



# Hooked on a Feeling:

## The Loss of Community and the Rise of Addiction

*Bored, miserable creatures are more likely to seek altered consciousness than engaged, contented ones. Animals in captivity, for example, are much more likely to use intoxicants than those in the wild. And one could say that civilization itself represents a state of captivity.*

- David Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*<sup>1</sup>

*Addiction, in one form or another, characterizes every aspect of industrial society*

- Morris Berman, *The Re-Enchantment of the World*<sup>2</sup>

His body was found hours after life had escaped it.

Lying against the wall between two bedroom windows there were two options for what might have been his last sight. One was looking out the window into the night sky. Perhaps it was peacefully calm and the sky was filled with stars. Possibly it was covered in a late fall haze from passing storms. Either of which would feel serene in comparison to the alternate view: the junkie's toolbox; a metal spoon bent at the tip of the handle, a lighter, a syringe, and a belt, his belt, strewn about the floor. Beyond that kit was the false hope of a closed door and its potential for life saving help.

Before this particular night, the door opened. Someone was there or someone came in to respond, to pull him back to life, to stop his body from shutting down forever as heroin invaded his

blood stream, inhibiting endorphins and overwhelming the body with such a euphoric relaxation that the body can literally forget to breathe.

This time the door didn't open. No one was there to stop this well-rehearsed play from reaching its logical and biological conclusion.

As he slumped against the wall, a fatal dose of heroin overtook his body. His respiratory system shut down. Life loosened its grasp for the final time and Mike was gone.

He was my brother.

And I want to believe his last sight was looking out the window.

That he might have seen something, anything, other than the empty room where he died alone.

Some wounds never heal. Within civilization, some are never given the chance.

We have taken the unfortunate position within Modernity to treat addiction, a chemical or social dependency upon substances or activities, as a personal flaw. A stigma: a sign of failure. We point to the most extreme examples of addiction to feel superior, to take pride in our own polite complicity.

But it's not that simple.

Particular addictions might be more obvious than others, but the impulse for addiction in general is something that we all carry within us. As eco-psychologist Chellis Glendinning contextualizes it, "addiction is an attempt to avoid confronting the pain that lies at the heart of the traumatic experience."<sup>3</sup> That experience: the domestication process, the universal experience within every civilized society. The tie that binds us.

Domestication in terms of plants and animals is an external force. It is a tinkering on the genetic level to breed out "undesirable" traits and increase those that conform. It is something put upon them.

For humans, the process isn't as simple: human domestication is social in nature. Our captivity is a matter of circumstance, not breeding. The domestication process in every single society where it is present attacks the same elements of our nature: the

need for community, the need for place, the need to feel like a part of something. All needs that move beyond the simple axiom of food, clothing and shelter. Domesticators, priests, politicians, and programmers all recognize that if they want our obedience they have to divert our bodies and our minds. If you look at the circumstances for humans outside of First World privileges, it becomes increasingly clear that force is the primary method. But even in the slums, shanties, and missionary camps, you catch the glimpse of the other side of the equation, the part those of us in the First and Second worlds are more familiar with: the illusion of choice. The dream of prosperity and wealth. Hopes for a better life ahead.

We look to the propagators of our misery for handouts. But the trauma that Chellis speaks of is the intuitive feeling, the deep-seated want for something more: for substance over subsistence. We may not be able to name it, but we seek it out.

And some of us are less able to keep that search under wraps. Looking back to Chellis again, the “hallmark” of addiction “is an *out-of-control, often aimless, compulsion* to fill the lost sense of belonging, integrity, and communion with substances like alcohol and food, through experiences like falling in love or gambling. The addicted person is trying desperately to satisfy real needs—but since either the external situation or the internal climate does not allow for satisfaction, she turns to secondary sources.”<sup>4</sup>

We don’t chastise the addicts because they are failures. We chastise them because their excesses are a reflection of our search, our escapes. Addicts are the dirty laundry of domesticated societies. We admire them when they hit bottom and wake up. When they overcome their addictions and fall in line like the rest of us. They become the subjects of movies, talk shows, and gossip columns about their success in attaining complicity.

Externalizing their situation, we continue in desperation to satisfy our own real needs. Alone together, we quietly find ways to fill our void.

And we continue to perpetuate the trauma of meaninglessness as we further internalize the domestication process.

Mike was neither the first nor the last relative or friend to die from an overdose, but the words “death by acute heroin overdose” on

the death certificate in my hands were absolute. He was the first person that I had lost to heroin just before the current national heroin epidemic would fully take root. Between 2002 and 2013, there was a 286% increase in deaths caused by heroin overdose. This came alongside a doubling of the number of actual heroin users in the same time period.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Center for Disease Control, heroin claimed 8,200 lives within the US in 2013. It quickly spread across all demographics.<sup>6</sup> Ushered by a surge in Oxycodone, a pharmaceutical opiate widely sold as OxyContin, a highly addictive and fast acting pain reliever, opioids found a new audience amongst the dispossessed.

The seekers.

The lost.

The bored.

Those who can't tolerate the crushing despair and disappointment that modernity has left us with. That is a percentage of the population that is growing exponentially. Even with a quadrupling of heroin related deaths in just over a decade, heroin is just a fraction of the 2013 average of over 100 fatal opioid related deaths *per day* in the US in 2013.<sup>7</sup>

And that number continues to rise. Quickly.

In 2014, that number rose to 125 opioid related deaths in the US daily.<sup>8</sup>

Heroin may be the more dramatic of addictions, but it promises its users a quick escape. As our technologically infused lives speed up, increasingly drastic measures deliver the promise of immediate gratification. For most of us, our addictions may appear slower: addiction to sugar, to alcohol, to social media, to an unending stream of 24 hour news or gossip, to video games, to misery, to shopping, to legal or illegal substances; all of us are looking for that distraction. We can escape into the vices of domestication to ignore the empty feeling, that longing deep within.

We crave that moment where giving in doesn't have to feel like giving up.

We crave that moment where dopamine hits our blood stream and spreads throughout our bodies. That moment where we can feel something. We crave feelings of euphoria. And we have shown

that we will seek it out at any cost.

Despite everything that we have experienced in the still of a life that civilization has brought us, we were not programmed by millions of years of evolution to desire nor to thrive in misery. The nomadic hunter-gatherer written into each of us knows this.

The forager's band is where our social life evolved. That place where life is a known rather than a question. Where we don't have to second-guess our purpose and significance. That place where we can exist, where we can share space, experience and presence.

This community is the place where we belong.

This is the place where we can air our vulnerabilities and give our fears an outlet so that together the community, the band, the society, can move on with life. It is here that wildness is embraced, that egalitarian relationships flourish, and that the complexities of life are understood without delusion.

It is our nature, as living beings, to be cautious. But it is not our nature to become absorbed by fear, to want and to seek out diversions. That is what domestication brings.

When we seek diversions, when we seek euphoria and ecstasy by whatever artificial means we have chosen, we are searching for that piece of ourselves that we find within each other. As animals, we have needs. And those needs extend beyond the tooth-and-nail material necessities that survival requires. Within each of us is that yearning: the want to see beyond survival, to live.

As humans, as animals, as a part of the community of wildness: we want to feel and live our purpose rather than to merely think it.

In lieu of direct experience, the domesticators have learned that we will take substitutes.

Their greatest fear is that we will realize that we don't have to.

Narcotics, sedatives, and other intoxicating substances aren't new. Modernity did not create them, but isolation drives us to them. Exponentially.

What these substances are is an indicator. As domestication, sedentary life, and civilization increase, so too does the reliance upon intoxicating substances within societies. The immediacy and integrated existence of capable individuals working as a cohesive

group enmeshed into the landscape can itself bring about those ecstatic states to heal worn bonds, to cope with the stress that life can bring, and to ease social tensions that arise when animals constantly interact with each other.

It is the removal from that place and circumstance, that connectivity, where doubt creeps in and the substances become the first of many necessary escapes. They become the instigator of specialization. The spirit of the warriors. The metaphysical justifier of hierarchs. The numbing fuel for workers, soldiers and consumers.

The history of domestication runs parallel with the ritual and habitual use of intoxicating substances. A by-product of alienation, exacerbated through war and technology, something like the current global heroin epidemic where people are literally injecting venom into their veins is a stinging reminder of our own removal. Our inability to cope with or recognize our own disconnect from the world and each other is the invitation.

