their little box and be spoon-fed everything and go to their little job. And then they wonder why they're miserable and why they're cynical. But if they came out here, they would be a lot better off. And if they left all their market shit at home, then they'd be even much better off. (Interview, Burning Man 1999)

Using Metaphors and Meanings of Consumption. As Larry Harvey suggests in many of his interviews and speeches (see, e.g., Harvey 1998), and as I found repeatedly in the responses to my self-identification as a marketing professor to Burning Man participants such as George, the terms *marketing* and *consumer* are emotionally charged and generally negative signifiers at Burning Man. As used emically at the event, the term *marketing* was invariably coupled to the advertising industry, to the production of "symbols" and false "market shit" (Crucifix George, personal interview, Burning Man 1999). Marketing is linked to a sophisticated industry of persuasion in which consumers are socially isolated ("in their little box") and made dependent ("spoon-fed") and depressed—"miserable" and "cynical" (Crucifix George, personal interview, Burning Man 1999). Given this meaning, it is unsurprising that the term *consumer* (used herein in this sense in italics) is, emically, an insulting ascription. In interviews and in fieldnotes, I find Burning Man participants repeatedly constructing and vilifying *consumers* as dehumanized, atomized dupes. They also relate normal consumption as a set of practices characterized by passivity, acquisitiveness, selfishness, and unreflective materialism. Alternately, they characterize consumption at Burning Man as self-expressive, voluntary, genuine, and creative.

A central metaphor employed by informants to encapsulate this distinction is that of the entranced television couch potato as exemplifying the prototypical—or stereotypical—consumer. Structured by adherence to the No Spectators rule, the passive viewer–active participant distinction formed one of the key cultural boundaries differentiating the diverse range of insiders from the outsiders in the Burning Man community. My fieldnotes contain many incidents where people commented on one another's lack of appropriate attire or tendency to hide behind a camera. There was even a large No Spectators rally (fieldnotes, September 3,

1999). The peer pressure to remind and shame people into participating in a way that would be recognized by others as acceptable—this was mainly limited to dressing in a wild costume, going naked, wearing body paint, riding a strange vehicle, or working on or displaying art—was at a near fever pitch throughout the entire event. From their comments to me, people indicated that they were constantly judging others in terms of the degree of their participation in the event. Acting as culture-bearer in my second year at the event, I found that I engaged in this behavior frequently, probing others in conversation about their "participation" (fieldnotes, September 1, 2000). Complaints were frequently directed at the careless, polluting, spectating nature of the people who came to the weeklong event only for the final day or two. These people were variously termed "tourists," "weekenders," "spectators," "yahoos," "lookie-loos," and "frat boys"—terms related to *consumer* and couch potato by their passive, visual, and socially isolated connotations (fieldnotes, 1999 and 2000). These outsiders were judged as inauthentic.

There was frequent discussion about banning these outsiders from future events. They were perceived as attending the event solely to gawk at the freak show or the naked young women. This widespread sentiment, conveyed in numerous articles and Internet postings, indicated that authenticity as a true member of Burning Man was earned by participation in the event in a particular manner constructed as appropriate, and that this authenticity was enforced by social pressures and ostracism. Strong out-group sentiments are often similarly required to form close-knit, caring communities. At Burning Man, authentic participation was discursively construed as not behaving like a *consumer*.

Burning Man Contrasted with Disneyland and Woodstock. In a revealing contrast used in interviews, publications, and Harvey's speeches (e.g., Harvey 1998), Burning Man is described as the antithesis of Disneyland, as "Disneyland in Reverse" (Plunkett and Wieners 1997). For example, Burning Man's Disneyfication was parodied in a column in the official *Black Rock Gazette* newspaper on September 4, 1999. In the column, by Sister Dana Van Iquity, the Disney conglomerate buys the rights to Burning Man, then enacts a No Fire–Spectators Only rule. The general thrust of the humor comes from the cultural awareness that Burning Man participants are not *consumers*. Yet the Disney comparison also expresses a genuine cultural tension. With high ticket prices, drink concessions, entertaining theme spaces, media fascination, and a cherished brand, the event has many similarities to a Disney theme park. By providing the sound bite "Disneyland in Reverse," organizers effectively distance and differentiate Burning Man from the overt commercialism of Disney, concomitantly positioning it as appealing to resistant consumers. Disney provides an important foil against which to discursively distinguish Burning Man from a major competitor.

Besides Disneyland, another important topic of discourse was the difference between Woodstock 1999 and Burning Man. The Woodstock 1999 concert has been commonly

characterized by its vandalizing, rape, and looting as well as by its exploitation by greedy promoters (Moodie and Callahan 1999). Burning Man participants discursively link these negative events to Woodstock's position in the market. For instance, "Gorgeous Girl" noted that Woodstock was nonparticipative and based upon a mutually exploitative foundation. According to her, Woodstock was "all about what you can get from something—entertainment, \$4 water, people who clean up for you" (interview, Burning Man 1999). Her comments reveal a dialectic that seeks to separate Burning Man's communal ideology from the ostensibly corrosive forces of the market. Unlike Burning Man's not-for-profit organization, Woodstock 1999's purpose was to make a profit for its promoters. Gorgeous traces Burning Man's positive experience to the lack of greed, and therefore authentic intent, of the event's organizers. Further, she constructs the self-centered, nonparticipative, and spectating nature of the *consumers* who attended Woodstock as a major part of the problem that led to rioting and looting. By linking the violence of Woodstock to its position in the market, participants make the ideological point that Burning Man's position outside the market frees it from the market's miasma of mutual exploitation. Although the two festivals might be viewed by outsiders as similar sorts of Dionysian and Bacchanalian celebration, it is in these dialectical distinctions from the market that Burning Man participants define the event in communal terms.

Distancing by Keeping the Market in Mind. Prevalent discourse about marketing, corporate greed, and the passivity of conventional *consumers* and consumption seek to educate participants about the ill effects of the market system and to construct Burning Man as outside of them. This ideological education is effected through rules such as the No Vending and Mask the Brand Names rules, the dehumanizing descriptions of *consumers* as passive dupes, and commonly circulated contrasts to couch potatoes, Disneyland, and Woodstock. Keeping the negative qualities of the market in mind is a way to discursively discharge them, an attempt to neutralize their power through continual cultural discourse. This is the first major type of social practice used to distance consumers and consumption from the market.

Burning Man's organizers and participants' critiques of consumer culture draw on concepts familiar from Marxism, critical theory, cultural studies, and postmodern market critiques. In some sense, emic familiarity with apparently etic concepts helps account for the sense that Burning Man deliberately explores the "long recognized and central tension of modernity" between the individualism of contemporary society and its underlying conformity (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, p. 428). Use of these passive, isolated, *consumer-as-dupe* comparisons may point more to the higher cultural capital (Holt 1998), upper-class, artistic, educated intelligentsia that make up Burning Man's main constituents, rather than to any emergent observation of the state of modern society. Participants are also building strong communal ties and using the ancient practice of vilifying the outsider. In addition, this intelligentsia seems to have outgrown and

become somewhat immune to the persuasive appeals of conventional marketing. Their protest can presumably be taken as a critique of their own marketplace experiences, which they find overly structured, personally distanced, and subject to a proliferation of manipulative and exploitative appeals. The result is a pathologizing dialectic in which an isolating consumer culture spread by exploitative large corporations sickens and undermines the norms of a caring, sharing, and civilly engaged community.

