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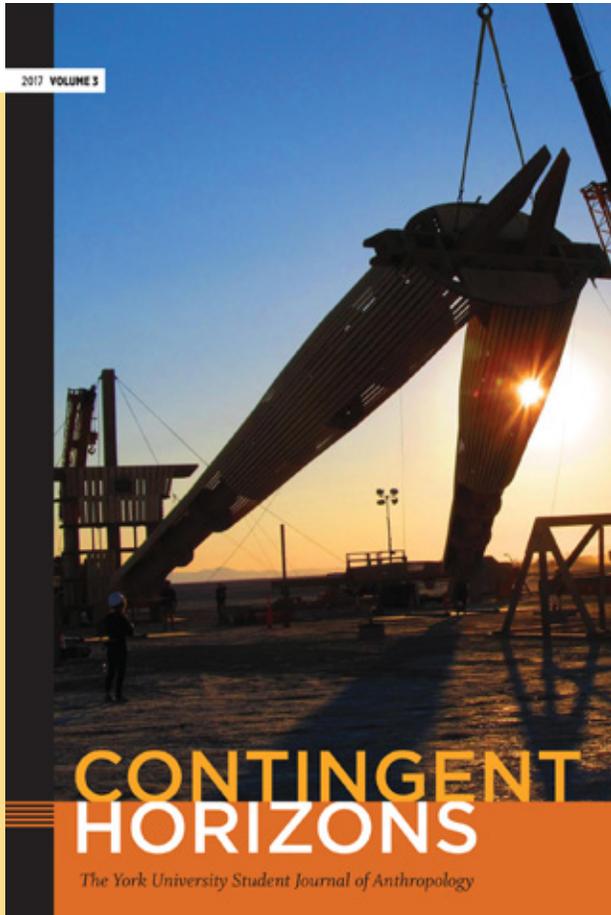
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The Nail in the Man's Leg

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The Nail in the Man's Leg

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This article aims at situating the ethnographic dimensional shift of a found object. This essay takes a look at the journey of a nail object and its many dimensions in relationship to the human encountering the nail-object, and in the situation of the many worlds the nail object inhabits. Burning Man festival, in this essay, serves as the dynamic stage for such study of relationships.

KEY WORDS artifact, Burning Man festival, dimensions, found object, object boundaries, worlds

In this essay, I reflect on some relations between dimensions, worlds, and boundaries as they may be experienced by humans and objects (Dumit 2015; Star 1989; 1999). The first part of the article puts theories of dimensionality, boundaries and worlds, and language in conversation together. The second part of the article is an autoethnographic account. The ethnographic experience takes place at Burning Man festival — a unique transformational and art festival of epic proportions, held yearly since 1986 on the American west coast. “The Nail in the Man’s Leg” follows the shifts of dimension of a found object — a nail. It asks, “How do the relationships between the object, the worlds and boundaries it inhabits and travels affect the dimensions of the object?”

Such relations are outcomes of the specific mixture of place, event, and the world affiliation of humans populating the place while attending the event. This essay is not an exploration of human performance in a festival context; it is not an essay describing the costumes of the participants, or historicizing the making of a cult event in the USA. It is not an essay that debates identity and gender politics around a festival named Man, neither is it an anthropological journal of humans answering to the call of pagan rites while conforming to a contemporary commodification of magic. Discussing the festival as a curiosity, and evaluating its contribution to the arts—this article does not do that. But, for the sake of understanding the dimensional shifts of a nail-object, from one human encounter to another human encounter at the festival Burning Man, this essay begins with a brief history of what that festival is, and how the humans attending are forming their own worlds and boundaries within the festival event itself.

Festival

Burning Man festival is a complex and populated event where gathers a vast number of humans around one goal: attending Burning Man festival. The “Man” refers to the towering effigy. The burning of the effigy on a Baker Beach in San Francisco in 1986 started what is now called Burning Man festival (Burning Man). It since moved to Black Rock Desert in Nevada, USA. The Man is a wooden art structure built to burn. It mostly is built out of wood, wired with an intricate pyrotechnic and lighting design. The Man structure towers over, and is placed at the center of the whole of what’s called “the city.” The burning of the event culminates the week-long festival, first as a pyrotechnic performance, followed by the biggest and loudest party of the event. The specific event is also called the “burn.” “Burning” refers to attending Burning Man festival. A “burner” is a Burning Man festival goer. “I can always tell a burner,” speaks of recognizing another festival goer, outside of the festival period and place. A burner is *not* someone who works, organizes, provides medical care, or patrols the festival. Regional burns and pre-burns respectively refer to smaller versions of the festival taking place in various locations around the world at various time.

What started as a two-people fire ritual grew to its current near 80,000 people event. Las Vegas’s population is 613,599, Reno’s population is 227,511 (United States Census Bureau). They are Nevada’s first and third biggest cities. The fifth biggest city is nearby Carson, at 55,439 people, making the Burning Man festival one of the most populated cities in Nevada (United States Census Bureau). Black Rock Desert is located 16 miles from the nearest town, Gerlach, 110 miles from Reno, Nevada, and 341 miles from San Francisco, California (Google Maps). The “playa” refers to the place where the festival is held. There is no water on the area designated as the playa. The name is inspired by the alkaline “dust” covering the desert ground. It is a dry lake bed, protected by the National Conservation Area land designation. Black Rock City, LLC is the name of the company that runs the event (The Official DPW Handbook). Black Rock Desert is the name of the area where it takes place (The Official DPW Handbook). The “city” is the name given by those who attend Burning Man, what exists as a festival infrastructure. The city refers to the festival’s occupied surface. The festival is held for a week, on the Labour Day late summer weekend. The infrastructure of the city takes a month to put up and another month to tear down. “I can’t wait to be in the dust,” means that one can’t wait to be back on the playa, also called “home” and “home away from home.” “Out there” is more likely to refer to the world outside of Burning Man, also called the “default world.”

