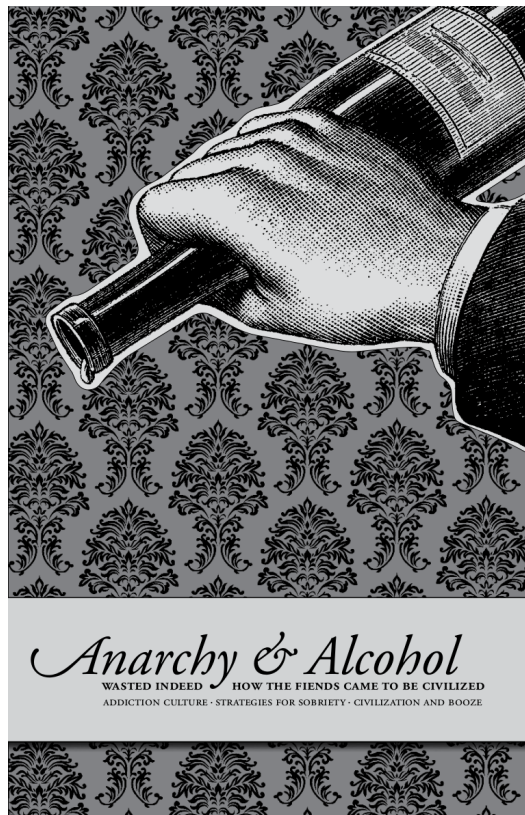


Anarchy and Alcohol

addiction culture · strategies for sobriety · civilization and booze

Alcoholics Autonomous



2008

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Peering through the fog behind his eyes, he saw an alcohologram: a world of anguish, in which intoxication was the only escape. Hating himself even more than he hated the corporate killers who had created it, he stumbled to his feet and headed back to the liquor store.

Ensconced in their penthouses, they counted the dollars pouring in from millions like him, and chuckled to themselves at the ease with which all opposition was crushed. But they, too, often had to drink themselves to sleep at night — if ever those vanquished masses Flop coming back for more, the tycoons sometimes felled to themselves, there's gonna be hell to pay.

Wasted, Indeed: Anarchy & Alcohol

Ecstasy v Intoxication: for a world of enchantment, or *anarchaholism*?

Sloshed, smashed, trashed, loaded, wrecked, wasted, blasted, plastered, tanked, fucked up, bombed. Everyone's heard of the arctic people with one hundred words for snow, we have one hundred words for drunk.

We perpetuate our own culture of defeat.

Hold it right there — I can see the sneer on your face: *Are these anarchists so uptight that they would even denounce the only fun aspect of anarchism — the beer after the riots, the liquor in the pub where all that pie-in-the-sky theory is bandied about? What do they do for fun, anyway — cast aspersions on the little fun we do have? Don't we get to relax and have a good time in any part of our lives?*

Do not misunderstand us: we are not arguing against indulgence, but *for* it. Ambrose Bierce defined an ascetic as “a weak person who succumbs to the temptation of denying himself pleasure,” and we concur. As Chuck Baudelaire wrote, *you must always be high — everything depends on this*. So we are not against drunkenness, but rather against drink! For those who embrace drink as a route to drunkenness thus cheat themselves of a total life of enchantment;

Drink, like caffeine or sugar in the body, only plays a role in life that life itself can provide for otherwise. The woman who never drinks coffee does not require it in the morning when she awakens: her body produces energy and focus on its own, as thousands of generations of evolution have prepared it to do. If she drinks coffee regularly, soon her body lets the coffee take over that role, and she becomes dependent upon it. Thus does alcohol artificially provide for temporary moments of relaxation and release while impoverishing life of all that is genuinely restful and liberating.

If some sober people in this society do not seem as reckless and free as their boozier counterparts, that is a mere accident of culture, mere circumstantial evidence. Those puritans exist all the same in the world drained of all magic and genius by the alcoholism of their fellows (*and the capitalism, hierarchy, misery it helps maintain*) — the only difference is that they are so self-abnegating as to refuse even the false magic, the genie of the bottle. But other “sober” folk, whose orientation to living might better be described as enchanted or ecstatic, are plentiful, if you look hard enough. For these individuals — for us — life is a constant celebration, one which needs no augmentation and from which we need no respite.