Burning Man's organizers sought to promote the event as a cure for this contemporary market malaise. In an interesting twist, they promote this cure using the same therapeutic language, desire for self-transformation, and spectacular aura of the carnivalesque employed by the historical advertising industry (Lears 1994, pp. 43–51). Therapeutic, transformational, and festal qualities were also, ironically, the miraculous qualities of most marketplaces throughout the early modern period (Lears 1994, pp. 24–25, 43–51). However, according to Lears (1994), the sense of hedonism, *joie de vivre*, and physical embodiment of abundance has been mostly leached from contemporary consumption meanings by the dialectics of yearning, efficiency, and moral constraint underlying advertising. Burning Man's emphasis on embodiment, flamboyant decoration, excessive consumption, intoxication, sexuality, and fulfillment demonstrates the more openly hedonistic style of consumption associated with festivals (Pike 2001a, p. 167) that may usefully stand in ideological opposition to advertising's spirit of endless unfulfilled yearning.

This analysis helps us to interpret the inconsistencies of \$110 tickets, as well as of espresso, ice, and bottled water sales at the event by the Burning Man organization. The analysis indicates that Burning Man is actually more about resisting exploitation by powerful corporations and their constricting advertising ideologies than it is about resisting exchange or commerce. Participants indicate in this way their view of the market as manifesting a self-interested, exploitative ethos, which is cast in opposition to the communal ethos they ascribe to Burning Man, regardless of the profit being made or the dollars changing hands. Like the restaurant that labels its soup homemade, Burning Man's not-for-profit and anticommmercial elements become signals of authenticity and messages about the value of participation, a communal ethos, self-expression, and self-reliance. These messages are a type of ideological service that Burning Man provides to its participants. Speaking out against ubiquitous elements of society like commerce, marketing, and advertising, and marking out brands serves to differentiate, sacralize, and elevate the social space for participants. The discourse creates the sense of a place different from everyday society, a more untainted psychic location for self-transformation and social experimentation. It is as if by keeping the market centered in the cultural crosshairs, its alleged evils will be exorcised. An important way this discourse is reinforced and turned into practice is through Burning Man's gift economy.

Altering Social Relations with Alternative Modes of Exchange

The first Burning Man event held in Nevada's desolate Black Rock Desert was a small community of several dozen friends who camped together and shared supplies. As the event grew to hundreds of people, encouraging barter preserved the communal ideal. Needed supplies that may have been forgotten on the journey into the desert were shared with neighbors and traded for other goods and services. By 1995, the event attracted 4,000 people. Codifying the exchange rules for this much larger group led to a barter economy that added the exchange of silly or useless trinkets to the exchange of necessities. The bartering exchange of trinkets became an important social activity that served to bring people together into dyadic exchanges, similar to the trinket exchanges customary at Mardi Gras festivals or suburban Boy Scout jamborees. By 2000, after several years of trinket exchange, the organizers of Burning Man began to openly encourage participants to simply give gifts without the haggling and quid pro quo of barter.

Gift Giving at Burning Man. In 1999 and 2000, attending the event entailed many gift-giving and gift-receiving practices. Considerable discursive treatment was devoted to the importance of the gift to Burning Man's communal experience. The "Survival Guide" states that "Black Rock City is a place of sharing and free exchange within a gift economy" (Burning Man Organization 2000). Gifts central to Burning Man's gift economy are the free entertainment services that, in toto, constitute the Burning Man experience. Other than the Burning of the Man, the urban planning, the Central Café, the Ranger police force, medical services, and the cleanup, there are few centrally organized activities. Everything else is created and donated by participants. Communal gifts included frequent staged public performances at hundreds of different theme camps, as well as rave and other dance clubs, many with very sophisticated constructions and expensive sound and light systems. Although most theme camps provided free services—such as free massages, interactive art experiences, bondage and domination rituals, and suntan oil application—others offered free goods. Many bars offered alcohol, usually for free, but sometimes bartered. The Midnight Popcorn Camp offered free fresh-popped and flavored popcorn at midnight every evening.

At Burning Man 2000, a nude and glowing with glitter young couple explained to me that they saw their naked, glittering bodies as temporary works of art that they gave to the community. Giving others permission to photograph you in an outlandish costume or nude was also seen as a gift, to which photographers reciprocated with verbal thanks and compliments. However, as the following excerpt from my fieldnotes indicates, there is an interesting reciprocity involved. Not only thanks, but also powerful motivators of attention, status, and prestige are being exchanged.

After all this awful weather, this has been a terrific day. I went out all dressed up, borrowed sequined silver pants from

Queen Cassie. My costume is attracting all kinds of attention. People are asking to take my picture like I am some kind of celebrity. So many people smiling at me—it is wonderful. . . . Later, a gorgeous woman covered only in gold glitter is being swarmed by men requesting her picture. We chat for a while and she asks me if she can take my picture. What a compliment! (Fieldnotes, September 2, 2000)

Decommodifying, Sacralizing, and Enhancing Community. Consider the Freezing Man camp. Present at Burning Man 1999 and 2000, this camp was an ordinary group of people, not affiliated with any company, who had brought a self-decorated, refrigerated truck to the event. They had filled it with dry ice and ice cream treats. They drove it through the desert giving away Dove sorbet and ice cream bars, frozen Snickers, Popsicles, and ice cream sandwiches. The brands are important because, although this act was unconnected to the candy companies, it was in defiance of Burning Man's antibrand injunctions. It might even appear to some to be an act of sampling by a marketer. My fieldnotes for August 29, 2000, reveal some tension around a related possibility. Unsubstantiated rumors had circulated that General Mills had attended the event and given out free samples. But erasing every sign of brands from Burning Man is an almost impossible standard, participants would argue. Even shirt buttons, underwear tags, tent stakes, and portable toilets are branded. The power of the ritual is not in the origins of the goods but in the sense of distance from the market gained by not charging for them. This practice of giving was much more important than trying to be obsessive purists who might churn their own ice cream or scratch the brand names off of every package, ice cream bar, and Popsicle stick. Producing absolutely everything that one consumes seems an impossible standard, one unreachable even by the most isolated Amazonian tribes. Freezing Man's perspective in action provides a portrait of Burning Man's realism in action. Widespread tolerance for inescapable brands indicates that the illusion of being outside the market at Burning Man is a contingent and constructed one. Participants must constantly reinterpret considerable evidence to the contrary, such as brands.

Gift giving plays an important, if not central, role in this reinterpretation. Participants construct market players as large, impersonal, manipulative, and exploitative. However, gifts belong to the communal realm of emotional bonds, mutuality, caring, and sharing. As a gift, the ice cream becomes not simply an ordinary purchased ice cream bar but something singular and personalized by the ritual act of giving. As such, it exists to participants outside of market logics of self-interest seeking and exploitation, despite its clearly displayed brand (cf. Baudrillard [1976] 1993). The theories of Kopytoff (1986) and Weiner (1992) assert similarly that goods can be removed from a commodity or exchange system and placed into a sacred realm, thus "decommodified," made singular, unique, "inalienable" (see also Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). Unlike sampling or selling, the ice cream

gift was not provided in order to persuade people to purchase ice cream at prices inflated to cover the cost of sampling, that would then yield a profit. Giving actually implied a considerable financial and personal sacrifice (as attested to by the commentary accompanying the auction of the truck on eBay later that year). Bells chiming, its approach inspired childlike delight in participants and helped to create an atmosphere of surprise and wonderment set apart from everyday experience.