Design and Geography

The city is set as a crescent, with two miles from the farthest peripheral fence, also called the “trash fence,” to the inner circle, five miles deep if you count the “deep playa,” where lives off-the-grid structures at the opposite of the crescent dip, and about 400 feet from Esplanade, the inner border of the crescent road to the Man, the center of it all (Burning Man). The open circle grid goes from radial 2 o’clock to 10 o’clock and is further divided in crescent grids streets from A to H. The city is host to hundreds of theme camps and villages. At least one other landmark structure—the Temple—rivals in worship that of the Man. Very few attendees camp in what’s called the Walk-in Section. All those attending the

festivals, including the organizers, the workers, the medical staff, and the law enforcement agencies are hosted in the city. “Gate,” literally, the entrance gate, is staffed by “greeters,” Will Call ticket booths, and ticket patrols. I will come back to the role of the gate, later in the article. When the gates of the festival opens, everyone comes in, and no participants leave until the last day of the festival.

The Culture

It is a 24-hour non-stop event where participants bring in everything they need except for port-a-potties. There is no commerce inside the fence with the exception of coffee and ice available for purchase at Center Camp. What a participant brings in, the participant brings out. There is an organized cafeteria and shower station for the workers. The policing force has its own quarter. There is even a temporary airport open to all. Burning Man recommences every year, a society with the functional infrastructure of telecommunication, electrical grid, hospital care, roads, law enforcement, transportation, education, entertainment, art and spirituality, food, and shelters.

The “Ten Principles” applies to all the attendants of the festival. These Ten Principles are: Radical Inclusion, Gifting, Decommodification, Radical Self-Reliance, Radical Self-Expression, Communal Effort, Civic Responsibility, Leaving No Trace, Participation, Immediacy (Burning Man). These principles are important conditions of existence of the festival, and allow for co-habitation of heterogeneous groups of attendees. Susan Leigh Star defines heterogenous as requiring many “different actors and viewpoints” (1989:397). Burners from one and the same village at Burning Man festival might not accord their viewpoints, nor their hobbies and occupations, in the default world.

Labour and Logistic

Leave No Trace is the principle that perhaps is the most important as it applies to this essay. On Leave No Trace depends the perpetuation of the annual event. Black Rock Desert houses a fragile ecosystem. The space is owned by the Bureau of Land Management Nevada (BLM). A typical BLM law enforcement agent does not look like a realtor but rather like a Canadian police officer, with a gun and a permission to arrest unlawful citizens. Neither citizens of the Burning Man festival, nor Black Rock City, LLC, are above the BLM law. The politics of leasing the area year after year to an event capped at near 80,000 people is a story of its own, including laws and rules that are systemic of partial extortion of capital and partial eco-protection. The BLM is the last actor to check-off the total clean-up list, after the festival is over. If there is one glitter on the dust, the permit for the event to take place the following year will not be re-issued (Burning Man).

Whatever is left on the playa is called Matter Out Of Place (MOOP). MOOP is not necessarily debris. It can be something that is out of place, such as a pair of goggles that fell off a burner's belt clip, or it can be wood chips, metal shards, saw dust, or a nail (Listen to an Audio Interview). Burners have evolved over the years, setting-up camps specialized in recycling and re-using materials and MOOP. Educating attendees about the Ten Principles is everyone's responsibility. Being mindful of Leave No Trace is expected of everyone.

“Exodus” is the name given to the last day of the festival when all burners must leave. Exodus event is as epic as the gate opening. “Collexodus” is self-explanatory: at Exodus, out-going festival goers donate their non-perishables in an effort to collect, re-use, and re-distribute the left-over bounty to the crew who will be left behind for the ultimate playa restoration. Some of the Collexodus bounty is re-distributed the following season among working crews. In this activity, the Principle of Decommodification is applied as gift economy.

Art and Infrastructure

Emblematic of the biggest art festival in the world are big, wide, daring wooden structures to be installed and burned within a week. A good number of the metallic and wooden structures are built in the San Francisco Bay Area, and transported for assembly on site. I hope the reader can appreciate how many nails it takes to build such a city.

I attended my first Burning Man festival in 2011, on the theme of Rites of Passage. The experience was transformative. It impacted on my artistic and academic direction. In 2012, in Montreal, I curated a collective, interdisciplinary, and performative event I named The Artist as Shaman. That same year, I returned to Burning Man festival. It was transformative. I unloaded myself from a dead-end love relationship. The theme of 2012 was Cargo Cult. Each of the years I attended Burning Man, I experienced an acute sense of meaning and destiny shift—a sort of Burning Man magic. Each year, I collected a found nail which continues to hold personal meaning and value for me. In 2014, I returned to the festival, yet this time, I joined Burning Man’s Department of Public Works (DPW). I spent one month on site setting up the physical infrastructure of the festival. I don’t remember the theme of the year. I had to check it on Google. It was Caravansary (Burning Man). I don’t believe I had an epiphanic relationship to the theme. My epiphany related to the magic of the desert. Just the desert, before the campers set up, therein altering drastically the scape of the desert. There was an art structure that year named The Embrace. Once more, I collected a found object, again a nail. I now have three nails from the Burning Man festival.