For us to exist in this world as sane, functioning and healthy beings, we need to have relationships that give us the space to be joyful, enthusiastic, miserable, grumpy, sad, ecstatic, and whatever other emotion we are going to cycle through. The sense of isolation that we carry is a direct result of the sedentary lives we live as civilized people.

We are products of circumstance.

The gaping hole that addiction fills begins here: at the unresolved tensions of existence. Of not being given the place to express fear, anger, and joy without losing the ground we stand on.

The ingenuity of nomadic hunter-gatherer societies doesn't lie in some mystical sense of New Age Oneness embodied by all of its participants. Hunter-gatherers, like us, are human. That means they, like us, are far from perfect. They, like us, don't have to be.

What is most telling about these societies is that they are *functionally* egalitarian in a sustainable manner. This state of primal anarchy works. And it works because their societies are pragmatic.

To highlight the pragmatism of nomadic hunter-gatherer societies might seem at odds with our understandings of the world. Within civilization we uphold our hyper-rationalism and etiquette as virtues. This is our presumption, but we mistake diplomacy for

balance.

Civilization places politeness over honesty.

“Niceism,” as John Zerzan aptly called it, “keeps us all in our places, confusedly reproducing all that we supposedly abhor.” Civilization can endure atrocity and the horrific because it needs atrocious and horrific things to happen so that flicking on a power switch yields results. What it cannot endure is endemic negativity. We must always act “civilized” because we are forced, by proximity, to have to deal with each other.

The fragility of our society is most apparent in its incessant need for all of us to internalize its failings. If we didn’t, then the whole sham falls apart. So we uphold politeness as a virtue even as we suffocate each other. I think all of us have seen how effective that method really is.

Conversely, one of the primary reasons that immediate return hunter-gatherer societies, that is nomadic hunter-gatherer societies who do not store food,<sup>10</sup> function is because they’re built around our imperfect reality: to state it clearly, hunter-gatherers know that we can’t always get along and they act accordingly.

Mobility is the greatest factor here. In terms of reducing social (alongside ecological) stress, hunter-gatherer bands simply move often. Hunting and gathering is a system of procurement that requires going off into the surrounding world, in groups or alone, often daily. It gives people time away.

Movement is the greatest form of conflict resolution.

Flux, as observed by Colin Turnbull amongst the foraging Mbuti of the Congo and the Ik of Uganda, Kenya, and Sudan is a “highly effective social mechanism.” Groups and camps have no overarching identity or organization, which encourages the movement of individuals between them. This creates “a fluid band composition, a loose form of social structure” that allows individuals to simply remove themselves from social tension rather than to force proximity.<sup>11</sup>

James Woodburn adds to this that the Hadza (hunter-gatherers in Tanzania) “make use of environmental explanations to justify nomadic movements which ease conflict.”<sup>12</sup> Some disputes are best resolved by simply walking away.

The importance of this is emphasized in how *mobility as virtue*

is ingrained early in life. Amongst the Mbuti, there's effectively an internal society of children, the *bopi* (loosely translated as "children's playground"). Within it:

*children will find that mobility is one of their prime techniques for avoiding or for resolving a dispute, for once they move elsewhere their spheres move with them and the dispute is discarded. ... Chortles quickly become laughter, and this laughter becomes the Mbuti's prime weapon against conflict, aggression, and violence.*<sup>13</sup>

It cannot be overlooked that for many, like the Mbuti, "the one really strong cohesive factor is simply the forest itself."<sup>14</sup> The forest, the desert, the plains; whatever the wild community is that surrounds a group is vital to the health and well-being of the individual. Wildness is an actor in these societies, not merely a backdrop.<sup>15</sup> That adds another dimension to the curative powers and the conflict resolving nature of movement.

### *On the Importance of Healing*

Mobility is just one form of conflict resolution.

Bonding is another.

Healing, group activity, playing, singing, and dancing: these are the tools that a functioning community has at hand. When the individuals are participants rather than mere spectators, tensions can dissolve. The community pulls itself together. It confronts tension by putting it front and center, by enacting ritualistic displays of conflict.

Looking again to the Mbuti, children and adolescents engage regularly in group games, some rougher than others. Tug-of-war is a prime example. A game that we almost all recognize, but in this context there is a ritualization of conflict resolution through enacting it. Turnbull observes that it "is expected that the conflict will arise within the age grade of adulthood, to some extent it is their role to manifest such conflict, and it is the role of youth to resolve such conflict if they cannot avert it."<sup>16</sup>

These kinds of games interweave an ongoing thread throughout hunter-gatherer life: to blur the lines between entertainment,

healing and conflict resolution. If games can mitigate conflict, then there is no reason why life shouldn't err on the side of fun, of happiness, and enjoyment. That is a sad reminder for those of us afflicted by Modernity.

So what does this have to do with addiction, with intoxication?

This is where the ingenuity of function within immediate return societies comes back into play: their rituals, those daily or weekly outbreaks of communal healing and bonding, work because they make people happy. Mobility can resolve tension, but attaining euphoric states as a community can dissolve them.

The healing dance is a near universal amongst nomadic hunter-gatherer societies. Variations are relatively minor, but the form is almost universal. Dances are largely unorganized, unplanned. They can be started or stopped on a whim. They encourage group involvement and often centralize around ritualistic enactments of causes of group tension; sexuality, relationships, aging, and the like. They often begin as the sun goes down and can last all night or as long as the participants get joy from them.

The purpose is to achieve ecstatic states. To experience mutual derived joy. While the dances can occur around illness and their participants largely attest to their ability to heal or comfort the sick, the healing spoken of here is social and psychological in nature. Anthropologist James Woodburn reiterated of the *epeme* dance of the Hadza in Tanzania "that the point of the ceremony is to heal rifts and bring everyone together."<sup>17</sup>

But what is telling is that ecstatic states are reached through the combination of singing and dancing (with or without a fire). Historically speaking, it is the lack of substances used to attain these states that makes them particularly relevant here: healing requires communal engagement. Intoxicants serve to bring individuals to euphoric states, but the dances take an entire community there. The want for an individualistic indulgence largely does not exist within these societies prior to contact and conquest by neighboring or intruding societies.

In his 1971 survey of hunter-gatherer societies, anthropologist Carleton Coon observes that until "outsiders began bothering them" nomadic hunter-gatherer societies were notably free from

the use of intoxicants.<sup>18</sup> Intoxicants exist in the wild, but the circumstances for using them largely do not.

But it is worth making a further clarification.

It is improbable that nomadic hunter-gatherers never had interactions with intoxicating plants, as we shall see with peyote, a number of them are used for medicinal reasons, typically below the threshold of intoxication. I'm specifying habitual and ritual use because they are cultural phenomena: a reflection of what communities find of value. Among nomadic hunter-gatherers, that indicates an implicit disregard for intoxicating substances prior to colonization or settlements. It is the correlation of the habitual and ritual use of intoxicating substances with domestication alongside the lack of substances in attaining group ecstasy that is most telling.<sup>19</sup>

I have to take a step back here.

Looking further into the details of communal healing and methods of resolution, it is no wonder that isolation within hunter-gatherer societies is a non-issue.

And at the same time it is no wonder that isolation is such an issue within Modernity. We literally build walls around ourselves. We live amongst strangers. We bury ourselves within a society that "is made up of vast numbers of traumatized individuals" where the only universal is an unspoken, unaddressed and on-going trauma.<sup>20</sup> Our tension isn't met with joy; it is catered to with *violence as entertainment* in movies, video games, or the faceless bullying of the internet.

We can see the power of community through healing dances because the absence of our own community, of place, of touch, weighs so heavily on each of us. Even addressing that void directly tears at my soul: this is domestication, this is our lives redirected. This is the human animal, removed from context, just destroying itself, over and over and over again trying to find that piece of us that only exists within each other.

And as we walk past each other in unthinkable numbers, each of us carrying our personalized traumas, the community we need is literally all around us, but at the same time so buried in constant socialization and the virtues of commodification that we just don't reach out until after we break. That is if we ever reach out at all.

*Healing*, that term so bastardized by self-help gurus and conferences, offers us real grounding. And yet we give it no real outlet unless it's just another commodified attempt to find solace in the cracks of complacency.

For hunter-gatherers, healing isn't a *retreat*. It is an *engagement*. Among the Huaorani of Ecuador, tensions surrounding gender are ritualized not as "an expression of hostility" but "as a means to overcome potential conflict and transform social division into necessary complementarity."<sup>21</sup> Unlike the religious rituals of priests, communal healing is an outpouring of the anarchistic spirituality of life integrated with the community of wildness.