Personalizing and Reducing Social Isolation. In my interviews, I found that, with almost universal consensus, informants related the construction of the gifting society to Burning Man's organizers' intention to shift participant's sense of the social from their ordinary experience to a more communal one. "Ike the Inchoate," a California academic and writer with a long history of Burning Man participation, stated that the lack of commerce and the presence of gifts at Burning Man "purifies social relations. Instead of being forced into this uniform code of exchange that is intensely abstract but also pegged to the buying and selling of human effort, we have to, you know, find alternative modes of exchange that challenge us creatively" (interview, Burning Man 1999).

Ike's comments discursively link the gift economy to an escape from what many participants find negative about the operations of the market—namely, the abusive exploitation of human labor, dehumanizing abstraction, and enforced homogeneity often associated with large corporate enterprises. His comments clarify that it is not exchange per se that is being resisted at Burning Man. Alternative modes of exchange, ones that exist outside of the conventional market, are desirable. As an example of an alternative exchange model, in the same interview, Ike discusses the Space Lounge, his favorite bar at Burning Man. If you want a drink, the bartender asks you to provide a story or a joke in exchange for it. Everyone present at the bar listens and, if the response is favorable, the bartender provides you with your drink. To an anthropologist of exchange systems like Weiner (1992), the Space Lounge might signify a new system and scale of reciprocity. To some people, requiring a personal revelation in exchange for a drink might seem a much more expensive proposition. Yet Ike emphasizes the value of this sharing and personal openness to building communal relations, a personalizing act that simultaneously singularizes the exchange and vivifies the social gathering. Ike contends that the bar demonstrates the way people can be forced out of their "dehumanized" and "atomized" states and their isolated "cocoons" by this new exchange mode (interview, Burning Man 1999). "Jacob," a musician in his early twenties from Austin, Texas, also found that the injunctions against commerce brought people closer together and thereby helped construct a caring, sharing sense of community. As Ike did, he positioned barter as a more communal practice than market exchange.

The idea of bartering brings people together. . . . When people vend things they're not personally attached to the things

that they're selling and they're not really attached to the money that they're getting for it, either. It's going to go towards purchasing things that might be precious to them, but, but it's distanced, it's this [compressing gesture with hands] intellectual space that, you know, creates distance between people [nods]. (Interview, Burning Man 1999)

This distaste for anonymity, accompanied by a hunger for a closing of the interpersonal divide between people, is also present in some of the more communally oriented general discourses on community (e.g., Etzioni 1993; Putnam 2000). The many acts of sharing at Burning Man—providing ice cream bars, music, nude displays, jokes—demonstrate the sort of active civic engagement that Putnam (2000) describes as having dissipated from contemporary American society. Ike, Jacob, and many other Burning Man participants and organizers link the anonymity and distance of contemporary American society directly to the workings of the large corporations and suggest that Burning Man's exchange practices provide an alternative.

Competition and Reciprocation in Gift Giving. As stated often in Burning Man communications, the event is supposed to be egalitarian, with gifts large and small equally appreciated. However, in recent years it has become subject to competitive gift giving. Gifts to the community are in fact often reciprocated by participants and organizers in different ways. My fieldnotes capture many instances of people evaluating, judging, and ranking the artistic gifts of participants. During Burning Man 2000, a group of participants from Microsoft was mentioned for their \$80,000 theme camp display. Artists of large installation pieces such as the Book Man of Burning Man 2000 (a large sculpture of a seated man made entirely out of books) become like celebrities, with lineups of people waiting to meet them and discuss the artwork. My fieldnotes over both years find repeated instances of artists of major art pieces standing in front of their work, coming up to people who are admiring it and saying, "[I made this artwork] just for you." The "just for you" ritual only happens under these contexts. It is a ritual greeting or response accompanied by accolades and often by pleasurable physical contact such as touching or hugging, signifying that the sayer has made a significant contribution to the community and wants to receive something back. The local Burning Man—run press and radio, and personal Web pages, as well as national media, all give much more attention to the larger, more impressive art installations. As well, in a more powerful demonstration of hierarchy, Burning Man organizers reward artists who give impressive gifts to the community.

My fieldnotes capture a fireside conversation with "Giovanni Maximi," an artist (a millionaire businessman in his life outside Burning Man), late one evening. After someone else asked him whether the theme camps competed with one another, he replied with an emphatic "No. What we want is the space [gestures around him]. Good camp space is the key scarce resource here." Then he starts talking about the great location of his camp, which is on the main promenade,

directly facing The Man. Comparing it to prime theatrical or concert seating, he calls it “front row center” several times. Earlier, he had been talking about the rarity of “E-tickets,” the passes given to people so that they could drive their quirky homemade vehicles through Black Rock City. The space and the passes are allocated by the Burning Man organizers. He said that they gave it to him because they know he contributes a lot to the community with his art installations (fieldnotes, August 28, 2000).

Generally speaking, large-scale contributions are rewarded with large-scale privileges and status. The rewards for giving are encouraged by the hybrid communal form of Burning Man. Because some participants return annually, they can become directly compensated by organizers and obtain special privileges and status and therefore are engaging in acts of “reciprocal” giving (Mauss [1923] 1976). That is, the giver derives some utility directly from the giving when we note that the event’s organizers are serving as a proxy for the community in the act of reciprocation. For others, such as newcomers, status and privilege tend to be more limited, and they could be said to be engaging in the more sacrificial form of “circular” giving (Hyde 1979, p. 16), in which obligations are created and discharged through more general gifts given to and received from the community (see also the “generalized reciprocity” of Putnam [2000, pp. 20–21]).

It is worthwhile to note that, as indicated by Giovanni’s personal wealth, status at Burning Man is often constructed from conditions requiring considerable economic standing in the outside commercial realm. The analysis suggests that, as with the use of brands as raw materials for gifts, Burning Man is dependent on and determined by many aspects of the market infrastructure. Yet there were also multiple opportunities for people to transcend this. My 2001 fieldnotes record the status accorded the wearers of the handmade necklaces given to participants at the Alien Sex Show who performed on the Alien Sex Camp’s center stage, a relatively simple act of self-expression. A friend of mine, “Angel Rae,” earned one by appearing in a leather outfit and being whipped by five different audience members (which also satisfied one of her fetishes). Nudity and sexuality were not required; some simply sang, danced, or told jokes. It is also worth considering here that Angel Rae’s immense knowledge of and experience with rock groups and the bondage subculture earned her considerable status in discussions with other participants. Although her “subcultural capital” (Thornton 1996, pp. 11–14) did not result in the same sorts of direct material dispensations of scarce resources that it did for Giovanni, she ended up staying in Giovanni’s camp and enjoying those resources with far less effort expended, indicating the complex relation between subcultural and cultural capital. Because there were so many subcultures present at the event and, as Angel’s music knowledge exemplifies, there were so many ties between them and wider constructions of cultural capital, there were many opportunities for people to gain status not only from their material wealth or high cultural capital but also from their high sub-

cultural capital. Like cultural capital, this latter form of capital usually related to objects, texts, and images that were situated in the commercial marketplace.

Creating Community through Changing Exchange. Burning Man’s organizers encourage and enforce alternative exchange practices. People have been forcibly ejected from the event for selling hamburgers, T-shirts, and other things. Organizers and participants construct alternative modes of exchange as providing alternative social relations that are superior to or purer than market logics. Their superiority evaluations hinge on the involvement of more personalized interactions, which encourage the mutuality that builds a sense of caring, sharing communality. Although brands and commodity goods are the raw material of the Burning Man experience, the decommodifying rituals of nonmonetary exchange seem to overwhelm the commercial nature of the brand and create a communal atmosphere held to be apart from the market. This is the second major type of social practice that is used to distance consumers and consumption from the market.