I wrote this essay because I attended the festival and collected found objects. This essay is an attempt to share my found object experience through asking, “Who else cares about a nail?” and, “How is caring about a nail determinant of who the nail is?” To share my story and that of those who shared theirs with me, I employ theories pulling from feminist, anthropological, and performance studies, together creating a replica of what inner monologue might have run through a found nail object’s head as it travelled across boundaries of the many worlds existing at Burning Man festival.

Dimensions

“The Nail in the Man’s Leg” tells the tale of the journey of a nail, the sorts that gets planted in a wooden structure like the Man at Burning Man festival. Pocketed by a festival attendee, a nail artifact shifts dimensions according to the intention of the action in the moment of pocketing the nail. In this part, I follow the theoretical processes of a nail’s dimensional migration via the human encounters that shape one nail’s dimensions, from material and labour, to symbolic and mythical, to labour and embodied dimensions (Dumit 2015).

If, as Diana Taylor explains, “[P]erformance functions as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity” (2003:np), and the reader has understood that Burning Man is a site of extraordinary performances, social knowledge, memory, and identity, how does a nail perform its shifts of dimension? The nail in the Man’s leg, an artifact of the burn, is recognizable by every human having attended the burn, yet not every one will cherish the artifact as a treasure. The nail, nonhuman, an object, cannot perform by itself or travel by its own means. The nail needs relationships of the sorts of mixture of place and event, and the world affiliation of humans populating the place while attending the event to travel. However static, an artifact such as nail nevertheless “challenges” and “influences other performances” by navigating shifts across dimensions (Taylor 2003:np).

Joseph Dumit created a project called, “The Artifact Project,” in which he asked, “How is the world in the artifact?” and, “How is the artifact in the world” (2015)? An object artifact belongs to one or more dimensions depending on its “context and its situatedness” (Dumit 2015). For example, a nail packed in a merchandise box bought at the hardware store inspires a human to perform nailing a nail into something, like a piece of wood, a Man like wooden effigy. This nail belongs to functional material and labour dimensions. The nail that belongs to a symbolic dimension will inspire a human to keep the nail as a mnemonic artifact. In the first example, the nail has an immediate function. In the second example, the nail’s dimension occurs at an immediate moment as well and has an added functional future timeline. The nail becomes an object preserving the past, in the future. In a sense, the dimension of the nail is tied to Taylor’s discourse of artifact as, “always in situ: intelligible in the framework of the immediate environment and issues surrounding them” (2003:np). This means that the performance of the nail is predicated on the compound of its context and its purposeful usage, at that contextual time of encounter with its finder.

What is of interest at this point, is to demonstrate through Star’s Boundary Object Theory (1989; 1999) how a legless nail can move from one world to another and be as able as a human to perform dimension.

Worlds

Worlds are organized in groups, what Star names “categories” and “classification” (1999), what Diana Taylor names “communities (2003), what María Lugones names “worlds” (1987). In this essay, I use the name “world.” Lugones defines worlds as “possibles” rather than “utopia”, “inhabited at present by some flesh and blood people,” but it can also be populated by “imaginary people, dead people,” and it can also mean “society” (1987:11). Furthermore, Lugones says of herself that if she feels at “ease” in a world, then she knows she is of this world (1987). By integrating the definition of categories/classification/communities/worlds from these scholars, I define here in this essay, that world means a place that feels like home, a place where one is fluent enough to be at ease, and recognizable enough to be accepted as belonging to this world, by other inhabitant of this world. World is also by this compound definition, not existing in fixed, but fluid, evolving, even imaginary, categories and classifications. Worlds, at Burning Man, are at once very real, magical, and of imaginary construct. Yet, one world inhabitant recognizes another of its kind, however fluid and imagined that world may be.

The following question asks, “How do inhabitants of these worlds recognize each other,” and, “What role does a nail play in the making of these worlds?”

What makes the inhabitants of Burning Man festival part of one world is their common goal—attending Burning Man festival to live the Man burn. Leading to this event, the humans, members of this world, share one ecology of independently working worlds.

Worlds Ecology

This essay concerns itself with two classifications of the Burning Man worlds ecologies, categorized as: the DPW, and the burners.

DPW refers to the Department of Public Works. DPW humans set up the city, one month prior to the event. Members of DPW and DPW departments have a playa name. Department of Public Works members are referred to as DPW: “She’s a DPW” or, “She’s DPW.”

A small group of DPWs—the Dark Council—leads as a collective leadership entity (The Official DPW Handbook). The Dark Council, and many DPWs, work full time and year-round planning towards the next event. DPWs are as family. In 2014, Playground was DPW’s manager and their HR representative. Commander Cobra was crewmaster and labour manager for DPW, and as such he headed the daily morning meetings during pre-event on playa, and much more. D.A. was the Playa Restoration Manager, which equates to being the head of MOOP’s world.

DPW’s code of conduct towards outsiders, including the burners, enforces tight lip behaviour, and with good reasons. Upwards to 56,000 burners set up camp every year at the week-long Burning Man festival, seeking magic (Burning Man). Thousands more don’t get their tickets in since the event is capped. The unlucky burners await news from home through Instagram, Facebook, and after-event travel tales. The virtual immediacy of Burning Man world’s stories accelerates the risk of sharing backstage information. Burning Man’s magic risks flopping, a sense of wonder taking a dive, just as a card trick performed alongside its how-to instructions remove a sense of card trick wonder. Secrecy overflows from ethics and into socially expected DPW behaviours. Although DPW yearly Handbook is readily available as a PDF on the interweb, each DPW sub-departments have their own private culture and secrets. There exists no public archives of DPW. As Danger Ranger, Burning Man historical member and founder of the Black Rock Ranger says, “I could tell you things, but then, I’d have to kill you” (private conversation with Rusty, December 24, 2015).