Alcohol, like Prozac and all the other mind-control medications that are making big bucks for Big Brother these days, substitutes symptomatic treatment for cure. It takes away the pain of a dull, drab existence for a few hours at best, then returns it twofold. It not only replaces positive actions which would address the root causes of our despondency — it *prevents* them, as more energy becomes focused on achieving and recovering from the drunken state. Like the tourism of the worker, drink is a pressure valve that releases tension while maintaining the system that creates it.

In this push-button culture, we've become used to conceiving of ourselves as simple machines to be operated: add the appropriate chemical to the equation to get the desired result. In our search for health, happiness, meaning in life, we run from one panacea to the next — Viagra, vitamin C, vodka — instead of approaching our lives holistically and addressing our problems at their social and economic roots. This product-oriented mindset is the foundation of our alienated consumer society: without consuming products, we can't live! We try to buy relaxation, community, self-confidence — now even ecstasy comes in a pill!

We want ecstasy as away of life, not a liver-poisoning alcohol holiday from it. "Life sucks — get drunk" is the essence of the argument that enters our ears from our masters' tongues and then passes out of our own slurring mouths, perpetuating whatever incidental and unnecessary truths it may refer to — but we're not falling for it any longer! Against inebriation — and *for* drunkenness! Burn down the liquor stores, and replace them with playgrounds!

For a Lucid Bacchanalian, Ecstatic Sobriety!

Spurious Rebellion

Practically every child in mainstream Western society grows up with alcohol as the forbidden fruit their parents or peers indulge in but deny to them. This prohibition only makes drinking that much more fascinating to young people, and when they get the opportunity, most immediately assert their independence by doing exactly as they've been told not to: ironically, they rebel by following the example set for them. This hypocritical pattern is standard for child-rearing in this society, and works to replicate a number of destructive behaviors that otherwise would be aggressively refused by new generations. The fact that the bogus morality of many drinking parents is mirrored in the sanctimonious practice of religious groups helps to create a false dichotomy between puritanical self-denial and life-loving, free-wheeling drinkers — with "friends" like Baptist ministers, we teetotalers wonder, who needs enemies?

These partisans of Rebellious Drunkenness and advocates of Responsible Abstinence are loyal adversaries. The former need the latter to make their dismal rituals look like fun; the latter need the former to make their rigid austerity seem like common sense. An "ecstatic sobriety" which combats the dreariness of one and the blariness of the other — false pleasure and false discretion alike — is analogous to the anarchism that confronts both the false freedom offered by capitalism and the false community offered by communism.

Alcohol & Sex in the Rape Culture

Let's lay it on the table: almost all of us are coming from a place where our sexuality is or was occupied territory. We've been raped, abused, assaulted, shamed, silenced, confused, constructed,

programmed. We're badasses, and we're taking it all back, reclaiming ourselves; but for most of us, that's a slow, complex, not yet concluded process.

This doesn't mean we can't have good, safe, supportive sex right now, in the middle of that healing — but it does make having that sex a little more complicated. To be certain we're not perpetuating or helping to perpetuate negative patterns in a lover's life, we have to be able to communicate clearly and honestly before things get hot and heavy — and while they are, and after. Few forces interfere with this communication like alcohol does. In this culture of denial, we are encouraged to use it as a social lubricant to help us slip past our inhibitions; all too often, this simply means ignoring our own fears and scars, and not asking about others'. If it is dangerous, as well as beautiful, for us to share sex with each other sober, how much more dangerous must it be to do so drunk, reckless, and incoherent?

Speaking of sex, it's worth noting the supporting role alcohol has played in patriarchal gender dynamics. For example — in how many nuclear families has alcoholism helped to maintain an unequal distribution of power and pressure? (All the writers of this tract can call to mind more than one such case among their relatives alone.) The man's drunken self-destruction, engendered as it may be by the horrors of surviving under capitalism, imposes even more of a burden on the woman, who must still somehow hold the family together — often in the face of his violence. And on the subject of dynamics...