As with discourse about *consumers*, the construction of nonmarket exchange modes as more communal may reflect the educated backgrounds of many Burning Man organizers and participants. Their narratives reveal the same longing for an uncontaminated past of purer personal relations that has been associated with so-called primitive economies by many theorists. Citing Marx, Morgan, Malinowski, and Tönnies as examples, Weiner (1992, p. 30) has noted that the strongly communal nature of “primitive” economies has a long tradition of being held in intellectual opposition to “the social inequalities of capitalism.” Similarly, Bataille ([1949] 1988) has suggested that Western society needed to re-create community and resanctify material life by turning back to more primitive forms of exchange. As an example, he gave the transcendently generous and sometimes destructive expenditures of the potlatch ceremony, detailed first in Franz Boas’s late 1800s ethnographies of indigenous Pacific Northwest Coast societies. The competitive and sacrificial nature of Burning Man giving suggests some parallels with potlatch.

Observations of Burning Man also suggest that, as with potlatch, status-building motivations are involved in gift giving. Yet even with products, brands, and a renewed hierarchy dependent on market infrastructure to support them, Burning Man’s rules encourage the temporary adoption of a more social, even sacrificial, attitude toward exchange. Evident in my own field journal introspection was my intense need to reciprocate in this environment, to participate and give something back to others. Giving to others who temporarily share the same physical space (ostensibly, strangers) is a rule that approaches a necessity at Burning Man. People who may not be used to such behavior practice building trust, mutuality, and reciprocation with a group of strangers. On this basis, giving begets giving, social distance is temporarily bridged, and a temporary form of caring, sharing community is built that is viewed by participants as existing at a distance from the market.

Re-enchanting by Associating Everyday Consumption with Art

From its early associations with the bohemian lifestyle of its San Francisco-based founders, to its later associations with the Cacophony Society's attention-inspiring performance art-based events, Burning Man has long been constructed and described as an art festival. This section explores the processes used by organizers and participants at Burning Man to relate consumption practices to art and self-expression that is more communal and more genuine than practices that occur within the market system. In addition, this section explores the important effects that this artistic association has on creating a shared sense that the event transpires at a distance from the market.

The Connection between Caring Community and Art. Burning Man's relation to expression and artistic work is apparent throughout the event. Huge installation pieces are common at Burning Man. For example, Burning Man 2000 featured the Faces of Man installation, with three gigantic masks, accompanied by three different types of music. At night, flaming tears dripped from one of the masks. Another was a gigantic, wood-fired, burning heart. There was a 14-foot-tall figure of Colette, made at the event by fusing hundred of pieces of glass. The 45-foot-tall Man, built from scratch and different each year, provides another example. More traditional paintings and sculptures are also displayed. Burning Man also hosts one of the largest gatherings of art cars in the world, as well as the many strange, so-called mutant vehicles like penis bikes or Viking ships (Burning Man Organization 2000). Performance art is also extremely common. For example, at Burning Man 2000, a naked woman, painted silver and gold, pedaled past me in the desert, simultaneously balancing on a unicycle and playing a tuba.

The creation of art is a ritually potent sphere often connected in human history to gift giving, mysticism, animism, irrationalism, countercultural movements, and authenticity (see, e.g., Barzun 2000; Hyde 1979; Lears 1994; Meamber 1999; Schroeder 1998). In his "oral history" of Burning Man (in Plunkett and Wieners 1997), Larry Harvey places art and its "magic" at the center of Burning Man's community: "See, with Burning Man we aren't creating art about society. It's art that generates society, which, by a magical process, convenes society around itself." Harvey's statement likely draws on the apparent magic of the first beach burn, in which people came running from out of the dark distance toward the large fire—perhaps seeming to materialize from thin air—and began celebrating spontaneously around the fire.

The process by which community convenes around Burning Man's art, however, is far more cultivated and structured than Harvey's magical metaphor might suggest. Art is directly encouraged at the event, sometimes even financially sponsored with cash grants. Participants and organizers often repeat the No Spectators and Radical Self-Expression rules that incite expressive display and performance. Organizers celebrate and encourage people to visit artworks in official

printed, broadcast, and computer-mediated communications. The entire community rewards art creators with compliments, attention, status, and even scarce resources such as prime real estate. The works provide a lingua franca and common set of experiences for the temporary community that are generally considered to be valuable and local. Artworks are sites of social gathering; they are rated and ranked, discussed and interpreted with strangers and friends, admired, examined, and photographed. Several informants indicated that their ability to watch the making of the art—which had to be assembled in the desert—lent authenticity, immediacy, and a sense of communal involvement to the experience. Because artistic decorations adorn almost every physical object and body on the campsite, their presence marks out the spatial boundaries of the communal space, differentiating it from nearby towns such as Gerlach. Because the art is not for sale and is not intended to persuade anyone to buy anything, it is seen as having a meaning that can be more personally involving, socially relevant, self-expressive, and less functional. As a gift, it is associated with a communal, moral foundation. All of these aspects connect notions and discourses of community with those of art.

There is, however, a complex relation between the "radical self-expressiveness" (Burning Man Organization 2000) of art at Burning Man and the maintenance of a caring communal ethos. In many communities, the individualism of self-expression often occurs at the expense of communal ideals. At Burning Man, self-expression is recast through artistic discourses as a gift to the community. This recasting resolves many of the inherent tensions. However, demonstrating the organizers' favoring of caring community over expression, and thus their tendency to favor communal escape from market logics over individual escape, some insulting forms of self-expression were considered too radical or too damaging to the communal ethos. A theme camp with the provocative name The Capitalist Pigs was ejected in 1999 for blaring insulting obscenities at passersby with a bullhorn. This was deemed an unacceptable theme. Similarly, a participant in 2000 who swore and gave the finger to other participants in the name of self-expression and to honor his expelled Capitalist Pig friends was not treated favorably. Rather than individualistically radical forms of self-expression, communal forms were favored. Often these communal forms of expression evoked a sense of inclusion, interaction, trust, sharing, and physical intimacy.

Art as Invitation to Self-Expression and Transformation. Much of Burning Man's self-transformational potential is realized through practices relating to self-expression and art. Inviting and generally protecting more radical types of self-expression than are permissible in everyday society, Burning Man offers its participants a social arena where they are encouraged to experimentally express and re-create their identities by refusing to be spectators. In the campsites, this newfound autonomy was symbolized by the ever-present use of border markings and oppositional flags, such as the Jolly Roger, to signify the encampments of dif-

ferent communities or individuals, as suggested by event organizers. The freedom to express individuality is also evident in cyberspace, which contains a variety of interpretations of the event, including mystical, Buddhist, Christian, Satanic, intellectual, hedonistic, utopian, artistic, political, environmental, technological, and primitive perspectives.