Along with the DPW Burning Man during-event pageant, a variety of rites signal levels of belonging to the community. New comers join the family by attending the daily morning meetings, eating together at the cafeteria, and joining the entrance camp, the Ghetto, likely partaking in the epic nightly parties (but never before 5pm, nor on work-call). Specialized work force DPW camp together near their tools. A material dimension contributes to the status of a new-be likely to camp in a tent packing no AC, while the old-timers set up in their air conditioned caravans, accessorized with a turkish rug, their own shade structure, and a sought after vacuum appliance. The dimensional material consecration is the very recognizable DPW black hoodie, and for the vehicle-owners, the DPW license plate. The longer length of time a DPW has spent with the family the more slogan-patches will have been sewn on the hoodie. DPW merchandise is recognizable. A

hoodie, out there in the default world, will have you tagged as being part of the DPW family, wherever, and with whoever is also a member of the bigger Burning Man family. Most DPWs call burners “hippies.” The relationship between DPWs and burners runs from DPWs who set themselves apart and away from the festival, and those who love the festival. Conversely, a DPW is often (not in all circles) appreciated as a special contributor to the festival, by especially long-time burners. The DPW hoodie very well may get you a free coffee in the San Francisco Bay Area, and a respectful tilt of the head in Elko, Nevada, I have experienced.

Burners are the participants who set up camp and party on the playa for a week. The entrance alone allows time enough for incoming participants to shift to a collective burner identity. On the day the gate opens at Black Rock city, it takes on average more than twice the time it would to drive from one’s hotel in Reno to one’s camp on the playa — roughly ten hours on the day of. After arriving on the actual dust, pre-gate burners used to be allowed to mingle and come in-and-out of their vehicles, embracing each other like long lost family. The ecstasy of having arrived home, coupled with the grueling anticipation rising as vehicles move an inch per minute, made the experience a transformational catharsis.

The entrance gate is a place of ritual and facts, defining the contour of members’ perspective, fleshing out their unique belonging to the group’s shared experience. At the gate proper, past the ticket Will Call booth, there are about ten rows of entries wide. One vehicle at a time, the occupants of it submit to the entrance ritual. Each get a hug by the greeters and are handed the week’s activity booklet. First time participants are labelled “virgin.” They are rounded up by the greeters and elder participants who cheer them on to the beat of the consecrating gong. At the sound of the gong, all within hearing recognize the entrance of a new member into their burner world. At that point, incoming participants have reached and crossed what Bruno Latour calls “passage point,” entering their world of “allies” (Star 1989:389 n.4). Participants are allowed to roll on the alkaline sand, thereby getting their first annual dose of playa dust. The event of the gong and the rolling in the dust together comprise what Star names “an ecological viewpoint” (1989:389). Both newcomer and veteran burners by passing the gate enter one ecology, one world, the ecology of Burning Man’s world. The “flow” of burners passing the gate represents an “alliance” to a “network” that is a complex mixture of place, event, language, worlds and their boundaries (1989:389-390). Enlarging Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory conditions of “alliance,” “flow,” and “network,” best illustrated in *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Star speaks of a “coherence” as “boundary objects” (1989:390). The gate is a place of coherent networking, not only among those attendees in-coming, but also those already on site who work at handing and handling tickets and greeting burners. Thus having been granted access within the designated perimeters of the festival, not allowed to look back but to be inside for the entire week, members of the Burning Man world re-unite again to reconcile (on a spectrum) whatever differences alive among them in the default world.

But who cares about the nail? “Being at ease” in a world (Lugones 1987) is determined by the event of humans bonding in one world, where the stake of the bond depends on the common understanding of shared facts and acts.

In a matter of speech, language, verbal and non-verbal, feels familiar when we are at ease. Burning Man festival, the burn, the evening when the Man wooden effigy burns down in a great pyrotechnic and fire show, is the moment of ease. Inside the boundaries

of Burning Man festival, members perform the unfamiliar with performed familiarity. They perform facts of wearing, speaking, doing, dreaming, moving in codes specific to the Burning Man world. The burning of the Man reconciles with ease the inhabitants of the Burning Man festival worlds. But what of the nail? Who cares about a MOOP nail? How is the kind of care received as a Man burned MOOP nail differ from that care received as a MOOP nail found at the periphery trash fence?

In “Acts of Transfer,” Taylor speaks of meanings shifting over time and through cultures (2003). In her Boundary Object Theory, Star speaks of similar processes using different vocabulary (1989). Star speaks of what Taylor conceives as time and culture, using the image of boundaries. Both Taylor and Star problematize an object that remains as it is, but which, when held in hand by one or another human, shifts dimension. The scale of its shift of dimension can be applied on a spectrum of familiarity to unfamiliarity with that dimension. The dimension of the object can be spoken of in terms of being at ease with the object, or not. What happens when two people of different worlds pick up a MOOP nail? The following aims to explain positions of language and translation as they related to the dimensional shift of a found MOOP object.