The Tyranny of Apathy

“Every fucking anarchist project I engage in is ruined or nearly ruined by alcohol. You set up a collective living situation and everyone is too drunk or stoned to do the basic chores, let alone maintain an attitude of respect. You want to create community, but after the show everyone just goes back to their rooms and drinks themselves to death. If it's not one substance to abuse it's a motherfucking other. I understand trying to obliterate your consciousness is a natural reaction to being born in alienating capitalist hell, but I want people to see what we anarchists are doing and say “Yeah, this is better than capitalism!”... which is hard to say if you can't walk around without stepping on broken forty-ounce bottles. I've never considered myself straight-edge, but fuck it, I'm not taking it anymore!”

It's said that when the renowned anarchist Oscar Wilde first heard the old slogan *if it is humiliating to be ruled, how much more humiliating it is to choose one's rulers*, he responded: “If it's humiliating to choose one's masters, how much more humiliating to be one's own master!” He intended this as a critique of hierarchies within the self as well as the democratic state, of course — but, sadly, his quip could be applied literally to the way some of our attempts at creating anarchist environments pan out in practice. This is especially true when they're carried out by drunk people.

In certain circles, especially the ones in which the word “anarchy” itself is more in fashion than any of its various meanings, freedom is conceived of in negative terms: “don't tell me what to do!” In practice, this often means nothing more than an assertion of the individual's right to be lazy, selfish, unaccountable for his actions or lack thereof. In such contexts, when a group agrees

upon a project it often ends up being a small, responsible minority that has to do all the work to make it happen. These conscientious few often look like the autocratic ones — when, invisibly, it is the apathy and hostility of their comrades that forces them to adopt this role. Being drunk and disorderly all the time is *coercive* - it compels others to clean up after you, to think clearly when you won't, to absorb the stress generated by your behavior when you are too fucked up for dialogue. These dynamics go two ways, of course — those who take *all* responsibility on their shoulders perpetuate a pattern in which everyone else takes none — but everyone is responsible for their own part in such patterns, and for transcending it.

Think of the power we could have if all the energy and effort in the world — or maybe even just *your* energy and effort? — that goes into drinking were put into resisting, building, creating. Try adding up all the money anarchists in your community have spent on corporate libations, and picture how much musical equipment or bail money or food (-not- bombs... or, fuck it, bombs!) it could have paid for — instead of funding their war against all of us. Better: imagine living in a world where cokehead presidents die of overdoses while radical musicians and rebels live the chaos into ripe old age!

Sobriety & Solidarity

Like any lifestyle choice, be it vagabondage or union membership, abstention from alcohol can sometimes be mistaken as an end rather than a means.

Above all, it is critical that our own choices *not* be a pretext for us to deem ourselves superior to those who make different decisions. The only strategy for sharing good ideas that succeeds unfailingly (and that goes for hotheaded, alienating tracts like this one as well!) is the power of example — if you put “ecstatic sobriety” into action in your life *and it works*, those who sincerely want similar things will join in. Passing judgment on others for decisions that affect only themselves is absolutely noxious to any anarchist — not to mention it makes them less likely to experiment with the options you offer.

And so — the question of solidarity and community with anarchists and others who do use alcohol and drugs. We propose that these are of utmost importance. Especially in the case of those who are struggling to free themselves of unwanted addictions, such solidarity is paramount: Alcoholics Anonymous, for example, is just one more instance of a quasi-religious organization filling a social need that should already be provided for by anarchist community self-organizing. As in every case, we anarchists must ask ourselves: do we take our positions simply to feel superior to the unwashed (er, washed) masses — or because we sincerely want to propagate accessible alternatives? Besides, most of us who are not substance-addicted can thank our privileges and good fortune for this; this gives us all the more responsibility to be good allies to those who have not had such privileges or luck — on whatever terms *they* set. Let tolerance, humility, accessibility, and sensitivity be the qualities we nurture in ourselves, not self-righteousness or pride. No separatist sobriety!