It is accessible to all.

As we will see in two immediate return hunter-gatherer societies, it is the bonds of community that allows the 'healing energies' (*n/um* for the Ju/'hoansi, *be* for the Pygmies) to arise.

*N/um*<sup>22</sup>

*Community is at the dance, and the dance establishes community. ... In a real sense, it is the community, in its activation of n/um, which heals and is healed. ... And there are no restrictions in the access to n/um. In egalitarian fashion, all receive healing. N/um is shared throughout the community. It is not meant to be hoarded by one person; perhaps it never can be.*

- Richard Katz, *Boiling Energy*<sup>23</sup>

The true spirit of egalitarian societies is exemplified by the healing rituals of the San, hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari. That ritual is called *kia* and its purpose is to attain "an altered state of consciousness, enhanced to the degree and quality of transcendence."<sup>24</sup>

As the San see it, *kia* is meant to activate *n/um*, a "substance that lies in the pit of the stomach of men and women who are *n/um k'ausi*—medicine owners" which "becomes active during a healing dance." The dancers heat *n/um* through dance and song induced trance until it boils and "rises up the spinal cord and explodes in the brain."<sup>25</sup> The !Kung consider it to have been passed on through their culture, a claim they can easily verify through depictions in their ancient rock art.<sup>26</sup>

The ritual is initiated by healers, beginning at night and lasting as long as it takes for the *n/um*, or “boiling energy,” to do its work. It is important to distinguish healers from shamans. Healers lack specialization, their role isn't to interpret the world but to take part in collectively giving in to it. It has not been uncommon to find that most of the adults at any given location consider themselves to be healers.<sup>27</sup>

*N/um* is available to everyone. As Nisa, a !Kung woman and healer, puts it: “Both men and women learn how to cure with it, but not everyone wants to. Trance-medicine really hurts!”<sup>28</sup> The physical and emotional toll of leading that transcendent state isn't to be taken lightly. There is nothing personal about *n/um* and no expectation to take on the role of a healer. Healers take on *n/um* for the sake of the group, the culture and themselves simultaneously and without contradiction.<sup>29</sup>

The dance itself starts off spontaneously. Unless it is meant to cure or comfort someone with a serious illness, the planning is largely non-existent.<sup>30</sup> It begins at night and takes place around a fire. There is a semblance of sexual division of labor with the roles, but, like all things in a truly egalitarian society, they have room for flexibility and lack any pretense of sex-based values. During the *kia* ritual, it is men that dance and enter trances. Women sing and tend the fire, yet the “men insist that it is the women who are crucial to the success of the dance. Without their sustained singing, the *n/um* cannot boil.”<sup>31</sup>

Women entering the dance or entering trance isn't unheard of within the context of *kia*. But there is an equally important women's dance, !*Gwah tsi*, where the roles are reversed. !*Gwah tsi*, like *kia*, lacks planning and either can occur without conflict as needed, upwards of multiple times per week.

Both dances center around the creation and sustaining of involved rhythms with drums, instruments and, most importantly, vocalization. The ritual has two parts, the first is about getting the dancers to that trance state, which permits the second, a “process of curing and the collective emergent sense of fellowship.”<sup>32</sup> The Nharo “deny any connection between *dagga* [a native plant similar in effect to marijuana that began to be used after the Nharo were settled] and the trance ritual. Instead, trance is achieved through

the vigorous, sustained, and physically exhausting activity of dancing around a nocturnal fire, to the chanting of women—both the fire and the chanting producing hypnotic effects.”<sup>33</sup> This is something that I think most of us are familiar with: the enchantment of music, friends and fire is something we are arguably drawn to on a very primal level.

The curing aspects of the ritual come through the emphasis of physical touch. Nisa describes the experience of healing:

*As you being to trance, the n/um slowly heats inside you and pulls at you. It rises until it grabs your insides and takes your thoughts away. Your mind and your senses leave and you don't think clearly. Things become strange and start to change.*

*You touch people, laying on hands, curing those you touch. When you finish, other people hold you and blow around your head and your face. Suddenly your senses go “Phah!” and come back to you. You think, “Eh hey, there are people here,” and you see again as you normally do.”<sup>34</sup>*

It is important to shake loose any notions of “ritual” that we may carry with us. I use the term because it is technically fitting, but the context shifts everything. The egalitarian, free-flowing nature of these healing rituals is as absolutely contrasting with religious ritual as virtually any civilized person would know it. So it's easy to transpose our biases and experiences. But to do so would be to miss the point entirely.

The trance element of a ritual is taken very seriously, but the gathering is far more informal (something we will see further exemplified amongst the Pygmies). It is, in effect, a “social gathering” more akin to a party than a religious ceremony. It is a “time of general excitement and festivity, a time for people to ensure their safety, to suspend conflicts, and to act out and verify the common bond that unites them.” Not unafraid to ruin the vibe, people “talk, joke, flirt, and comment on everything that happens.”<sup>35</sup>

After the trance is reached, the mood shifts to playfulness. During *kia*, all join in the dance, including women and children. While expressing *n/um* may be painful for the healer, the ecstatic

joy of the group is infectious. The bonds are healed to dance another day.<sup>36</sup>

It is worth pointing out the relationship between mobility and healing rituals. It has been noted that the “actual frequency of dances is influenced by ecological and sociological factors.”<sup>37</sup> Namely, the longer bands have stayed around water holes or at times of increased population density, the more often dances occur.<sup>38</sup> When new bands join up at a waterhole, dances can happen nightly.

This brings home an important point: hunter-gatherers are capable individuals. They learn early on how to survive, how to forage, how to hunt, how to sustain their own lives.

From an individualistic perspective, they have no real reason to seek other people out, but that fractured perspective is our own baggage. It simply doesn't exist outside of the world that domestication has created. This is further evidence of the innate needs for community that we, as humans, as animals, carry within us.

The tragedy is that it needs to be reiterated.

*Be*

*I tend to consider that when people partake in a collective act, the participants behave with propriety and affinity to the group or social gathering.*

- Daisuke Bondo<sup>39</sup>

*Be* among the Baka (a branch of the Pygmies of the Congo) is reminiscent of both *n/um* and the healing rituals. *Be* “as a noun means both ‘song’ and ‘dance’.”<sup>40</sup> Among the Mbuti, it is reflected in the *molimo* and *elima* rituals, reflecting a “community festival” led predominantly by men and women respectively.

*Be* and *molimo* are in some ways even less of a ritual. *Molimo* “consists of singing daily to the forest.” Both men and women within the Mbuti love singing, often even more than dancing. Compared to the desert and plains dwelling San, the forests of the Congo can be filled differently by the songs of birds and calls of other animals. Anthropologist Jerome Lewis has argued convincingly that it is this ongoing symphony of the forest that language

arose from, first as song and then as speech.<sup>41</sup>

This is something that should again sound familiar. Among the Huaorani it was noted that they were always chanting in a way that takes on a central role in their society and “plays an active role in the creation and life of society itself”.<sup>42</sup> Melodies fold into the songs of the forest, but the lyrical content can be as mundane as just talking about the tasks at hand. But those chants also “constitute a form of cultural knowledge through which it is their very personal autonomy that co-residents come to share.”

For the Mbuti, this aspect of *molimo* “is an attempt to awaken the living and benevolent forest to the band’s misfortune, and to make the forest a cheerful place again.”<sup>43</sup> The community of the wild takes on a very real and active part of daily life. It grants solace and healing. It is the essential backdrop for the more lived elements of the Mbuti ritual.

That is a lesson that is instilled from birth. Primal anarchy is built into the play of children. Within the *bopi*, the world of the Mbuti is reflected:

*While they are learning the fun and beauty of working and playing with not against other, they are in a positive way learning by prescription rather than proscription, by being told what they should do rather than what they should not do. There is the essence of cooperative, communal life, of which competition is the antithesis. With cooperativeness in action comes community of spirit, and with community of spirit the foundation for truly social behavior is secured; social order becomes possible without law, as we know it, and without the threat of physical coercion, and without anything even approaching a penal system.*<sup>44</sup>

The children have their own ritual dance, *bina*, which mirrors the dances of adults and the sexual themes that will make more sense in adolescence. The *bina* is considered a social dance. It is a form of play where children are replicating the behavior of adults, preparing for the cultural world that they will be inheriting themselves.