Language and Translation

I use language as contemporary dancer Benoît Lachambre does. In Lachambre’s viewpoint, the dream and the language are words which speaks of one and the same idea, which is an idea emerging from space (2015; 2016). In his movement art pedagogy, Lachambre tells his students to create space—inside and outside—to allow for dreams to happen. Lachambre uses both dream and language in ways meant to liberate possibilities for occasions to be, to happen, within the space that a dancer creates. Lachambre speaks of “being choreographed” (2015). Dream and language, in Lachambre’s movement and dance pedagogy, is a potential of choreographic material that is realized, when space is allowed between the dancer and the dancer’s environment, whether the encounter is human or nonhuman. This space is where choreography happens, where relationships are defined within choreographic space.

In the studies of dance and movement art, relationships are dynamic exchange events where communication takes place. Dream and language relate one to one another: human to human, human to nonhuman, human to environment, possibly nonhuman to nonhuman, etc. Language is movement-in-relationship with. In this sense, relationship is not an image of locomotion from point A to point B, but through and within the relationship it creates with point A and point B, with an image emerging. The image in the context of this illustration translates as dream and language. The image in the context of Burning Man is the magic where dimensions form.

The movement of a nail’s shift of dimension requires to be understood by more than one group, for the movement to be a language of relationship. There needs to be a place of meeting along the spectrum of familiarity and unfamiliarity with the dream event. This common language problematic speaks of a necessitation for a translation tool. In Boundary Object Theory (1989; 1999), Star summarizes the problem of translation as argued by Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory (2005), as a “re-interpretation of the concern to fit their own programmatic goals and then re-establish themselves as gatekeepers” (1989:389).

Applicable to the event of Burning Man, where attendants, burners, and DPs re-interpret themselves for the duration of their stay, humans take active part in establishing and re-establishing their world as each prepare to burn the Man. They adhere to (a re-interpretation act), and in turn, reinforce the codes of belonging to that same group (a gatekeeping act).

The problem of translation is crucial to Star's argument of "reconciliation," and the Boundary Object Theory (1989; 1999). Star describes a boundary object as:

those objects which both inhabits several intersecting social worlds and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them. . . . They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, as a means of translation. (1989:393)

Star continues saying that, "the creation and management of boundary objects is a key process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social words" (1989:393). To illustrate Star's argument, let me tell you about my encounter with Susy (Personal Interview with the author, November 21, 2015).

When I told my friend Susy I was writing a story about a nail I have kept from Burning Man, she told me about objects she kept from her burn. Enthusiastically, she went to fetch a Ziploc bag containing three pieces of burned wood. These half burned objects sitting on a shelf in her store room wouldn't be of much interest to people who are outsiders of the Burning Man's world. Even if the found object doesn't hold the same value for me (I prefer nails), or for Mattstep (he prefers the ephemeral quality of the experience), or Rusty (he prefers sunrises on the playa), all of us would recognize the wood as an artifact of the burn, an event which has shared meaning. In other words, the three pieces of burned wood speak to us. The burnt wood, a shareable knowledge, makes our worlds—burners and DPs—intersect. The burnt wood-as-boundary objects reaches across burners and DPs alike. In this example, the burned pieces of wood "act as anchors," what Star's explain as the anchor's role to maintain the understanding of an object across boundaries (1989:414). The burned wood anchors a mythical dimension of MOOP as a physical reconciliator, creating space in the dream to allow a relationship of shared memories of the event (Star 1989).

At Burning Man, worlds intermingle. Burners and DPs share worlds in partial relationships with one another. Attendees may have migrated from one world to another. Two worlds will likely meet on the playa, at a pageant, riding an art-car, at a bar, at the emergency hospital, and there attendees will share world stories. In an interview conducted with DPW network engineer Mattstep, he told me stories of gifting found objects to burners (personal Interview with the author, February 16, 2016). In the ashes of the man burn of 2015, he picked up a sort of screw, a fastener, and gave it to a stranger, an inhabitant of the virgin-burner world. How magical it must have been to be bestowed with such a found object, one that has been structural to the assemblage of the Man! Mattstep acted with the awareness of a language specific to the virgin-burner world. His generosity towards that individual happened upon encounter of their two worlds. Had the virgin-burner not been around, Mattstep would have pocketed and discarded the fastener adequately.

Beyond the human, beyond the cyborg, Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto"'s arguments fit the nail story in addressing objects (1991). Haraway says, "[I]ndeed myth and tool mutually constitute each other" (1991:164). Crossing boundaries, the nail's tool dimension is disassembled, shifting away from its head in the wood, reassembled as MOOP or treasure. Lying on the playa, its tool body is constructed by the language of the collective from which the individual who pockets the nail associates with. The nail and the human enter an intimate relationship in the space created by pocket proximity. The mythical context of the burn spills over and into the collective world of one, in the previous illustration, the fastener enters the virgin-burner world. The burned pieces of wood for Suzy, and the three nails I have kept, are both tool and myth. Mattstep, the virgin-burner, Susy, and I understand the language of the found object as first the language of tool—its original function.

The nail in the Man's leg crosses boundaries, accessing worlds. Leave No Trace is lived by each attendee in a different ways: the nail as MOOP is picked up, pocketed, and discarded adequately; the nail as an object capturing the charge of the event, the nail as a reminder of having been at the event, the nail found in a pile of ashes is picked up, pocketed, and preserved in a Ziplock bag and labelled, Burning Man 2011.