Revolution

So anyway — what are we going to do if we don't go to bars, hang out at parties, sit on the steps or in front of the television with our forty-ounce bottles? *Anything else!* The social impact of our society's fixation on alcohol is at least as important as its mental, medical, economic, and

emotional effects. Drinking standardizes our social lives, occupying some of the eight waking hours a day that aren't already colonized by work. It locates us spatially — living rooms, cocktail lounges, railroad tracks — and contextually — in ritualized, predictable behaviors — in ways more explicit systems of control never could. Often when one of us does manage to escape the role of worker/consumer, drinking is there, stubborn holdover from our colonized leisure time, to fill up the promising space that opens. Free from these routines, we could discover other ways to spend time and energy and seek pleasure, ways that could prove dangerous to the system of alienation itself.

Drink can *incidentally* be part of positive and challenging social interactions, of course — the problem is that its central role in current socializing and socialization misrepresents it as *the* prerequisite for such intercourse. This obscures the fact that we can create such interactions at will with nothing more than our own creativity, honesty, and daring. Indeed, without these, *nothing* of value is possible — have you ever been to a bad party? — and with them, no alcohol is necessary.

When one or two persons cease to drink, it just seems senseless, like they are ejecting themselves from the company (or at least customs) of their fellow human beings for nothing. But a *community* of such people can develop a radical culture of sober adventure and engagement, one that could eventually offer exciting opportunities for drink-free activity and merriment for all. Yesterday's geeks and loners could be the pioneers of tomorrow's new world: "lucid bacchanalism" is a new horizon, a new possibility for transgression and transformation that could provide fertile soil for revolts yet unimaginable. Like any revolutionary lifestyle option, this one offers an immediate taste of another world while helping create a context for actions that hasten its universal realization.

No war but the class war — no cocktail but the molotov cocktail!

Let us brew nothing but trouble!

Postscript: How To Read This Tract

With any luck, you've been able to discern — even, perhaps, through that haze of drunken stupor — that this is as much a caricature of polemics in the anarchist tradition as a serious piece. It's worth pointing out that these polemics have often brought attention to their theses by deliberately taking an extreme position, thereby opening up the ground in between for more "moderate" positions on the subject. Hopefully you can draw useful insights of your own from your interpretations of this text, rather than taking it as gospel or anathema.

And all this is not to say there are no fools who refuse intoxication — but can you imagine how much more insufferable they would be if they did not? The boring would still be boring, only louder about it; the self-righteous ones would continue to lambaste and harangue, while spitting and drooling on their victims! It is an almost universal characteristic of drinkers that they encourage everyone around them to drink, that — barring those hypocritical power-plays between lovers or parents and children, at least — they prefer their own choices to be reflected in the choices of all. This strikes us as indicating a monumental insecurity, not unrelated to the insecurity revealed by ideologues and recruiters of every stripe from Christian to Marxist to anarchist who feel they cannot rest until everyone in the world sees that world exactly as they do. As you read, try to fight off that insecurity — and try not to read this as an expression of our

own, either, but rather, in the tradition of the best anarchist works, as a reminder for all who choose to concern themselves that *another world is possible*.

Predictable Disclaimer

As in the case of *every* Crimethlnc. text, this one only represents the perspectives of whoever agrees with it at the time, *not* the “entire Crimethlnc. ex-Workers’ Collective” or any other abstract mass. Somebody who does important work under the Crimethlnc. moniker is probably getting sloshed at the moment I’m typing this — and that’s ok!

Have a drink on me — consumers are what make capitalism work!

How Civilization came to Fiend or How the Fiends Came to be Civilized

The Anarcho-Primitivist case for Straight Edge: Against His-Story, Against Alcoholocaust!

The history of civilization is the history of beer. In every era and area untouched by civilization, there has been no beer; conversely, virtually everywhere civilization has struck, beer has arrived with it. Civilization — that is to say, hierarchical social structures and consequent relationships of competition, unbridled technological development, and universal alienation — seems to be inextricably linked to alcohol. Our sages, who look back and ahead through time to see beyond the limits of such pernicious culture, tell a parable about our past to explain this link:

Most anthropologists regard the beginnings of agriculture as the inception of civilization. It was this first act of control over the land that brought human beings to think of themselves as distinct from nature, that forced them to become sedentary and possessive, that led to the eventual development of private property and capitalism. But why would hunter/gatherers, whose environment already provided them with all the food they needed, lock themselves in place and give up the nomadic foraging existence they had practiced since the beginning of time for something they already had? It seems more likely — and here, there are anthropologists who agree — that the first ones to domesticate themselves did so in order to brew beer.