Within the Baka, children can even take part in the *be* rituals, which are innately more spiritual and communal in nature, purely for the fun of it. For adolescent women, the rituals carry over

into the *elima*, which celebrates the onset of menstruation among young girls. Menstruation is something that the Mbuti celebrate loudly. The *elima* festivals begin when two girls in a band begin menstruating within a few days of each other.<sup>45</sup> The ritual lasts for days and involves the entire band and extended kin.

There is an air of freedom here, the girls are not kept in secrecy nor subject to a litany of ritual restrictions in terms of diet and behavior, which we see quickly vanish as domestication arises. There is a distinct and painful chasm between how the Mbuti treat *elima* and how their neighboring agricultural villagers see it: “as far as the villagers are concerned, evil spirits emanate from the forest.”<sup>46</sup>

For them, there is little more evil than the wildness inherent in the menstruation of women.

For the civilized, wildness and any other reminders of our animality must remain hidden. That is how weak the veneer of domestication is.

Among the Baka, *be* rituals are far more concise than the lengthy *elima* or the daily singing aspects of the *molimo* festivals. And yet, here again, we find a notable lack of formality.

Dances begin at night and take as long as is required. Unlike the San, they have no fires: only dancing and singing in the darkness of night.<sup>47</sup> The Hadza take that further, whose *epeme* dances “usually occur every night when there is no moon in the sky.”<sup>48</sup> For the Hadza, *epeme* is slightly more formal in nature; it is a dance that reflects on the killing of large game. The men dance stiffly here, while the movement in other nightly dances “they can move so gracefully and beautifully” dancing with women and emulating the sounds and movements of animals.<sup>49</sup>

For *be* to commence, dancers simply start dancing to see if others will take part or not. The “social relationships of the Baka society” are “embodied in the performances.”<sup>50</sup> It is telling that taking part is completely voluntary. If the energy isn’t there, dances simply stop and no hard feelings are held.

There is a distinct lack of ego to any of this. If the group wants the healing, wants the dance, it happens. Otherwise camp life goes on without it. There is no residual or social tension after a dance dissolves, it either happens or it doesn’t.

Community gives us the outlets necessary for attaining ecstat-

ic joy and also gives the space to just comfortably absorb into the wild surroundings.

Without force.

Without punishment.

What we see here are intact communities that learned to mitigate conflict, to experience joy as they remain enmeshed with the world of wildness. This isn't coincidental. These societies embraced the imperfections of being human, of being animal; they danced, sang, argued, or moved their way through it. Violence wasn't unheard of but oppression, coercion, and hierarchy did not exist.

When times got tough they turned towards each other and they turned towards the wild.

There is no doubt that hunter-gatherers, foragers by their very nature, would have knowledge of intoxicating substances. But it becomes clearer why they didn't turn to them. The circumstances for addiction, the need for escape, simply weren't present. The power of community, the ability to heal bonds, to move further into the landscape, to be integrated with wildness; all of these things offer so much to define and celebrate our lives as humans, as animals.

It becomes more obvious that the question at hand has less to do with why hunter-gatherers, by and large, didn't use intoxicating substances, but why anyone else did.

*Intoxicants and Interpreters: the Rise of the Shaman*

*Spontaneous healers, usually women, have always accompanied humans. But the shaman is a latecomer—part of the agricultural fear of curses and evil spirits, the use of intoxicants, the spread of male social dominance, the exploitation of domestic animals (especially the horse) as human helpers, and the shift of sedentary peoples toward spectatorship rather than egalitarian participation.*

- Paul Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*<sup>51</sup>

The myth of Progress tells us that humanity took certain steps on the way from hunter-gatherers to post-modern consumers. It would appear that humans made a conscious choice to settle, to

garden, then to farm and take up warfare, expanding with increasing speed until we got in the mess we're currently in.

To state it bluntly, that never happened.

Most of the "stages" between immediate return hunter-gatherers and civilizations are unrecognizable to each other. As radically different as the societies between nomadic hunter-gatherers and hyper-technological civilizations may be, the domestication process works effectively the same way: it pulls apart our needs as human beings and redirects them. This is not to say that all of the societies in between are one in the same. That absolutely is not the case: it was almost universally sedentary *hunter-collector* societies that created civilizations. Outside of a tiny handful of examples, it wasn't gardeners.

Hunter-collector societies are hunter-gatherers who become reliant on a surplus of hunted meats (to be carried by pack animals), dried fish, or wild grains. Hunter-collector societies reflect the widest range of variation of all hunter-gatherers, going from the largely egalitarian dog-sled using hunter-gatherers of the Arctic to the hierarchical native states of sedentary hunter-collectors in the Pacific Northwest of North America or to the sedentary grain harvesters who would develop agriculture in Mesopotamia, around the Mediterranean Sea, in Ethiopia, India, and China.<sup>52</sup>

We'll come back around to hunter-collectors shortly, but to really understand how we've diverged from communal celebrations of ecstasy, it's worth looking at the horticultural and delayed return hunter-gatherers who began to part ways with them to understand what happened.

It must be stated clearly that this is a process that most likely happened slowly or imperceptibly. We're talking about changes that came over decades or generations unless neighbors spread their vices quickly (a tragic reality of colonization, as we will see).

What we will be focusing on here are the circumstances under which the use of intoxicants, namely in ritual, arise. This is our grey area, but it is necessary to understand how the role of the healing dance is specialized, further ritualized, and, most importantly, increasingly aided by the use of intoxicants. It's a side step in the story of addiction, but in looking closely at this spread of societies where remnants or intact pieces of our ancestral lineage of healing

remain, we catch glimpses of the resilience of community and the exceptional impact of civilizations.

As most of the societies that we discuss were hit the hardest and most abruptly by the flooding spread of civilization, it's the unfortunate reality that the use of the substances left a door open, only to be followed immediately by the incorporation of the colonizer's alcohol, tools, and processed foods, often just amplifying the reality of colonization.

The results of that process are something we will return to. However, there are no secrets here, this is the living, breathing tragedy of civilized life: there is no way to have been prepared for the onslaught that civilization carries.

And it never ends well.

The link between the use of intoxicants and domestication begins with stored foods.

Societies with storage are considered *delayed return* which contrasts with the *immediate return* societies of nomadic hunter-gatherers. This might seem like a minor point, but I don't say this to damn horticulturalists and delayed return hunter-gatherer societies. I make it to understand how domestication functions.

And to that end, the distinction works.

Nomadic hunter-gatherers live in mobile bands; they are, by the nature of their subsistence, never physically removed from their land-base. They are foraging daily, hunting or fishing most days, and travelling between camps fairly often. They have no want or need for long-term storage because it's more they would have to carry or plan around.

This is an important point for understanding how egalitarian societies function: sharing is implicit. If you can't or won't store meat, fish or anything else then there is no reason not to share. This is why nomadic hunter-gatherers were personally capable of sustaining themselves in physical terms and it underlies the importance of their social relationships. It makes sense that they lacked specialists, that they had many healers instead of a few shamans: there was no real mediation between individuals, the group and the wider community of wildness.

As storage arises, either in terms of storehouses or literally

being buried in gardens, so too does property. The focus slowly begins to shift from daily treks through the forest to relying on grown and stored foods. The population check afforded by “the contraceptive on the hip” (carrying and exclusively nursing a child combined with the later age of first menses among nomadic peoples) begins to fade and population pressures rise alongside ecological and social ones.

It is here that two new roles emerge: the Big Man (a precursor to the chief) and shamans (a precursor to the priest). A Big Man’s role is to mitigate conflict socially; a shaman’s role is to mitigate conflict spiritually, it is not uncommon that the positions overlap. Both roles arise as the first specialists in the human timeline. There was neither a place nor a need for them in nomadic hunter-gatherer bands.

The shaman becomes tasked with both healing and cosmological interpretation. While it was common for all nomadic hunter-gatherers to have interactions with spirits,<sup>53</sup> Mircea Eliade, in his definitive overview on shamanism, noted “‘Seeing spirits,’ in dream or awake, is the determining sign of the shamanic vocation.”<sup>54</sup> The shaman took up residency between the worlds of the living and the dead. Which is why in horticultural societies throughout South America the shaman’s initiation was a “ritualistic death:” “the shaman must so die that he may meet the souls of the dead and receive their teaching; for the dead know everything.”