Another way of framing translation is to speak of a capacitation for nail MOOP to traverse shared language, trading languages across boundaries. A burner learns its world's language by attending the event. The burner will have been exposed to the language while preparing the camp. Montreal's camp Midnight Poutine remains active in the default world though community events such as Burners Potluck (Midnight Poutine at Burning Man; Brûleurs de Montréal Burners). Further organization is needed to pool some money for shared infrastructures, for example the kitchen, the poutine ingredients, and the shade structures. During the process of preparing the camp for Burning Man, a burner will be speaking its world's language. It is during the event itself, in the place itself, that language will sink in totally. In that world, the feeling of existing as a burner is at its peak. In that world, the burner is exposed to her or his language, and to similar yet different languages. Susan Foster speaks about "feeling the world as an act of knowledge," which points to the necessitation of a translation skill set (1995:9). A translation skill set can be an individual process formed and lived with ease, and/or extended as a collective skill set building, until lived with ease. Translation is a method of knowledge sharing that bridges two worlds into one shared understanding.

This shared knowledge is the language of the Ten Principles as a feeling. As a nail in the Man's leg, the feeling is an act of acknowledging an artifact's dimension. Having the nail in hand for a moment is an act of experiencing nail: remembering that moment which is not the nail but something happening at the moment of the nail-in-hand, recording the nail-in-hand event, and/or pocketing the nail for future disposal or future adulation. The condition of creating space for memories translates as the reconciliator of the experience of ephemerality, the activator of the Immediacy Principle. Leave No Trace Principle transports the experience of the nail from material to mythical and/or labour and embodied. Whereas I pocketed a nail, for Mattstep, the memory of having been on the playa is enough to carry the magic of Burning man in the default world (Personal Interview with the author, February 16, 2016). For Rusty, living the sunrise every morning on the playa is the memory he carries in his default world. He carries these memories in his imagination and

as pixels—images of sunrises shared through his Facebook account. The physicality of the nail is not at the center of the experience. Rather, the embedded memories—remembered or imagined—are at the center of the experience of the nail encounter.

It is the relationship between the the desert place and the Burning Man event that allows the magic of nail-as-myth to happen. Relationships created through MOOP nail create dream—the shared knowledge of a common language with humans, desert, and object (Haraway 1991).

Autoethnography of a Nail

How does a nail begin its story? Why is a nail found in so many burners' treasure box? How does a nail go from hardware store to sacred pouch, thus transforming relationship to, and the identity of a nail, from commodity to dream?

I am a DPW insider by way of having worked one season, in 2014. I come having been recommended by a prior DPW who had membership entrance into the mightiest of all camps, Heavy Equipment And Transpo (HEAT). Being socially admitted to HEAT immediately allowed me access to unconditional recognition. Just like that, I became part of the DPW family. Many HEAT members are founder members of the DPW. They helped grow the DPW into what it is, from what it was (The Official DPW Handbook). They have epic stories to share, and un-shareable secrets to speak of. Most of them have accumulated scars from the many years working on the playa. Their hoodies, many hoodies, are covered with slogan-patches. I was part of the circle of DPW. I stood out like a sore thumb, like the rookie wearing my brand new DPW hoodie.

I had planned for this essay to ask DPWs if they would be interested in sharing their story of the Man through a possible relationship they have, and/or had, with a nail, or other MOOP found object. I quickly came to consider three issues deterrent to information gathering: (1) Restricted access to the DPWs involved; (2) The unbelievable tale of a nail did not appeal to potential interviewees; (3) The DPW has no archives that I could dig in to supplement the lack of first-hand accounts.

Admittedly, my shiny first-year insider badge is pretty thin. I had secured four interviews in the months of November and December, calling out to DPWs outside of the purchasing, building, and firefighting departments, the original boundaries of my study design. None of the interviews came through on time. I was able to interview Mattstep, DPW network engineer, on the deadline day of my final revision draft. This failure to connect with insider participants forced me to revisit the structure of my article, and the sources of my story. “The Nail in the Man’s Leg” shifted from an oral genealogy, to a theoretical and autoethnographic interweaving, pulling from feminist, anthropological, science technology, and performance studies.

For the love of storytelling, I re-tell in the following, the tale of a “The Nail in the Man’s Leg,” as lived by Rusty, Mattstep, Susy, and myself.

I met Rusty while living at HEAT, in 2014. Rusty is a friend. I have been accepted as a family member of Rusty’s world. Rusty is part of DPW Transpo crew. He trucks in merchandise, such as a bunch of nails, from Reno to the Man. Rusty is an original founder of the DPW. I was excited to ask him about his found objects treasure box, and his possible

relationship to his nail cargo. I asked Rusty if he had any nails stories for me, and he wrote me this poem. I asked him if he had a nail treasure and he said no. His treasures are sunrises on the playa, living things, and his many cowboy hats.