The artistic notion of self-expression and personal autonomy is an opposition to more controlled or mass systems and, in this countercultural notion, unites diverse individuals and groups. In his paper on Burning Man as an exemplary refusal of imposed uniform meaning, Black (1998), after describing the rules and ethos that unite participants, argues for the openness of the event as one of its defining characteristics. Wray (1995) lists some of the divergent groups present at the event: "There are all sorts here, a living, breathing encyclopedia of subcultures; Desert survivalists, urban primitives, artists, rocketeers, hippies, Deadheads, queers, pyromaniacs, cyborgs, musicians, rangers, eco-freaks, acidheads, breeders, punks, gun lovers, dancers, S/M and bondage enthusiasts, nudists, refugees from the men's movement, anarchists, ravers, transgender types, and New Age spiritualists." With some exceptions, these diverse groups become happily cohabiting groups. There is conflict, often more over decibels than ideology, but this is usually quickly settled by an appeal to rules and to the communal ethos of the event. The central communal, self-expressive, self-transformational, and artistic meanings and values of the event are interlinked and are widely and deeply shared.

Art Socially Constructed as Distanced from Market and Corporate Logics. The most bizarre thing I saw at Burning Man was a man dressed in a three-piece business suit and carrying a briefcase, rushing along through the desert one evening. He brushed by a group of us quickly, saying "Excuse me, gentlemen," as if he were late for a meeting. Our group burst out laughing (fieldnotes, August 30, 2000). Like the full office cubicle, replete with inspirational posters and gobs of reminding Post-it Notes that someone had set up in the middle of the desert, the source of the humor was the realization that this is a place set far apart from the logics that drive everyday business behavior in the world of large corporations. Our mock businessman's attire, emoting, utterances, and rushing were pure performance art in this desolate and distant location.

Art at Burning Man is socially constructed as a purely self-expressive practice that is radical, communally interactive, and not for sale. It is placed in dialectical opposition to the efficiency of modern industrial production in which designs are functional, divorced from public view, and conducted for profit. Burning Man's emphasis on self-expression and self-transformation rather than practical matters provides it with a useful differentiation from the prevailing ethos of productivity and efficiency used by market forces. Ironically, this differentiation is co-opted by companies that send employees to Burning Man for "team building" and to "expand creative thinking" (Hua 2000). The fact that corporations use Burning Man to enhance the very characteristics that they are criticized for lacking points to an

interesting irony. It also points to the inescapably porous boundaries between Burning Man and the market system. Inevitably, Burning Man's participants return to a corporate world, albeit perhaps with a fresher perspective or some heightened artistic or communal sensibility.

However much Burning Man's creativity may be industrially useful, the presence of art and its construction at the event as radical self-expression tend to problematize the relationship between the commercial and the creative in ways that expose some of the underlying tensions between creators, the communities that support and nurture them, and market forces. In several interviews, and in Web-page descriptions of the event, informants suggest that Burning Man's creativity resists the reproductive forces of the market. Consider the words of "Carl of Cola," who created an elaborate theme camp for Burning Man 1999.

Interviewer: What happens when something becomes commercial, like this [event]?

Carl of Cola: It, um, it loses its creative edge. Um, the commercial world, like entertainment and creative stuff is fine, I'm not like opposed to it or anything. But it needs to be fueled by a more underground area of creativity. The most interesting commercial stuff I think you're seeing right now is all based on the best of underground culture from, you know, a few years ago. And that's good. (Interview, Burning Man 1999)

Carl's comments indicate that he views underground sub-cultural or communal creative works as more authentic or interesting than those created in the commercial world to sell at a profit. Later in the same interview, Carl noted that he believes Burning Man's injunction against commerce is "not so much an anticapitalism thing as it is an anticorporation thing. You see, corporations are so big and they just want to take." His comments specify resistance against exchanges with large, powerful, exploitative corporations rather than against market exchanges per se. The event is construed as anticorporate rather than antimarket or anticapitalism. Carl uses the differentiating term "creativity" to counterpose the communal ethos of the underground against the big corporations of the market. The underground is set apart from the larger market systems, enriched or given an edge by the identity-differentiating inventiveness of sub-culture and counterculture members. According to Carl, there is a connection between commercialized creative works and the underground. The underground feeds the most interesting commercial creations. It is noteworthy that several Burning Man participants related narratives in which they said that their best and most original ideas have been or might end up being appropriated by large corporations. This sentiment may be communal self-dramatizing that helps to mythologize the importance and relevance of the event to the outside world (cf. Hua 2000). It might also construct a temporary cohesiveness around the symbolically meaningful insider boundaries of local creativity and artwork. Through this discourse, corporations are not only separate from the Burning Man community but threatening to it.

Constructing corporations in this way, Burning Man's organizers and participants ignore overwhelming evidence that they are also employing, copying, and parodying many creative works that are corporate products (such as television shows like the *Wheel of Fortune*, parodied in the *Wheel of Misfortune*). Acts such as changing a McDonald's sign to a McSatan's sign are attempts to reclaim meaning by altering the allegedly mass meaning of a corporate product into something more subculturally relevant. However, as with participants' widespread use of commercial products as gifts and raw materials, the sign economy used in Burning Man's art is inextricably intertwined with the realm of the market.

Promethean Struggles between Communities and Markets. In my fieldnotes for August 31, 1999, I recorded an enchanting dance that occurred around a fire one night. To the tribal rhythms of a drum circle, a giant spectral figure with an oversized head and glowing green eyes unsuccessfully chased, and was taunted by, a fire dancer. With the key elements of Giant, Fire, Man, and Chase, the dance recalled the power and paradox of the Promethean myth that underscores much of our cultural understanding of innovation. Burning Man as an event is filled with Giants and Fires—the neon and wood Man himself is the quintessential culmination. The Promethean themes relate to the Marxist-flavored consciousness that scrutinizes superstructure, casting industry as the controller of productive, creative, or visionary techniques and technologies. This makes the Promethean wresting of fire, or the creative spark, significant, in that it symbolizes a political struggle for control over the creative powers of a community or a culture. According to this interpretation, Burning Man should be read as a communal rite symbolizing an important power struggle seeking to reclaim genuine (i.e., spontaneously, intrinsically motivated) creative energy from the industrialized corporate marketplace.

A deeper reading of the Promethean mythic themes at Burning Man suggests that organizers and participants conceptualize large corporations as threatening Titans or giants. For the subcultural members who believe that industry forces are draining their authenticity away, this is not the simple transfer of meaning implied by McCracken (1986) but a power struggle communally viewed as being of Promethean proportions. The sense of marginalized underdogs maintaining their secret society in the underground seems very important to communal cohesion. "Sir William of Occam," a first-time Burning Man participant in his early twenties, opined, "I don't think that anyone out here is particularly opposed to capitalism. I think they're opposed to the pigs coming in and ruining their party. Which is what it would be. The corporate sponsorship aspect" (interview, Burning Man 1999).

As with Ike's and Carl's comments, Sir William's sentiments leave little doubt that he believes it is not the market, capitalism, or commerce per se that are opposed at Burning Man but large corporations and their unwelcome, self-expression-dampening exercise of persuasion and power. Locating the threat to Burning Man's caring, sharing com-

munity in the realm of corporate sponsorship, Sir William emphasizes both the greed and the proestablishment standing of marketing forces by terming them "pigs." The anti-establishment stance, and protection of the apparent freedom of self-expression—"the party"—underlines the genuine tension about Burning Man becoming too popular or mainstream. The pigs ruining the party can be deciphered using a quasi-Freudian reading of the countercultural anti-authoritarianism that also typifies so many of Burning Man's antimarket edicts. Its message to participants is that staying authentic requires a perpetual dance of communally structured creativity that outsmarts authority figures. This creativity is culturally posited as enmeshed in a power struggle against mainstream representation and overthrown by the reproductive and deauthenticating forces of large corporations acting within the mass market. Similar to the paradoxes expressed in Thornton's (1996, pp. 122–129) ethnography of the rave subculture, Burning Man's participants want the world to admire their community's creativity and authenticity, but they resist letting outsiders join in it. In this, they may be opposed to the grander "utopian" ambitions of some of the event's organizers (Stein 2000).