The Jivaro, Amazonian horticulturalists, exemplified this initiation rite by subjecting the shaman-to-be with intoxicants, restrictions, and blows until they lost consciousness “in a manner assimilated to a ritual death.”<sup>55</sup> Along the west coast of North America, among the semi-sedentary and sedentary hunter-collector tribes of “the Kawaiisu, the Luiseno, the Juaneno, and the Gabrielino, as among the Diegueno, the Cocopa, and the Akwaala, the aspirant awaits the vision of the tutelary animal after becoming intoxicated by jimson weed.”<sup>56</sup>

The shaman as a specialist had an increasing demand put upon them by their patrons for resolution. Among Inuit communities (among the most egalitarian of delayed return hunter-gatherers), the demands upon shamans arose for a cosmology “existing out of the quest to resolve moral dilemmas, simultaneously offers an ac-

count of why misfortunes occur, and how they can be rectified.”<sup>57</sup> It was in the shaman’s own interest to “constrain how cosmologies are elaborated and represented.”<sup>58</sup>

The position of the healer arises from community; the position of the shaman arises from a need for communal accountability. It makes sense that the pathways taken would necessarily be different or far more extreme. As the healer can’t attain a trance on their own, the shamans almost universally require an external source.

That came, by and large, from intoxicants.

It is worth clarifying that the point here isn’t to equate shamans with hucksters. By specializing in healing and transcendence as a career, they are certainly going to master their craft. It is probable, if not likely, that their worlds often overlapped and that a shaman might impose their own self interests, but it would be wrong to presume that this possibility negates their intents and effectiveness as spiritual and social mitigators.

It is also apparent that as the societies shifted, so too did the methodology. Removed even slightly from the conditions that foster egalitarianism in band societies alternative narratives must originate in a sense of cosmic hierarchy.

The needs we have as individuals or as community still come about in dances, but a new role of spectator, of consumer, creep into view.

Our want for place and connectivity becomes a story over an experience. Even in its earliest stages, domestication begins by substituting our needs, by channeling them through arising social institutions. That is the requirement for power. It is as true amongst delayed return societies as it is for those of us living in a post-industrial glut of hyper-consumerism.

The second domesticators fail in reinforcing their worldviews, either psychologically or physically, the entire veneer crumbles. Our minds search out the cracks, our bodies suffer from regiments and drudgery, but it is the ability of civilization to offer alternative visions and means for euphoria or a sense of connectivity that has us turning towards addictions. Guzzling the alternatives to fill that void.

It is worth reiterating that domesticators largely didn’t invent intoxicating substances (until relatively recently at least). We just

didn't have a need to seek them out.

But sadly we know that circumstances changed.

We see a shift between the opening of doors through shamanic-induced-trance and the incorporation of outside sources for intoxicants.

Eliade argues that Inuit shamans induced trances through exposure to freezing temperatures along with self-imposed thirst and hunger. He found that Ugrian shamans of north-central Asia and the Lapps of northern Europe began using mushrooms to induce a trance in relatively recent history.<sup>59</sup> Stating further:

*Intoxication by mushrooms also produces contact with the spirits, but in a passive and crude way. But, as we have already said, this shamanic technique appears to be late and derivative. Intoxication is a mechanical and corrupt method of reproducing "ecstasy," being "carried out of oneself"; it tries to imitate a model that is earlier and that belongs to another plane of references.*<sup>60</sup>

The mushroom in question is Fly Agaric, which isn't the most lucid of intoxicating mushrooms. The technique employed by shamans to induce a trance was to eat the mushrooms then drink their slightly fermented, mushroom laced urine that increased the hallucinogenic potency.<sup>61</sup>

Psychedelics such as Fly Agaric would eventually become a powerful means of shamanic vision, but their prevalence and availability arose alongside agriculture.

A more notable psilocybin mushroom, *Psilocybe cubensis*, may likely not have spread widely until the introduction of cattle farming.<sup>62</sup> It shares an ecological niche with its relative *Psilocybe semmelanceata*, or Liberty Cap, in that it "favours acid upland pastures and grows in the kinds of conditions where the only viable form of agriculture is sheep- or cattle-farming."<sup>63</sup> That form of agriculture involves the removal of dense forests to clear room for pastures, this is the ecology that *Psilocybe* grow in. A similar psychedelic mushroom, *Straphoria cubensis*, has been linked so closely with cow-dung that it has been called a "weed" for "high-technology cattle-raising cultures."<sup>64</sup>

Glorified though psychedelic mushrooms have become within our culture, Andy Letcher writes in his history of the “magic mushroom,” that it “would be quite wrong of us to assume that just because a magic mushroom is abundant now it has been so throughout all of human history and prehistory.”<sup>65</sup>

Likewise, cultural preoccupations with psychedelic mushrooms may cause us to overstate their impacts: Psilocybin is “about a hundred times less potent than LSD.”<sup>66</sup> *Cubensis* is the basis for the “magic mushrooms” that are sold on the street, which itself may be a source of misunderstanding. A lot of reported experiences within civilization have actually been with store bought mushrooms, laced with PCP, LSD, or MDMA, dried and sold as “magic mushrooms.” When a team of scientists undertook an 11-year study of 886 samples that were said to be “psilocybin,” they discovered that only “28 percent of these were hallucinogenic mushrooms, while 35 percent were other drugs, mostly LSD or PCP and 37 percent contained no drug at all.”<sup>67</sup>

The fanfare surrounding psychedelics has led to misconceptions about their universality. Among the Kuma from the Wahgi Valley of the West Highland region of New Guinea the consumption of a mushroom called *nonda* before trance-dances led to false reports of its hallucinogenic qualities. Upon further inspection, *nonda* comes from the *Boletus* family and “no trace of any hallucinogenic compound has ever been found within them.”<sup>68</sup>

What we see here is how fast cultural change can occur. Within decades or less of contact, the role of healers can quickly be supplanted and replaced by shamans. The role of the trance-dance begins to wane as the use of intoxicants arises.

This shouldn't be surprising.

Contact is context. New diseases and new technologies go hand-in-hand with the colonizers who bring them. Forests are cleared, mountains are destroyed, lands are seized, and people are killed. These aren't the circumstances in which healers have thrived, they are beyond the realm of understanding for grounded and rooted cultures. They need answers for questions that would have never been asked before and crisis dictates the new narratives.

The role of the shaman takes root to help reconcile the eradication of community as civilization increases its grasp and expands

further into the forests.

The non-shamanic curers and healers of the hunter-gatherer Netsilik of what is now the Nunavut territory of Canada, *krilas-oktoq*, were within range of contemporary times and practicing a “head lifting” or “touching” approach to healing soon after they began to settle.<sup>69</sup> This was a practice that began to fall by the wayside as the role of shamans increased after contact. Likewise, the Ese Eja (hunter-gatherers of Bolivia and Peru) would have their *eyamikekua* hand-based healing displaced by the introduction of *ayahuasca* (a native intoxicant) by neighbors. Representing a transition that “is consistent with the transformation of a society being symbolically and materially centered around animals and hunting to one more centered around agriculture and plant based extractivism.”<sup>70</sup>

The Huaorani shamans called *meñera*, “parents of jaguars,” turned towards manioc beer for their rituals and dances. A change in line with moving from hunting and gathering to shifting cultivation, which as “we know it today is the product of the steel axe, and also the machete.”<sup>71</sup>

It becomes clear that the waters get murky here. The Western infatuation with shamanism and trance-inducing drugs obscures elements of great recent historic change and colonization. So there are instances where seemingly minute differences in subsistence reflect in far greater differences in how trances are induced.

More to the point, that line, particularly under outside pressure, can blur easily between when the substance is assisting the trance and the shaman is becoming addicted.

*Epepe* use by Yanomami shamans drives that point home.

*Epepe*<sup>72</sup>

*Hostile demons, scattered in various locations, haunt the different levels of the universe. They are busy devouring souls, which they capture by surprise inside the dwellings. If they are vigilant, if they have knowledge and power, the protecting shamans recognize them immediately thanks to the fact that each demon has his own particular path and odor. The shamans know how to avoid the perils that threaten those who approach supernatural beings and*

*how to restore their souls to the sufferers; if they fail, the soul is “eaten” and the body, deprived of its energy, of its “center,” gradually wastes away and dies.*

*Transformed into hekura, the shamans travel through cosmic space to recover a soul from a demon or from enemies, or to steal one in order to “eat” it.*

- Jacques Lizot, *Tales of the Yanomami*<sup>73</sup>

The Yanomami came to fame for what can only be considered a tragedy at the cross roads of Modernity and colonization.