This drastic reorganization for the sake of intoxication must have shaken tribal structure and lifeways to the root. Where these “primitive” peoples had once lived in a relaxed and attentive relationship to the providing earth — a relationship that afforded them both personal autonomy and supportive community as well as a great deal of leisure time to spend in admiration of the enchanted world around them — they now alternated periods of slavish hard labor with periods of drunken incompetence and detachment. It’s not hard to imagine that this situation hastened, if not necessitated, the rise to power of masters, overseers who saw to it that the toilsome tasks of fixed living were carried out by the frequently inebriated and incapable tribespeople. Without these chiefs and the primitive judicial systems they instituted, it must have seemed that life itself would be impossible: and thus, under the foul auspices of alcoholism, the embryonic State was conceived.

Such a pathetic way of life could not have been appealing to the peoples who neighbored the aboriginal alcoholic agriculturists; but as every historian knows, the spread of civilization was anything but voluntary. Lacking the manners and gentleness of their former companions in the

wild, these savages, in their drunken excesses and infringements, must have provoked a series of wars — wars which, sadly, the lushes were able to win, owing to the military efficiency of their autocratic armies and the steady supply of food their subjugated farmlands provided. Even these advantages would not have been enough, if the brutes hadn't had a secret weapon in their possession: alcohol itself. Adversaries who would otherwise have held their own on the field of battle indefinitely fell before the cultural onslaught of drunken debauchery and addiction, when trade — one of the inventions of the agriculturists, who also became the first misers, the first merchants — brought this poison into their midst. A pattern of conflict, addiction, defeat, and assimilation was set in motion, one which can be traced throughout history from the cradle of civilization through the Roman wars for Empire to the holocaust perpetrated upon the natives of the New World by the murderous European colonists.

But this is just a story, speculation. Let's consult the history books (reading between the lines where we must, as these books come down to us from yesteryear's conquering killers and their obedient slaves ... that is, historians!) to see if it lines up with the evidence. We'll start in the early years of agriculture, when the first tribes settled down — in the fertile lands around rivers, where wheat and barley were easy to grow and ferment in mass quantities.

The Domestication of Man — By Alcohol

Enkidu, a shaggy, unkempt, almost bestial primitive man, who ate grass and could milk wild animals, wanted to test his strength against Gilgamesh, the god-king. Gilgamesh sent a prostitute to Enkidu to learn of his strengths and weaknesses. Enkidu enjoyed a week with her during which she taught him of civilization. Enkidu knew not what bread was, nor had he learned to drink beer. She spoke unto Enkidu: "Eat the bread now, it belongs to life. Drink also beer, as it is the custom of the land." Enkidu drank seven cups of beer and his heart soared. In this condition he washed himself and became a civilized being.

—The first written narrative of civilization, the Epic of Gilgamesh written in 3000 bc, describes the domestication of Enkidu the Primitive by means of beer.

The oldest authenticated records of brewing were fashioned over 6000 years ago in Sumer, the oldest of human civilizations. Sumer also had the first known state-organized religion, and the official "divine drink" of this religion was beer brewed by priestesses of Ninkasi, the Sumerian goddess of alcohol. The hymns of Ninkasi were brewing instructions! The first collection of laws, the Code of Hammurabi of Babylon, decreed a daily beer ration in direct proportion to social status: beer consumption went hand-in-hand with hierarchy. For example, workers received two liters while besotted priests and kings got five. [For an interesting thought experiment, ask yourself how much alcohol — and of what grade — you get now, and what that says about your position in society.] Historians pondering the primacy of alcohol in these ancient lawbooks have even conjectured that the original function of hierarchy was to permit some men to hoard mass amounts of alcohol while ensuring that a sufficient labor force —*pacified by their meager alcohol rations to discourage revolt or escape* — was always at hand to keep farming and brewing. Kings used golden drinking straws to sip from giant containers of beer, a tradition that has been preserved in plastic throughout the Western world. The pivotal role of alcohol in this first hierarchy is easy to recognize, even from a cursory reading of these records: as in every authoritarian

regime, “justice” was a cardinal concern, and the punishment decreed for all who violated any of the laws governing beer was death by drowning.

