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Republic of the Imagination: *Burning Man* and the culture of radical self-expression

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Burning Man, it could be argued, is the best party on the planet and one of the most elaborate and complexly engineered. Where else could you have a dance party on a large duck where everyone is dressed as their fantasy avatars; or sit on an art car called 'The Bleachers' designed like stadium seating to watch and be watched, complete with referees in the standard black and white attire directing playa traffic; or mount a double-decker bus that resembles an underground rave in Eastern Europe; or dangle from cables as you smash your opponent to hard core punk rock at the *Thunderdome*; or find yourself at a large open-aired dance party with over 5000 people dancing to the world's most famous DJs and electronic music acts such as Bassnectar and Beats Antique? *Burning Man* has elevated the art of partying to epic proportions from mobile niche environments to large-scale international acts drawing crowds of thousands. At *Burning Man*, you can create your own experience and any desire you might have can be found and fulfilled on the playa. It is as if everyone's fantasy is being played out simultaneously and it is in the collision of these fantasies that meaningful encounters occur.



Figure 6.1: Aerial View of Black Rock City, 2012 (Photograph: Scott London)