Cowboy Poetry by Leo Rusty Johnson

Have you heard the story of journey to the flames here's a story of a journey kinda the same. [s]tarts along ways away in a mill iron ore smelters to steel hammered n forged hardened and strong transformed in to nails that'd be used to build houses and art that's how r story ties in for the nails of steel r used to construct our man in black rock city that's right Burningman. A DPW hand grabs the nail hammers straight n true in to the leg of the man to stand for all to see strong n hard winds n dust thousands of people admiring some say worship but the story's just begun for our nail ten days of dessert trials it's true then comes burn night. The crowd surrounds our man fire works began flames dance bright n the man he fights stands long and loud the crowd anticipates the fall as pieces fall the nails hold on the wood turns weak n gives the fire goes on man falls in to a heap the crowd on their feet rushes forward to the heat. Party till dawn at was once the man[']s feat[feet] but our story isn't complete a burner from who knows where wants a m[e]mento of their time here grabs our nail n some ash to show of the part of history he has to show it travels back home where ever it might be to tell the story of burning man for all he sees. (Personal Interview with author, September 25, 2015)

Remembering Memories Versus Imagining Memories

Rusty did not say “for all to see,” but “for all he sees.” Soyini Madison asks in her book *Critical Ethnography*, “[D]oes that mean those truths or realities do not exist simply because we do not see them” (2012:89)? Rusty’s response to Madison’s question is a poetic genealogy of a nail, the ease of travel of a nail in the Man’s leg, from its packing box at the hardware store, to magical treasure as a found object in a mega art festival, to its likely resting place in a pile of trash. Although Rusty’s account of a nail is an imagined memory in that it addresses my needs to build a narrative of a nail as Burning Man consecrated artifact, the poem does just that, addressing my needs. In an article discussing “Feminist Standpoint Theory,” “Situated Knowledges,” and the authors’ argument of a “situated imagination,” Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis argue, “something is ‘imagined’ or ‘imaginary’ does not imply its *falseness*; the point is *how* things are imagined” (2002:324). The boundaries between facts and fiction of a nail’s dimension overlap, as memories are remembered and imagined.

The Tale of the Nail

A nail is labelled as hardware, comes in various sizes, packaged in boxes for industrial orders averaging thousands of nails per box. Let’s call the nail *common nail 6D 2"* USD\$157.50 per package of 2730 nails. This is the industrial nail Purchasing department will order, Transpo department will coordinate for delivery, and Joe the Builder’s crew will hammer in.

Most likely, *common nail 6D 2"* is used is such unpolished work as shade structure, populating islets of reliefs on the scorching playa. *Common nail 6D 2"* is the toad of the

family, while screw is the fancier frog, giant staples the bull frog, and fastener is the bull's eye of all hardware. A wooden structure such as the Man, built to burn to the ground in just about two hours, is often engineered with as little exterior attachments as possible, limiting weight and debris. Nails are there, though, and finding a nail in the pile of said burned Man is the climax of this insider story.

In the genealogy of "The Nail in the Man's Leg," *common nail 6D 2*" is as generic as an artefact gets, not yet arte, just fact. It is a tool not yet at the mythical dimension. The mythical construction of the nail has yet to begin. The DPW builder crew, headed by head builder and Burning Man DPW founder Joe the Builder, relates to the nail with detachment. That is, until a DPW not wearing her/his work boots steps on a nail. *Common nail 6D 2*" generates a layer of meaning, inclusive of the experience of hospital visit, medical intervention, and minor surgery. The experience compound bequests a change of the nail's name. Let's go from *common nail 6D 2*" to *god damn nail*.

DPW skips to the one hospital on location during pre-event. There follows a prompt assessment: wiggling of the nail and asked, "[O]n a scale of one to five, how much does it hurt?" says the emergency medical technician (EMT) on shift. The EMT inserts four needles in the foot, the anesthetic shots, following with scalpel knife surgery, more needle work, a glob of antibiotic gel, gauze bandage, bonus pills and a prescription for more antibiotics. DPW builder replays the story mentally, partly busy remembering, mostly busy imagining what job will be assigned to a temporarily disabled DPW, and curses the *god damn nail*. Meanwhile, for the EMT at the Rampart Urgent Care, it's *just another nail common-injury*.

Fast forward six days and nights of transformative festivities into the festival. The Man is erect in the middle of the playa, set within a row of spires pointing to another giant structure to burn the day after the Man, the Temple. On Saturday night, the city is literally on fire. LED-strung hippy burners ride bright bicycles or hop on art cars competing in brightness and loudness. Some minor wooden structures have gone up in flames the night before. Metal work structures spew meters-long flames.

People gather around the Man: there's the circle of fire dancers where sober fire-officers and law enforcers patrol. Everybody else outside that circle has dropped LSD; those who haven't feel the vibe. The music is louder than the ears can take. If per chance two people meet, unplanned, it is called destiny. Dust devils whirl. The crowd is on edge. After a show nobody but the first row can see but everybody feels, the Man raises its wooden arms — a sign the massive party is about to go down. Extreme pyrotechnic work starts. Two hours of pure ecstasy cumulate in a pile of ashes. The security perimeter eventually cracks open. Those valiant souls who awaited this very symbolic rush to the burning ashes walk at a ceremonial paced-down ritualist clockwise circle around the ambers until they are cool enough to pick and pocket. This is the spot to find red hot The Nail in the Man's Leg nails.

Bill Brown, a critical theorist who popularized the "Thing Theory," explains such an event leading to the pile of ashes as a "metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems" (2001:5). Magic does not stop at the ashes. Thousands of people take over the night in what can be best described as the popular saying, "[W]hat happens in Vegas stays in Vegas."

Common nail 6D 2" has transformed into *the nail in the Man's leg*. For the following two days, festival goers will gather in small groups, tossing the remnants of the Man, fishing for a prized memento. Susy, a 2009 burner I interviewed at her home in Toronto, showed

me three pieces of burned wood, one of which has a hole where a nail is missing (personal interview with the author, November 21, 2015). Susy talked about the energy embedded in the artifact. The energy is a condition of the dream, that common language shared among members of the Burning Man world.