Though it was yet newly-invented, beer influenced every single facet of emerging human civilization. Before the invention of money, beer was used as the standard item of barter — a money before money! In Ancient Egypt, a keg of beer was the only proper gift to offer to the Pharaoh when proposing marriage to his daughter, and kegs of beer were sacrificed to the gods when the Nile overflowed. As civilization spread, so did beer. Even in regions as remote as Finland, beer played a crucial role from the moment civilization struck: the *Kalevala*, the ancient Finnish epic poem, had twice as many verses devoted to beer than to the creation of the earth. Brewing could be found wherever civilization was, from the rudimentary villages of German barbarians to the god-emperors of ancient China. Only those human beings that still lived in harmony with wilderness, such as the indigenous peoples of North America and some sectors of Africa, remained alcohol-free — for a time.

The “classical civilizations” of Greece and Rome were as soaked in alcohol as they were in blood — the entire ancient world was lost in a collective hangover. This must have helped the nobles and philosophers to gloss over the fact that their “enlightened democracy” was based on the subjection of women and masses of slaves. The greatest work of “classical” literature, the *Symposium*, details a drinking party starring Socrates, whose claim-to-fame as a philosopher was ... augmented by his inhumanly high tolerance for alcohol. Studying his glorifications of the abstract over the real — *provided these weren't falsely attributed to him by his mendacious pupil, Plato* — one can still catch a whiff of the sour breath of a drunk.

BREW AND STATE

In life be I called Gambrinus, King of Flanders and Brabant, who first have made malt from barley and so conceived of the brewing of beer. Hence, the brewers can say they have a king as the first master brewer.

-

The patron saint of beer was a *monarch* of course.

The Roman Empire finally collapsed, as all empires eventually do (including this one, damn it!), after a generations-long drunken orgy of decadence and degeneration. The two most influential survivors were beer and Christianity. Brewing had once been the domain of women — but with the rise of the Catholic Church the monastic orders seized that domain for themselves, destroying one of the last bastions of primal matriarchy. Monks, wasting away in prayer, relied upon the drink to ease their miserable religious fasting — and so, not surprisingly, the consumption of beer was not considered a violation of their vows of non-consumption. Beer consumption in monasteries reached unheard-of levels, as monks were allowed to consume up to five liters of beer a day. Both the popes and early emperors such as Charlemagne would personally supervise the brewing process, hoping to create the perfect drink to obliterate both their consciousness and the consciousness of their subjects.

The birth of capitalism and the nation-state began with the commercialization of beer. The monasteries, overflowing with more beer than they themselves could consume, began to sell it to the surrounding villages. Monasteries doubled by night as pubs, and these men of God created some of the first well-managed profit-making enterprises. With the weakening of the power of the Church and the rise of the modern nation-state, kings and dukes moved in to close the tax-exempt monasteries. They began licensing out brewing to the rising merchant class, imposing a heavy tax that hastened the centralization of power and wealth in these nations. Beer became

the focus of every night and the mainstay of every celebration. Christmas “Yuletide,” for example, derives from “Ale tide.” To pacify women on their wedding night, an extra-potent “Bride Ale” was made, and so our word *bridal*. Everywhere the triumph of drunkenness, everywhere the triumph of God and State.

Her-Story and Hop-Story

Herewith shall brewers and others not use anything other than malt, hops, and water. These same brewers also shall not add anything when serving or otherwise handling beer, upon penalty of death.