Re-enchanting Community through Art and Expression. Although Max Weber (1978) believed that the rationalization that led to the disenchantment of the world needed to be faced squarely by leaders, Jacques Ellul ([1954] 1964) argued that it should be combated by reinserting mystery and the taboo into technology and daily life. For Lears (1994, pp. 21–26), the earlier "animistic culture" of abundance that had reigned before consumption had been rationalized was filled with a sense that symbols were alive, that the material world of things was "pregnant with meaning" (Turner 1967, p. 44). At Burning Man, discourse and practice relating art and self-expression to a vast variety of forms of consumption and production can be understood as attempts to temporarily re-enchant a social world dominated by rationalized, efficiency-driven consumption by encouraging the temporary reemergence of an animistic culture where things regain their magical meaningfulness. Re-enchantment occurs through distancing consumption and production from the structuring productivity and rational rules normally in effect in market circumstances and through associating them with artistic discourse and practice. It is as if consumption, freed from its normal and adult status as a duty, can return to playfulness; the material world can become seat of the sacred again; consumption can become (re)ensouled.

The emphasis on playful self-expression over market efficiency means favoring individual decision making rather than following the dictates of hierarchical resource-based power structures—although of course these power structures still exist to some extent at all events. The emphasis on expression also creates a more mystified and surprising social atmosphere than normally prevails. During the temporary Burning Man event, the enigmatic and surprising aspects of expression and art are considered oppositional to the market. Noncommercial art is interpreted by participants

as a signal of communal authenticity counterposed against the alleged inauthenticity of the mainstream or mass market. The use of art and self-expression discourse and practice is therefore the third major type of social practice used to distance consumers and consumption from the market.

As with notions of primitive gift economies and passively duped consumers, these conceptualizations of the authenticity of art can also be found in prominent academic works. In a very influential treatise, Benjamin (1969) theorized that art that is consumed in the context of ritual and tradition in which it has been historically embedded can be said to possess an “aura” that confers upon it a rich surplus of meaning that is diminished in reproduction. Situationist philosopher Debord ([1967] 1995, p. 132) linked art to a mythic “common language” that sustains a caring communal ethos. Another Situationist philosopher, Vaneigem ([1967] 1994) argued that the marketplace logics of productivity and efficiency had undermined people’s ability and motivation to engage in authentically transformational self-expression and artistic creativity. The Situationists, including Debord himself, were personally involved in the utopian performance art movements of the 1950s (Bonnett 1999). These Situationist philosophies thus were very likely familiar to Burning Man’s Cacophony Society members and were probably discursively embedded by organizers and participants into the cultural fabric of the event.

In the “Discussion,” this article turns from these dialectics of art and self-expression to further explore the nature and theoretical implications of this ethnography. Three sections follow. The first reconceptualizes the nature of communal opposition to market logics. The second develops these ideas and contributes to the conceptualization of consumer emancipation. The concluding section directly considers whether consumers can actually escape the market.

DISCUSSION

Consumer Communities and Markets

Burning Man provides an unprecedented empirical site from which to theorize about the subtleties of emancipatory dynamics. Burning Man’s community, with its gift economy, suggests that we need not conceptualize an emancipatory community in terms of the absence of markets per se or of opposition to capitalism. Its emancipatory drive is instead directed at an exploitative ethos that weakens social ties and dampens self-expressive practices. As a complex consumption phenomenon, Burning Man provides people with the experience of living in a sharing, caring community, exemplifying the communal ethos said to be undermined by dominant market logics.

In postmodern schools of thought, emancipation from the market has not previously involved individual consumers becoming re-embedded in communities. The fragmented, individualized, isolated forms of consumption depicted by Firat and Venkatesh (1995, p. 255) suggest that emancipation can be gained in a very “private” and “individual” manner. However, by bringing in the communal ideal, this

analysis indicates that it is important to avoid conflating some types of social fragmentation (i.e., the disintegration of social connection; in particular, of a caring, sharing communal ethos) with the fragmentation of consumption meanings. While the latter concept has emancipatory potential, the former does not.

Therefore, this research does not simply rehash the old harangue about the perils of the market and its deteriorating influence on ostensibly pure and natural communities. Burning Man’s Disneyfying discourse and Promethean performances underscore that large corporations are widely viewed as possessing divergent interests from certain consumer groups. This more sophisticated argument indicates that sharing, caring consumer communities can counteract certain market influences, such as pitting consumers in competition with one another, or disabling their ability to share expensive products or services. The ability of a group of consumers to create and share an instant theme park at Burning Man provides a perfect example of the potentials inherent in the communal ethos. It empowers and educates consumers, enabling them to gather and focus their critiques and to assert their common agency against the interests of producer communities. In so doing, consumer communities can provide some of the foundations necessary for consumers to direct their own consumption meanings, practices, roles, and identities.

This ethnography suggests that we reconceptualize the newer, more commercial manifestations of community—such as subcultures of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), brandfests (McAlexander and Schouten 1998), virtual communities of consumption (Kozinets 1999), brand communities (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001), and cultures of consumption (Kozinets 2001)—as regatherings of the collective force required to resist the atomizing and self-expression-crushing capabilities of large corporations. All of these studies portray consumers, to some extent, banding together to make their unique preferences known, to assert their agency and even ownership of the brand, to criticize and even perhaps incite activism against the companies that manage the products and brands that unite them (see, e.g., Kozinets 1999, 2001, p. 82; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001, p. 424).

This ethnography draws our attention to some of the communal qualities that empower this collective consumer defiance. The communal conception of community as a caring, sharing ideal is important. The creative, time-limited, and performative elements of Burning Man’s communal gatherings are also important. If we look, we can find these qualities in commercial consumption-celebrating gatherings such as fan-run *Star Trek* conventions (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 2001) and Harley-Davidson rallies (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Further research could explore whether the link between communal ideals and successful resistance is true of other communal contexts such as consumption enclaves and brand communities. This study therefore extends prior conceptions of consumer community by suggesting that commercially influenced forms of community

should be seen not merely as parasitic co-optations (Holt 2002), hybridized communal market forms (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), or symbiotic unions (Schouten and Mc-Alexander 1995). They should also be conceptualized as a corrective, or at least ameliorative, response to two effects of market logics, namely, its tendency to weaken social ties and to reduce or homogenize self-expression.

Exchange and Sacrifice. This ethnography suggests that alternative exchange and sacrificial practices be featured more prominently in our conceptions of emancipation. The existence and centrality of Burning Man's gift economy is a pillar on which discursive arguments about its distance from the market are constructed. As Belk (2000) notes, one of the functions of gifts is "to create illusory fantasy worlds in which the presumably normal principles of self interest, competitiveness, and economic rationality are turned on their heads." To Hyde (1979, p. xiv), gift exchange is "an erotic commerce"; it is erotic in the sense that Eros symbolizes the principle of attraction, union, or that which binds people together; it is a communal principle that is opposed to Logos. Logos is the force of reason and logic that is related to "the market economy" (Hyde 1979, p. xiv); it is the rationality driving differentiation, on which market logics of efficiency, segmentation, and division are based. Hyde's (1979, pp. 158–159) theory tidily relates all of the major discourses present at Burning Man: gifts are art, and art must remain outside the market in order to remain fertile, genuinely creative, and capable of serving as an agent of self-transformation. Gifts are related to play and enchantment as well as art. Emphasizing the Eros of connection, play, and fantasy rather than the Logos of rationality and division, gift giving and barter perform an enchantment function on the entire community.