Anthropologist and utter scumbag Napoleon Chagnon drew them into a public spectacle, a case point to establish his socio-biological theories about the innate violence of humans within a state of nature. He wrote about the extensive and enduring traditions of warfare within this horticultural society within the Amazon. He didn't create that warrior culture: that is another by-product of settlements and property, it typifies horticultural and hunter-collector life-ways.

What he did neglect was to include his own role in what can only be considered genocide.

It has been argued that the degree of horticulture amongst the Yanomami is itself a recent historical condition. The ecocidal decimation of the Amazon by civilization forced the Yanomami deeper into the forest or to settle nearer to trade posts and missions.<sup>74</sup> It was missionaries, colonizers and Chagnon himself that had introduced steel tools, Western foods, and guns into the equation alongside diseases that the Yanomami would have had no immunity towards.<sup>75</sup>

This is a story that repeats itself throughout the history of civilization.

And it is gut wrenching.

Like the Jívaro mentioned earlier, the steel axe made gardening manioc easier. And like the Jívaro, the Yanomami used it to make manioc beer. Paired with the crushing reality of the colonial frontier and an already existing warfare complex, the alcohol no doubt added to the fierceness with which Yanomami groups fought each other, also increasing the tensions within the *shapono*, or communal living structures.

This would have been ample cause to amplify the role of the shaman. And here the role of the shaman is absolutely tied to *epene*, a native intoxicant. *Epene* wasn't used exclusively by shamans, but it would become anticipated that the more they crossed that line between the world of the *shapono* and the world of the dead, the more they had to offer in terms of metaphysical explanations for the rapidly deteriorating state of the world.

The anthropologist Kenneth Good spoke of one Yanomami shaman as "a great shaman": "He took drugs each day, powdered *epene* seeds, a powerful hallucinogen that the Indians took turns blowing into each other's noses through a three-foot-long drug-blowing tube." In that trance-like state, it was their responsibility to interact with the spirits to heal the sick and protect the village from evil spirits.<sup>76</sup>

We can see that the spirit of the communal dance lingers here. The shaman didn't act alone. Good recounts a particular story in which a person was sick and in need of healing. The shaman "had taken the *epene* drug and was being assisted by five or six other men who had also taken the drug and were painted and decorated with feathers." The "shaman was drawing the sickness out of the patient, transferring it to others, then reviving them."<sup>77</sup>

This doesn't sound unfamiliar, but we see the level of communal involvement wane as the specialist arises. *Epene* isn't the property of the shaman, but a signature of sorts. It was expected that the shaman would chant and seek *hekura*, the world of the spirits, often. That is an expectation that may have pushed the shaman closer to addiction. In the middle of the night as the shaman awoke and began chanting at an hour when no one was awake to blow the *epene* into their nose, "he'd inhale the *epene* powder like snuff from his hand."<sup>78</sup>

This is a point I don't take lightly. The connection here is an absolute correlation between the external stress on a society and the internal demand for answers from the shaman. What may have originated as a vocation becomes an occupation in response to encroaching turbulence. In the case of the Yanomami, contact remains the antagonist in this equation.

As social and political tensions rose, *epene*, mixed with alcohol, would lose its spiritual side completely and become the pathway

to an intoxicated state for fighting over property and territorial disputes. Helena Valero, who had been kidnapped as a girl by the Yanomami and raised within their culture, told a story of a dispute between Namoeteri and Konakunateri bands while hunting boar. They entered one *shapono* and all ingested *epene* while arguments mounted until they began to beat each other with the blunt end of an axe.

In this case, that was enough to bring resolution. They concluded their battle saying: “We have beaten you hard and you have beaten us hard. Our blood has flowed, we have caused your blood to flow. I am no longer troubled, for our anger has passed.”<sup>79</sup>

There’s something to be said about that kind of conflict resolution and perhaps in times of less pressure and outside incursion maybe that’s how many disputes ended. Unfortunately the correlation stands: intoxicating substances are used in societies that may already have taken on some degree of domestication. As the threads that ignite egalitarian resolution of mobility and communal healing are pulled, intoxicated states will amplify the potential for violent outcomes.

And civilization requires expansion. Tensions arise from social, ecological and psychological pressures. As the paths to resolution are removed, the potential for decimation and/or further isolation become the only options.

As alcohol, guns and steel tools flooded the world of the Yanomami, the role of social intoxication had already been opened. The stage was set.

The results were absolute.

Emboldened with Western goods and weapons, the warfare that the Yanomami practiced fed the illnesses and stresses of contact. Starved as forests were felled, as game were displaced and killed, Yanomami warfare took on a new level of lethality. The West watched with a harrowed fascination as the bodies piled up as though they were mere spectators of some primeval process.

We simply removed ourselves from this situation as we justified the carnage as tribal war.

That story, as we know it, as they know it, as they struggle against their extinction in the face of Modernity, are familiar paths. Domestication deals in distraction because it trades in tragedy.

Without those pressures the Yanomami may have never settled at all, the tensions may have never required a culture built around warfare.

It may well be that their tensions could have resolved themselves without notice on a global scale, but what happened to the Yanomami is a problem the world over: civilizations did arise. Horticultural societies rarely ever grew into agriculture. Their scale was minor compared to what it could have been. Domestication has its consequences, but its presence doesn't ensure civilizations or States will arise.

The problem is that civilizations did arise.

Ethnocide goes hand-in-hand with the ecocide of contact and colonization.

But this is not a uniquely modern problem. This is the pattern that all civilizations follow, that all civilizations must follow. What might have happened to the Yanomami in time has a precedent: the Uto-Aztecan societies that ran through what is now southern North America. These societies are arguably the only cluster of civilizations to arise from horticulture.

And it is here that the use of intoxicants, mirrored in the distancing from and decimation of the earth, become deeply entrenched in the day-to-day lives within these societies.

### *Creating Gods and Eating Them*

If there is a single plant that can sum up the complex relationship between intoxicants and subsistence, it is peyote.

Long before Carlos Castaneda used Don Juan to introduce peyote to the West, the spindly cactus had a deep and significant role in the societies that existed throughout the deserts of what is now the Southwest of the US into Mexico.

However, that is a role that was attained not as a hallucinogen, but as a medicinal plant.

This isn't an uncommon situation. In lesser doses, nearly all intoxicating plants contain curative properties. That they become central to societies through ritual should come as little surprise given the curative power of healing dances and trance rituals. The space for overlap is clear. As the trance-dance becomes specialized,

the mildly intoxicating plants used medicinally could become an easy transition for inducing trance for the shamans and priests.

The Uto-Aztecan people are defined by a mutual language group with widespread roots. By 1519, the Uto-Aztecan language family spread nearly 2000 miles from the Aztecs through the Shoshone in the prairies of what is now Idaho and Wyoming.<sup>80</sup> It has been argued that, if you go back far enough, the entire swath of Uto-Aztecan speakers was all one society.<sup>81</sup> That group includes the native civilizations of the Aztecs in Mexico and the Hopi, Anasazi and Pueblo of the American southwest. Intricate trade routes permeated from the Incas in Peru and spread north from there.

Of the substances that would become abused by the civilizations within this massive trade network, most of them originate in their curative powers. *Datura* was used as an analgesic. *Nicotiana rustica* was used as a poultice and fumigant. *Peyotl*, as it would be called by the Aztecs, were no exception.<sup>82</sup> Among the Tarahumara, Huichol, and Tepehuane people, peyote was used externally for rheumatism, wounds, burns, snakebites, the stings of scorpions, and skin diseases.<sup>83</sup>

Early explorers such as Ortega and Hernandez made no mention of the hallucinogenic aspects of peyote, while writing about it extensively as a medicinal. In his 1938 account of the initial accounts of peyote usage amongst indigenous societies, Richard Evans Schultes writes “the principal appeal of peyote has been and continues to be centered around the therapeutic and stimulating properties of the plant and not around its vision producing properties.” Its visions, he surmises, “were incidental.”<sup>84</sup>

If you live in the desert, an ecosystem that necessitates quick and long movements, peyote is a pretty perfect companion. Among the Huichol and Tarahumara, whose ritualistic and long distance running (respectively) would become emblematic, peyote is a cure-all. It wards off sleep and hunger, reduces body temperature, decreases pain perception, is a mood stabilizer, and improves sensory perception.<sup>85</sup> It's not hard to see how a plant such as this wouldn't be widely used.