—Beer Purity & Eugenics Laws of Bayers-Landshut

While the monasteries were commercializing beer and the nation-state thriving off it, a secret sisterhood of brewers remained in the peasant villages, fermenting strange and miraculous drinks for the poor and excluded of medieval society. These “witches” would ferment juniper berries, sweet gale, blackthorn, anise, yarrow, rosemary, wormwood, pine roots, henbane — each with effects unique and potent. For example, while drinks based off the “vile weed” hops were sedatives, many other fermented drinks would heal the sick, calm the angry, and give hope to the hopeless. Peasants would gather in their villages and drink sacred drinks brewed with yeast their grandmothers had passed down through generations. As they consorted and consumed these wild and varied drinks, all the degradations the priests and kings had heaped upon them would rise to their consciousness, and they would rise in revolt against their rulers. As these revolts were especially frequent and ferocious in the Holy Roman Empire, the various German nobles conspired to destroy the cultures that nourished them. The Duke of Bavaria, Wilhelm iv, passed the Beer Purity Act to quash all subversive diversity of fermentation. From 1516 onwards, beer was to be brewed only with the sedative hops: henceforth all alcohol was homogenized, and whatever medicinal or restorative fermentation technology had existed was lost. Hops-based brew causes a lack of coordination, an inability to think clearly, and eventually a slow death — all qualities needed to make both German peasants and modern temp workers incapable of revolt.

The women who had formerly been the respected brewers of the peasant villages were hunted down and burned at stake as “brew witches.” To this day, witches are rarely imagined without their brewing cauldrons. Burnings of witches on the grounds of heretical brewing processes continued until 1519. With this slaughter, the last independent and creative brewing centers were destroyed, and women prostrated before the drunken God of the repressed monks and greedy brewmasters. Through alcohol the common folk were subdued, and what passed for life in the Middle Ages became nasty, short, brutish, and — above all — drunk.

Globalize Alcoholism

Indeed, if it be the design of Providence to excavate these savages in order to make room for the cultivators of the earth, it seems not improbable that rum may be the appointed means. It has already annihilated all the tribes that formerly inhabited the sea coast.

—Benjamin Franklin who was, primitivists take note, the “discoverer” of electricity, among other things — though folk scientists will protest that he discovered elec-

tricity no more than Columbus discovered America. Perhaps “domesticator” is more accurate a term? Anyway, back to our story

As imperialist European civilization began its cancerous spread across the world, beer loyally led the charge. The first merchants, the Hansa, exported beer as far as India. The colonization of the United States began when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, instead of further south as planned, because they ran out of supplies: “especially our beere.” The founding fathers, including Washington and Jefferson, as well as being slave-owning aristocrats, were all brewers of beer. Coincidence?

The foundations of colonial genocide bear the stench of a long and protracted alcohol-induced nightmare — nearly every indigenous culture the Europeans encountered was destroyed by European alcohol and disease. The spreading of *firewater* among indigenous populations of North America went hand-in-hand with the distribution of lethal smallpox-infested blankets. Many of these cultures, without the experience of thousands of years of civilized alcoholism to draw upon, were even more subject than the Europeans to the ravages of “the civilized brew.” Between alcohol, disease, commerce, and guns, most of them were quickly and utterly destroyed. This process was not unique to North America — it was repeated throughout the world in every European colonial endeavor. While the drug of choice varied (sometimes it was opium, for example, as in the “Opium Wars” Great Britain waged to control China), alcohol was judged in many countries to be the most socially-acceptable tool of pacification.

The Industrial Revolution was hastened by the prospect of brewing beer yearlong, since the temperatures needed for brewing occur naturally only in winter. The steam engine invented by James Watt was immediately applied by Carl von Linde to enable artificial cooling, allowing those with the infrastructure of civilization to brew anytime, anywhere. Contrary to popular belief, Louis Pasteur invented pasteurization for *beer-making*, and only later was it adopted by the dairy industry. Yeast, which is found naturally in the air, is no longer even used in that state by modern brewing, as scientists have isolated a single yeast cell and induced its artificial reproduction for brewing. Following the invention of the assembly line, beer has come to be mass-produced on an ever larger scale. Over the two centuries since, the alcohol industry — like all capitalist industries — has been consolidated by a few major companies controlled feudally by families like the infamous Anheuser-Busch beer syndicate (infamous for its connections to right-wing groups and religious fundamentalists). As for other links between alcohol and far-right/fascist activity — perhaps the reader will recall where Hitler initiated his takeover of Germany.