This common language is not exclusive to those remembering the memory. Wannabe burners, those who have yet to experience Burning Man, can imagine what it must be like. The artifact is a fact to the fiction. Its memories are constructs of worlds and boundaries around what's embodied as remembered and what's imagined. In the default world, the common language is the, "me too, I have a nail from Burning Man!"

The Nail Loses Its Magic

And then, there's the bunch of nails that even the most feverish burner hasn't picked from the ashes. The wind has scattered micro debris along miles of eroding soil. The burners have packed and gone. DPWs are packing and organizing exit strategies. Only the DPW Playa Restoration (Resto) crew led by D.A. is allowed on the playa, for the cleanup (Burning Man). However excruciatingly exhausting on the body and the mind, Playa Restoration is crucial for the renewal of the event. So emotionally and physically taxing is the work, it is not surprising that those DPWs I have talked to who have kept an object from the Burning Man event have found the object post-event during Resto.

There is roughly a month left after Exodus to get the playa as clean dust until the BLM rolls in for the final Leave No Trace verdict. It's hot. Most DPWs hanging out for Resto are hard core lifers. Extreme weather, scorching hot in the day time, freezing cold at night, the alkaline sand transforms a foot in affectionately called "playa foot," a stump of painfully cracked hardened skin, and that's the hands too. Nostrils are so dried out by now, the best thing in the word is sniffing melting ice cubes. Lips are chapped beyond foreseeable repair. Lungs are sandpaper lined but many of the crew members still smoke. Whiskey and bad beer hangovers don't affect anymore. Living quarters are reduced to shared dorms. Food is what's left-over from the Exodus's Collexodus: sprayable cheese, salty chips, coconut water, etc. Thirty minutes of dehydration means death.

Year after year, D.A.'s crew manages the impossible. Although participants are required to bring out what they bring in, the urgency of a rushed Exodus results in a number of unfortunate soiled camps. Nature adds to the chaos, with sand storms and wind blowing, the fragility of the soil, the plague of pin-head sized glitters, the freak rain and water most years, caking, covering, and blowing micro debris all the way to the highway. Crew members are lined up at arms-length, pacing one step at a time, scanning the dusty soil for shiny bits of broken glass and astro turf lint. A different kind of magic sets in. There exists no longer the augmented magic of thousands of humans performing Burning Man, the over-stimulating fabricated noise, colours, and explosions of LED. There exists the harsh desert, the sand storms, the fatigue, and the exhilarating awareness of being in such a place. There is also the reality that Black Rock Desert in early September spells hostile. Black Rock Desert then is a place of seasonal shifts, at time where organic matter makes it or dies of exposure from the elements (Listen to an Audio Interview). There is also the reality of human mental meltdown. Magic lays less in the material dimension as it does in the labour and embodied dimensions. It's the kind of magic that is remembered as having

been there and survived. It's the kind of magic that feeds a mythical dimension, a repository of tales to tell over the next bonfire. D.A. speaks of "closing the circle" and "bringing the goodness home" ("Listen to an Audio Interview"). All that goodness is language that carries dreams of the mythical dimension back to the default world.

At the time of "closing the circle," in its climactic demise, a nail becomes a *bunch o'nails* on a magnetic broom.

Conclusion

While dimensions co-habit during the event via interrelationships of tension and generosity, there is a macro dimension of being at Burning Man, which places all attendants as being at Burning Man, rather than being in the default world. The dimension of a nail object shifts from one human encounter to another human encounter. The significance of encounters at Burning Man become anchors as Situated Knowledge (Star 1989; Haraway 1988). For Mattstep, the myth of Burning Man, its magical dimension, does not reside in the found object. In his world, the stuff that makes the myth of his world, his DPW magic, is the ephemeral quality of being on the playa. Nevertheless, his generous act of gifting demonstrates that Mattstep is aware of the dimension of mythical language of the virgin-burner's world. Matt speaks a common language with the virgin-burner. He operates in a caring and generous relationship.

So I will close with a confession. I would not have written this essay had I known I was about to put in discussion so many theories addressing the dimensional performance of a found object and its fortuitous human-nonhuman encounter, taking place in an animated twenty-four hours per day debauchery. Originally my story was quite simple. I asked, "what's a nail object in somebody's hand? Can I move its dance, i.e. dance the nail, and know its story?" My artistic field is movement performance, while my academic expertise develops as performance nonhuman ethnography. I wrote the story from my perspective, questioning kinks and curves I came up to, with arguments that I lived, yet had been coined, speaking of theories I had not encountered. It turns out quite a lot of interest is dedicated to the serious studies of nonhumans, objects, and language relationships.

To tie it back to the compound artifact/archive theories of Dumit and Taylor, "context and the situatedness" (2015; 2013) play a key role in the perpetuation of the festival magic year after year. The nail, the Man, the gate's gong, the sunrise on the playa, and the black hoodie shape Burning Man's encounters as artifact memories.

There are unifying points in the story of "The Nail in the Man's Leg": (1) People who attend Burning Man share the event of burning the man at Burning Man; (2) People who attend Burning Man Leave No Trace, i.e.: pick up that nail off the ground. There are personal stories at Burning Man, and even though the world of the Pink Gym camp and the world of the Thunderdome camp are unlikely to mistake one's event for the other's, the Radical Inclusion Principle exists as a lived rule: DPW Mattstep travels worlds, gifting a virgin-burner a found object.

In conclusion, sometimes the nail has no special meaning and is just left there in a pile of ashes, waiting to be picked up by the Resto crew. But always, this non meaning is an occasion of meaning, for a relationship that has no meaning is no less one of dimensional relationships that tells a story.

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