The different relationships with a plant that we widely understand as a hallucinogen might seem at odds with the interpretations that Castaneda or drug enthusiasts like Terrence McKenna

offer. But it's important to note that mescaline, the primary chemical within peyote, fluctuates greatly. The potency of peyote buttons depend on age, location and season of harvest, it is greater in the top half of the button, lesser in the bottom and almost none in the root. The levels of mescaline are tied directly to the rains, typically going up in content in the winter and down in the summer. Dried buttons can have as much as 5-6% of their total weight in mescaline content, though it is commonly found in the 1-2% range or less. The high percentage of mescaline in dried buttons owes itself directly to the high water content found in fresh peyote where mescaline content is as little as 0.2-0.3%.<sup>86</sup>

In light of this, the argument for incidental visions starts to make more sense.

However, we know that the relationship with peyote changes. The visions become a vital part of Uto-Aztec religious culture. The role of peyote doesn't diminish: among the Maya and Aztecs it becomes ritualized as the civilizations grow and expand into warring, cannibalistic empires.

So what happened?

Even prior to the advent of agriculture, it would appear that the vast trade networks that would come to transport things like peyote for ritual and obsidian for ornate sacrificial blades had deep roots. None of these people are fully isolated from each other.

When domestication originates for one society along this line, it is not surprising that it would spread relatively quickly throughout the continents. In this case, that points to when the oldest cobs of domesticated *teosinte*, or what would become maize or corn as we know it, start showing up in southwestern Mexico 8,700 years ago.<sup>87</sup> It starts to be seen in South American caves around 4250 BC.<sup>88</sup> The seeds would spread south through the Incans in Peru from the Olmec and Mayans, distributed by Uto-Aztec cultures, possibly carried by ancestors of the Huichol and Tarahumara to the Anasazi, eventually travelling to the northeast coast of what is now the United States by way of a series of relatively short-lived civilizations along the Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys.<sup>89</sup>

Compared to the settled hunter-collector societies that built the civilizations that overtook the entire world (which we will dis-

cuss in the following section), the origins of civilization among the Mayans and those that spread from there seem modest. Living in the forest, without the open valleys and nutrient dispersing flood plains, they practiced horticulture, or slash-and-burn agriculture as it is also known. This swidden system involves:

*clearing a patch of jungle with stone axes during the dry season between December and March and then setting fire to the area just before the start of the rainy season when maize and beans would have been planted with a digging stick to be harvested in the autumn. The cultivated patch would have been abandoned after a couple of years as weeds reinvaded and made clearance too difficult.*<sup>90</sup>

This is an extremely common form of horticulture that is used widely throughout the world, though the crops were different, it's what the Yanomami practice as well. While this form of horticulture can potentially long outlast agricultural systems, it doesn't escape their trappings. The Mayans, like the Aztecs and Incans that follow them, certainly fell into them.

And they did not fare well.

The problem with horticulture is that it could potentially work well, but only for small populations. Small populations are something that nomadic hunter-gatherer societies learned to check largely through mobility. Once that is removed, populations start to rise. Slowly at first, but they inevitably pick up. The slow movements of gardens begin to result in running into the gardens of other tribes. The decreased level of movement results in over-harvesting wild game. In an all too familiar situation, resources (as they eventually come to be known) start to dry up. Competition arises.

What happened in Mesoamerica was an amplification of production. Horticulture, with its slow movements, could no longer keep up with the population growth and the move to agriculture begins. The geography here matters: the Petén forests of the Yucatán Peninsula had only two permanent rivers, waterholes would become the basis for settlements which greatly limited the size of

the populations that could be supported through hunting and gathering, much less agriculture. The region was so ill suited for agriculture that even stones sufficient for grinding corn had to be imported.<sup>91</sup>

Unlike the large watersheds of the Nile or the Tigris-Euphrates, these societies were forced to build waterways, cities and farms with far less space to work with. They also notably lacked domesticable animals to use for food and labor.<sup>92</sup>

The usual suspects come into play. We have Divine Kings and Priests, we have a divided society with peasants and elites. To appease them all, alcohol made from maize becomes a mainstay.<sup>93</sup> Alcohol from maize, honey, and saps, intoxication through plants and mushrooms sway between ritual and habitual usage.<sup>94</sup> But as populations grow and nutrition declines, a new part of the religious society emerges: human sacrifice.

The architecture begins to accommodate. With the temples of the Mayans, Aztec and Inca, you see steep stairs leading up to altars. This is where captives of war, encaged and fattened with corn, would be ritualistically sacrificed and eaten, their scoured bodies rolled from the altars.<sup>95</sup>

I don't think there can be a more straightforward way to show how civilization always devours community. But the rite is important, for all its gruesomeness, cannibalism, like warfare is a response to what has been called the "ecological extremities of the Valley of Mexico."<sup>96</sup>

That's both true and false. Compared to the situations where civilizations typically arose, these valleys are extreme. Outside of agriculture the picture looks greatly different as nomadic hunter-gatherers had inhabited these forests for thousands of years prior. This is the epitome of a created tragedy: civilizations must conquer and cannibalize just as peasants must be soothed with alcohol and elites must invoke the divination of hallucinogens.

Warfare, and cannibalism as an extension of it, is a response to self-imposed ecological boundaries. Among the Aztecs, what wild game remained beyond the realm of their sedentary and rapidly deforesting cities was hunted for consumption by the elites. Commoners were barred from eating human bodies, a privilege that was bestowed upon elites and warriors. The dire need to gorge on

human flesh was enough to lure “the lower class to participate in these wars since those who single-handedly took captives several times gained the right to eat human flesh.”<sup>97</sup> If you captured enough enemies, you could bring your family into the elite ranks.

We run into intoxicants again here, but in a different light.

The priests and elites of the Aztec doused the sacrifice of captives in religious ritual. Their might was furthered when the sacrifices appeared to walk willingly onto the altar. And they did. With a little help from a plant called *Datura*, or as it is known today, *Devil’s Breath*.<sup>98</sup> In our scientific terms, this is Scopolamine, which the hipster-voyeurs of *Vice Magazine* came to dub “the scariest drug in the world.”<sup>99</sup>

*Datura* contains potent hallucinogenic seeds that, when distilled and powdered can be merely blown into the face of a would-be victim. Too much and they will overdose. But, given a small amount, they become “zombies”, or a walking and willing participant in whatever their assailant suggests. It’s a pretty logical part of the arsenal for street gangs in Columbia where it grows wild. The victim will have no recollection of the perpetrators, no memory of what happened, and often long term effects. To an outsider, nothing looks abnormal about the victim’s participation as they hand over their lives, identity, money, and anything the gangs want.

In the Aztec case, long term memory wasn’t an issue. Under the spell of *Datura*, the captives would sit upon the altar themselves as a ritualistic obsidian dagger tore open their chests and their heart was removed.

It would be a hard sell to try and debate the sustainability of these civilizations. Not surprisingly, they mostly collapsed prior to European contact. The remnants of these societies moved on, splintering at times into other existing societies, or starting new ones. Though the civilizations may have collapsed, the religious culture of the Aztecs did not fade entirely, nor did their earlier horticultural practices disappear.

In the case of the Aztecs, we will focus on two societies that outlived them: the Huichol and the Tarahumara. Both are indigenous societies that arise from the same group as the rest of the Uto-Aztecan lineage and their deeper hunter-gatherer roots, but they both developed cultures that incorporate and respond to el-

ements of Aztec reality. Becoming farmers in their own rite, but also outcasts of Olmec and Aztec wars and refugees of a thriving military of raiders seeking captives.

And it is within these societies that the ritualization of intoxication and escape becomes central.

### *Huichol and the Peyote Hunt*

To the Aztecs, the Huichol (or *Wixdrika* as they call themselves), were the *Chichimeca*: “the northern barbarians who lived as nomadic hunters and collectors in the high deserts to the northeast of their present home” in the Sierra Madre Occidental range.<sup>100</sup>

Their ancestral home was in San Luis Potosi, where Aztec and Spanish colonizers and conquerors exiled them. They practice *milpa* agriculture, not unlike the swidden agriculture of the early Aztecs and Mayans, which centers on maize and beans. They carry on a strong religious tradition that centers around the “trine divinity”, the connection between three of the most important Huichol gods; Corn, Deer, and Peyote.<sup>101</sup>

For the Huichol, corn, deer and peyote are one in the same. A central part of the Huichol identity lies in the “peyote hunt”, which is what they have become known for. As sedentism and deforestation would have decimated the wild game populations within range of the Aztec civilizations and their outliers, the role of the hunter within these societies would have been elevated, not unlike warriors, possibly as high as that of chiefs or priests.