Resist Capitalism — Desist Drinking

It’s no exaggeration, then, to say that alcohol has played a key role in the epidemic of fascism, racism, statism, imperialism, colonialism, sexism and patriarchy, class oppression, ungoverned technological development, religious superstition, and other bad stuff that has swept the earth over the past few millennia. It continues to play that role today, as the peoples of the whole world, finally universally domesticated and enslaved by global capitalism, are kept pacified and helpless by a steady supply of spirits. These evil spirits squander the time, money, health, focus, creativity, awareness, and fellowship of all who inhabit this universally occupied territory — “work is the curse of the drinking classes,” as Oscar Wilde said. It’s not surprising, for example, that the primary targets of advertising for malt liquor (a toxic by-product of the brewing process)

are the inhabitants of ghettos in the United States: people who constitute a class that, if not tranquilized by addition and incapacitated by self-destruction, would be on the front lines of the war to destroy capitalism.

Civilization — and everything noxious and baleful it engenders — will crumble when a resistance movement appears that can dam the flood of alcohol immobilizing the masses. The world now waits for a temperance that can defend itself, for a radical vision unclouded by drink, for a revolutionary sobriety that will return us to the ecstatic state of wild.

Our Anti-Authoritarian Heritage: Teetotalers Fighting Totalitarianism

It's not widely remembered that strict vegetarianism and abstinence from drink have been common in radical circles for many centuries. One need only thumb through the history books to amass a long list of heretics, Utopians, reformers, revolutionaries, communitarians, and individualists who adopted these lifestyle choices as essential elements of their platforms. We'll leave that list-making to the enthusiastic reader or obsessive critic — let it suffice to say that examples range from old white guys like Friedrich Nietzsche, who eschewed even caffeine while extolling the kind of ecstatic bacchanalism described herein, N. Vachel Lindsay, the visionary hobo of Springfield, Illinois who traversed the early United States to share his poetic appeals for temperance and willful unemployment, and Jules Bonnot and his fellow anarchist bankrobbers, who invented the getaway car together, to Malcolm X (of course), and the ezln — who prohibit alcohol as per the counsel of Zapatista women fed up with mens' bullshit. (The capitalist government of Mexico has tried to undermine revolutionary activity by importing beer into villages like Ocosingo; in that city and others; Zapatistas have responded by setting up barricades and fighting the soldiers who would enforce this "free trade" upon them.) One of Public Enemy's best songs attacked the role of alcohol in the exploitation and oppression of the African-American community. You can bet anarchist Leon Czolgosz was stone cold sober when he shot us President William McKinley to death. Oh, and — could we forget? — there's always Ian McKaye.

On the other side of the coin — can you imagine how much more progress we would have made in this struggle already if anti-authoritarians such as Nestor Makhno, Guy Debord, Janis Joplin, and countless anarcho-punks had focused more energy on the creation and destruction they loved so dearly, and less on drinking themselves to death?

Enough History! Let The Future Begin!

Perhaps so much talk about faraway times and peoples leaves you cold. Sure, history can be dead — and the history of triumphant armies and mass-murderer Presidents is indeed a history of death. All the same, we can learn from this past, as from each other, if we apply our imaginations and a keen eye for pattern. Professional historians and their fellow slaves of slaves might call this account subjective or biased, but then — which of *their* histories isn't? We're not the ones whose salaries depend on corporate sponsorships and patronage, anyway!

Even if you do decide that this history of alcoholism is "the" truth, for heaven's sake don't waste time looking back into the past for some long-lost state of primitive sobriety that — for all any of us know — may not even have existed. What matters is what we do in the present tense, what histories our actions create today. History is the residue — no, better, the excrement — of such activity; let us not drown in it like yeast, but learn what we must and then leave it behind.

Let nothing stop us, not even alcohol, as ingrained in our culture as it is! Those drunken despots and beer-bellied bigots may destroy their world and smother beneath their history, but we bear a new future in our hearts — and the power to enact it in our healthy livers.

About

Essays originally appeared as sympathetic but firm cultural analysis and comic relief in the reunion issue of *Inside Front*, an international journal of hardcore punk and anarchist action, published by *CrimethInc. ex-Workers Collective* in 2003.

CrimethInc. we are cement around the ankles of drowning liquor tycoons.

This special edition of *Anarchy & Alcohol* was released to commemorate the designer's fourth sober spring.

If you are wrestling with addiction to alcohol, write a letter to our recovery circle for more sober strategies from some of us who have kicked the habit.

Alcoholics Autonomous

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