Sacrifice may do even more. As Sherry (1996, p. 225) has noted, "of all the elements of gift giving identified by our intellectual ancestors, sacrifice is perhaps the most vital yet least understood." Sacrifice is one of the most radical practices that can symbolize the temporary suspension of market logics of efficiency and productivity. Although major sacrifice at Burning Man, as with potlatch, has important practical benefits for the individuals who perform it, this takes little away from its rich ritual significance and potential to displace the productive, acquisitive, and exploitatively self-interested calculus of the market. To disattach yourself from your belongings, to ask yourself what you can do without, what you came to the event to burn, can be simultaneously self-reflective and self-transforming. Belk (1988) has described how consumers' material possessions come to constitute their "extended self." Burning Man demonstrates the process in reverse: the burning of acquisitions can be a transformational shrinking of this (over)extended material self—one that can be experienced on individual and social levels, linked to communal and antimaterialist ideals. Sacrifice is semiotically bound up with religion, mysticism, art, and community. Further investigations of sacrifice and alternative exchange practices within consumer communities will help us to further understand the role that

these practices play in allowing them to evade the marketplace, as well as in constructing caring community and sacred consumption.

Consumer Emancipation

Prior conceptions of consumer emancipation have linked it to notions of impermanence, permeability of membership, distinctiveness, playfulness, creativity, and the presence of ties to mainstream society (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). This ethnography suggests that a key theoretical concept for resolving these apparently contradictory notions is to theorize consumer emancipation occurring within the context of a festival. Considered as an anticommence event, it seems hypocritical that Burning Man should generate such an enormous amount of consumption. Considered as a festival, however, it is driven by many of the classic features of festal excess found in the anthropology of festival and celebration: their overindulgence, "wastrel prodigality," exhibition of "surplus and abundance" and "conspicuous consumption" (Schmidt 1995, p. 8; see also Falassi 1987; Lears 1994, pp. 24–25, 43–51). These elements are not contradictory to the event's essence but are essential to its status as a festival, to its ability to differentiate from the commonplace and the marketplace. As Duvignaud (1976, p. 19) noted, "all observers agree that festival involves a powerful denial of the established order" (see also Kates and Belk 2001). Festivals provide ritual power for inverting, temporarily overturning, and denying the currently entrenched social order of market logics, which are necessary prerequisites for consumer emancipation.

The notion of a creatively liberating disorder is very similar to the self-expressive ideologies of art as they manifest within popular and avant-garde forms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which were also linked to celebratory and festal contexts (Lears 1994). Burning Man provides a powerful example that blends the often volatile and individualistic self-expressive urge with a communal ethos. The key is in the casting of self-expression as a communal gift. Self-expression thus becomes a means to connect one's most heartfelt thoughts and feelings to other people. Simultaneously, it connects groups of people to the often iconoclastic characteristics of individuals. Self-expression and communal contexts should, this research suggests, be connected with festivals and consumer emancipation.

The most important rules of conduct fostering Burning Man's emancipatory potential are actually therefore not its No Vending injunction but its interconnected No Spectators and Radical Self-Expression rules. The antimarket discourse at Burning Man directs its collective creative energies counterculturally, creating a performative ethos counterposed to the couch potato culture ascribed to the commonplace marketplace. The performative ethos works with the festal atmosphere to urge consumers to free themselves from the ordinary strictures, structures, and limitations that normally guide their consumption. The prevalent ethos grounds self-expression to a communal ideal. The result is a collective reclaiming of consumption identity. This research therefore

emphasizes the importance of theorizing the festal, performative, and communal nature of consumer emancipation. Other performative, festal sites like music festivals, raves, religious retreats, and New Age gatherings—even online Internet communities—therefore provide useful empirical contexts for furthering these theorizations. Studying them using the concepts developed in this ethnography, consumer researchers will develop theory about the relationship of performance and artistic creativity, sacred and secular consumption, and the roles that markets and communities play in these practices.

Hypercommunity. Finally, this theorization of consumer emancipation considers another critical aspect of Burning Man's ability to help consumers escape market logics. Burning Man is an event deliberately constructed by organizers and offered to participants as an experience that re-creates caring, sharing, Gemeinschaft-style community. In order to realize this promise, the event is organized and structured to assist participants in acting as a caring, sharing community. Consequently, 25,000 strangers unite and come to see one another as a community. They live in close proximity; act with affection toward one another; share food, drink, and extraordinary experiences; strive together against the elements, express themselves as openly and as radically as they dare; and help one another. In a week, it is all over.

The seemingly oxymoronic notion of a community that exhibits strong but short-lived social ties relates to Firat and Dholakia's (1998) conceptions of the impermanence of the emancipatory theater of consumption. Other consumption-related communities characterized by impermanence have included periodic communities (McGrath, Sherry, and Heisley 1993), extraordinary experience communities (Arnould and Price 1993), brandfests (McAlexander and Schouten 1998), and virtual communities of consumption (Kozinets 1999). However, unlike Burning Man, the communal characteristics of these social forms are epiphenomena of other experiences and not the basis of their attractiveness to participants. They also tend to have weak social ties.

Other phenomena related to impermanent communities are Turner's (1967) *communitas*, Maffesoli's ([1988] 1996) notion of "tribes," and Bey's (1991) "temporary autonomous zones." Although *communitas* are well-organized and structured, have short-lived but strong social ties, their focus is not community building but initiation. As Maffesoli (1996) uses the term, "tribes" (also called "neotribes" by some other scholars) are inherently unstable, are small scale, have weaker social ties, and have no codified rules or enforcement mechanisms, no neighborly bonds or reciprocal exchanges. Bey's (1991) conception of the temporary autonomous zone (TAZ) concerns a festal uprising of rebels who temporarily liberate an area from state control. Although it is related to escape from dominant social structures, including market logics, the TAZ is primarily a political conception and is not explicitly focused on community or close social ties. In addition, it is a covert, anarchic social form. I therefore suggest the term "hypercommunity" to distinguish from these other communal phenomena the phenomenon of a

well-organized, short-lived but caring and sharing community whose explicit attraction to participants is its promise of an intense but temporary community experience.

The conceptualization of hypercommunity draws us to question and examine the possibilities for the caring and sharing communal ideal within market-oriented communities. Although communal phenomena such as brandfests (McAlexander and Schouten 1998, see esp. pp. 386–387) and Maffesoli's (1996) "tribes" may be well organized and short-lived, it remains to be explored whether marketers can engineer experiences that offer and deliver a sense of instant, caring, and judged-to-be-authentic community. The results of such an investigation will have interesting practical, social, and theoretical implications. For example, industrial efforts at creating ostensibly authentic communities such as Disney's Celebration USA (Ross 1999) invoke some of the structuring and social ties of hypercommunity formation. Hypercommunity may play a role in health retreats, various types of urban boot camps, corporate team-building exercises and retreats, sports contexts, religious resorts, virtual communities, brand communities, themed vacations such as eco-tours, and tourism in general.

The conception of hypercommunity draws our attention to speed as a major cultural-social determinant worthy of further investigation and theorization. Although Lévi-Strauss (1966) identified the rapidity of cultural change in "hot societies," this dynamism has tended to evade the synchronic focus of most consumer ethnography. This ethnography hypothesizes that temporariness and speed of change are key cultural factors providing a community's members with a sense that they possess an authenticity that can evade corporate appropriation. By dissolving shortly after it forms, the hypercommunity becomes locked into a historical moment, seen as singular and priceless because, exactly like a particular moment in time, it is incapable of being reproduced. Both of these qualities—speed and temporariness—speak of singularity and suggest why hypercommunity may be seen as even better than the real thing: hypercommunities have such strong ties not despite the fact that they are temporary, but precisely because they are temporary. Even with Burning Man's rules, it is unlikely that so many people with such a diversity of interests could coexist for much more than a week or two. They are held together by their community's very impermanence.

Hypercommunity also maintains communal authenticity and evades being co-opted by the market because of its dynamism. If it stayed the same, it could be copied and its semiotic vitality drawn off by pesky "parasitic" marketers (Holt 2002). Hence, the temporariness of the hypercommunity, as well as its difference from year to year and even day to day are critical elements undergirding its ability to position itself at a distance from the market and to maintain strong, caring, sharing, social ties. Raves, antiglobalism protests, pie throwings, tree sits, happenings, and many other events drawing on sixties nostalgia also link temporariness and dynamism together with a communal antimarket ethos. These sites of resistance suggest the importance of tem-

porariness and speed to the emancipatory bracketing of ostensibly oppressive social forces.

Another spatial characteristic to which the hypercommunity concept draws our attention is the sociality of physical place. Kozinets (1999) celebrates the communal possibilities of online consumer groups, and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 413) agree with "most social theorists" that community is "no longer restricted to geographic co-presence of members." This ethnography suggests we bring physical presence back into the equation when attempting to understand communal contexts and emancipation. For Burning Man is not just a festival within a city but an entire city in itself. Combining city with temporariness gives us what Black (1998) whimsically terms an "ephemeropolis." Yet the community-defining power of a particular hypercommunity likely comes not from its ephemeral qualities but from the fact that it has boundaries that are sharply marked both in space and in time. The boundedness in space makes it distinct from contemporary notions of brand communities, neotribes, subcultures of consumption, and virtual communities and relates it instead to primal conceptions of local communities, groups of people who live together. Forming a local social network of social actors on the barren space of a desert is a novel way to signal both authenticity (Thompson and Tambyah 1999) and distance from ordinary institutions and logics such as the market. The challenges of the desert location also provide shared struggles, challenges, and local war stories, all of which rapidly build strong social ties. Studying the nature and configuration of other hypercommunities may inform our understanding of the role played by time, space, physical presence, and struggle in community formation, community resistance, and consumer emancipation. By studying features of hypercommunities, we highlight features of their antithesis, the market, that are otherwise taken for granted. In particular, we come to see markets as indifferent, impassive, hierarchical, mechanistic, routine, duplicative, constructive, global in scope, seeking permanence, and fostering self-interest. In contrast, hypercommunities stress ideals of caring, passion, equality, humanity, radicalism, innovation, and creative destruction and are local in scope, seek ephemerality and disruption, and foster caring, sharing ideals.

CONCLUSION: CAN CONSUMERS ESCAPE THE MARKET?

Perhaps it is not possible to completely evade the market. For even with its subversive discourse and alternative practices, the seduction by particular symbols or regimes of appeal continues unabated at Burning Man. Whether in cultural capital-laden appeals to authentic communities that exist outside of the market (Holt 1998) or to so-called radical self-expression that fits within subcultural and communal norms, the urge to differentiate from other consumers drives participation at Burning Man and does not release them from the grip of the market's sign game and social logics (Baudrillard [1968] 1996).

Yet perhaps conjuring up an alternative social realm that convincingly appears distanced from, outside of, or subversive to dominant market logics is enough to unleash consumers' liberatory potential. As Turner (1982) pointed out in describing the power of antistructure, a sense of release from these tyrannies—whether imagined or not—is enough to liberate considerable creativity, to release repression, to fulfill some sense of people's hidden potential, to evoke self-expression, and to unleash the potential for self-transformation. Baudrillard (1993) theorized that gifts had a revolutionary role to play in realizing this potential. Its potential also seems present in Hebdige's (1988) finding that newly emergent communities could recontextualize marketer's dominant meanings (see also Miller 1987, pp. 167–177). Weiner (1992) also envisioned liberatory potential in consumption, locating the power to resist dominant social structures in possessions made inalienable by their personalized connections. In each of these theories, embedding in specific local social networks was held to be central to the sources of meanings viewed by consumers as authentic, often sacred, and likely liberatory. The ritual role of gifts, the emergent temporariness of festivals and new social groups, the resistant discourse, the semiotic potency of the local and the communal all relate to the attempt to re-enchant consumption into a liberatory pursuit distanced from market logics.

What this suggests is that emancipation, if possible at all, must be conceived of as temporary and local. It is easier for consumers to live in self-authenticating simulations when they are tightly bounded in time and in space. The speed of hypercommunity, the urgency of performativity, and the inversion of the festival all overlap to enthrone the disorderly, chaotic, anarchic, creative, risk-taking, and innovative forces of human nature, as against its orderly, planned, pre-programmed, boring, and imitative aspects. For practical reasons, communities of this sort can only be temporary. Yet the illumination of taken-for-granted market logics, the flashes of inspiration, and the transformation of individuals and groups may be longer lasting.

Conceptualizing Burning Man as an event with major revolutionary implications is flawed, but dismissing it as irrelevant may miss the point. Burning Man is not about major social change, but minor changes in identity taking place collectively and simultaneously. It is not a grand Utopia, but a more personally enriching youtopia—a good place for me to be myself, and you to be yourself, together. Rather than providing a resolution to the many extant social tensions in contemporary life—such as those surrounding the beneficial and oppressive elements of markets—it offers a conceptual space set apart within which to temporarily consider, to play with and within those contradictions. It falls short of some ideal and uncontaminated state, but it may be all the consumer emancipation most consumers want or need.

Much of what goes on at Burning Man is cathartic, a ritual of release or rebellion (Gluckman 1954) that ultimately props up the market system by reinforcing it with labor and purchases. Reducing the event to pure catharsis, however,

would ignore the role of imagination in planning personal and social change. Illusions, delusions, and visions of new realities can look very similar at short range. A cathartic verdict would also ignore the many interconnections between Burning Man and the plethora of social worlds it touches that are bound to the market. For some people, and sometimes, these events exist as an empirical touchstone for theorizing about emancipation and the role of markets and communities in our contemporary consumer culture, as my writing and your reading of this ethnography demonstrate.

Are these emancipatory potentialities present in all communities, cloaked within market-community tensions? Are the needs that underlie them present only in the communities of developed economies rather than in those of developing ones? Do contemporary festivals, hypercommunities, and other resistant events and inversion rituals inevitably contain antimarket discourses? Do their rituals, discourses, and practices filter back into larger social systems, and to what effect? Does catharsis allow a return to unquestioned market logics and therefore solidify the cultural dominance of the market? Or, alternatively, does repeating the experience of resistance provide a foundation on which to build longer-term social change? Can temporariness, self-expression, performativity, and hypercommunity act as (Spanish) flies in the largely antiseptic ointments of contemporary consumer culture? Consumer research may gain added insight and social relevance by continuing to empirically explore and theorize issues such as the ones raised by Burning Man.

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