Within the Huichol, that role of authority lands on the *maara akdme*, the shaman-priests. These singing shamans lead the annual peyote hunts that are a peyote-driven ritualistic journey through 500 miles to hunt the sacred deer, embodied as peyote.<sup>102</sup> Though the peyote hunt takes place only once per year, the pilgrimage is the universal theme throughout all Huichol ceremony and symbolism. The pilgrimage itself appears to be connected to the role of the Huichol as runners on the Mesoamerican trade routes<sup>103</sup> and it moves further beyond that in reviving their hunter-gatherer past.

What is particularly relevant to the peyote pilgrimage for our purposes here is how direct the tie is between the use of peyote and the identity of the community. Despite sharing so much cultural

and religious affiliation with the world that the Aztecs created, the memory of nomadic hunter-gatherer life runs rampant through Huichol identity.

For the Huichol, hunting and gathering, as much as they may be absent from their lives, is what defined them.

Their cultural obsession is with a ritualistic resurgence of life within community. But lacking the proximity and fluidness that nomadic hunter-gatherers possess, the dance is not enough. Instead, a perpetual ritual of dance and song is channeled into shamanistic indulgences of with peyote as an intoxicant. Peyote established its central role in their hunter-gatherer days for its cure-all abilities for their desert ecology. Here it is used to attain a ritualized re-enactment of hunting and gathering life.

“The Deer-Maize-Peyote complex,” typified by the peyote hunt, writes anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff, “functions to achieve a series of unifications by presenting, then embracing, many of the contradictions, oppositions, and paradoxes of Huichol life.”<sup>104</sup> During this time, non-egalitarian divisions associated with age, sex, ritual status, regional origins, and family affiliations are disregarded ritualistically for the duration of the rite.<sup>105</sup>

The hunt follows the path of exile from their ancestral lands. That is a place where there was no perception of separation between “man, plants, animals, and “gods.” Identity becomes fluid and the participants can move between being human and deer, just as peyote, maize and deer all merge with each other.<sup>106</sup>

The participants must take peyote to open their “inner eye,” which is necessary so “he will recognize the tracks of the Deer-Peyote and see the brilliant rainbow-soul of Elder Brother *Wawatsári*, the Principal Deer, rise from the peyote plant as it is “slain” by his arrows.”<sup>107</sup> The sacrificial and ritual deer, represented by peyote, is a symbolic stand in for the life they once lived immersed in the wild as nomadic hunter-gatherers. A life lived in community, where the ritual of participation would have been experienced without this kind of formality.

It is likely in earlier times that this re-enactment surrounded the use of young peyote to stave hunger and push the body further as Aztec hunters decimated deer populations, pushing Huichol hunters further out. This is a point highlighted by the current real-

ity, where the introduction of the rifle only increased the decimation of deer populations and forced the Huichol to sacrifice cattle in their place.<sup>108</sup>

There is something innately primal to this ritual.

Entrenched though it may be with the trappings of agricultural and civilized reality, it seeks to reconcile the distaste for the anti-community of agrarian life. You can catch glimpses of how the power of the nomadic hunter-gatherer community still lives on in their mythology as an ideal, a place where separation between community and wildness doesn't exist. In a way, this is a reflection of the allure that peyote has gained within hippy and drop out cultures.

However, there's something definitively encouraging knowing that this universal understanding of our own primal anarchy exists so strongly in an agrarian tradition, especially compared to the emptiness and forward-obsessed perspectives inherent in Modernity. And yet even here, we see that this is about escape, about a purging of uncivilized wants, which ultimately perpetuates complacency with civilized life.

The Huichol ritualistically indulge back to their hunter-gatherer ways so that they can continue farming: so that they will work and so they won't focus on their own trauma of domestication.

The peyote hunt is therapeutic.

In reality, it only reflects on the dis-ease of civilized life and its inability to fulfill our innate needs.

And it is that reality, that acknowledgement that civilization will destroy, denude, and decimate wildness, both externally and internally, that perpetuates our drive to find substitutes and escapes for what it is we so desperately seek. It is that impulse that has sent the Tarahumara running and, sadly, has kept them on the run.

### *Tarahumara*

The Tarahumara, or *Rarámuri* as they call themselves, live further northwest of the Huichol, in areas now known as Chihuahua and Talu in Mexico. Their culture was seemingly closer to the semi-no-

madic hunter-gatherer Basket Maker cultures of the American Southwest who had started to farm corn.

Between 1000 and 1500 AD, as the Mayan civilization was collapsing and the Aztec Empire emerged, they began to intensify their horticulture in lieu of decreased hunting. As a part of and partner to the Mesoamerican trade route, it is probable, if not likely, that overhunting was the primary cause of this cultural change.<sup>109</sup>

Of their crops, corn and gourds seemed to be the most impactful.

They shared in the Huichol veneration of peyote.<sup>110</sup> Considering the medicinal uses of peyote mentioned above, the roots here shouldn't be a mystery: the reason the Tarahumara have come to the forefront in recent years is because of their long distance running. Their endurance is absolutely extraordinary: often trekking distances upwards of 200 miles.

How much of that movement is a result of taking part in trade and how much of it is solely related to the harsher ecological conditions of the Copper Canyon of Mexico where they live is hard to say. What we do know, without question, is that the rise of civilized colonization into the region has forced Tarahumara to stay on the move.

And their culture reflects that.

The Tarahumara live in *rancheros*, widely spread encampments and gardens. There are many elements of their lives that seem to hark back further into their own nomadic hunter-gatherer lives and their choice of shelter (not uncommonly, caves) is one reflection of that. But their use of running pulls on an even more primal aspect of their lives: the persistence hunt.

Persistence hunting is arguably the oldest form of hunting. It refers to the act of hunting by literally running an animal down. It's a process that requires speed, but above all else, endurance. But there is a huge problem there: archeologically speaking, you can't physically find evidence of it.

In his Tarahumara influenced book, *Born to Run*, Christopher McDougall points out that persistence hunting "leaves behind no forensics—no arrowheads, no spear-nicked deer spines."<sup>111</sup> Anthropologically speaking, we know that it is still (or has recently

been) practiced by some San hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari.<sup>112</sup> We have evidence in cave art that the practice was widespread among hunter-gatherers, but living cases of it are rare. The Tarahumara are among those few cases.

What we can glimpse from this is an indication of cultural change. The rise of domesticated maize in the region, the expansion of empires, the elaborate trade networks; the collective and primal memory and community that the Huichol ritualistically call upon seems to echo throughout the ancient subsistence methods of the Tarahumara. The remnants of a nomadic hunter-gatherer life way, of nomadic hunter-gatherer community, lingers.

Its direct opposition comes in the form of domestication.

The impact of expanding civilizations decimated the region and its wild communities. The rise of protein scarcity forced communities to spread further apart. The increasing reliance upon grown and stored foods fostered hierarchical social relationships: relationships that were pressed harder through trade relationships with civilized societies.

While peyote may lack the prerequisites necessary for a chemical-level addiction, alcohol does not.

*Tesguino* is a thick, milky beer made from fermented corn. And the Tarahumara consume it religiously.

The process for making *tesguino* is not a simple one. It takes three days to grind, cook, and ferment the corn. Its shelf life is incredibly short, 12 to 24 hours, so it must be consumed quickly. This doesn't stop the Tarahumara from making batches as large as 50 gallons at a time.<sup>113</sup> In the 1960s, anthropologist John Kennedy estimated that "the average Tarahumara spends at least 100 days per year directly concerned with *tesguino* and much of this time under its influence or aftereffects."<sup>114</sup>

The brew is relatively low in alcohol content, but drunk in such quantities doesn't negate the effects. Being drunk is akin to religious intoxication: "Drinking, to the Tarahumara, is a social rather than an individual activity."<sup>115</sup> True as that may be, it cannot be overlooked that the alcohol comes from maize that comes from settlement and trades with horticulturalists and civilizations. The social drinking here is a reaction and response to the physical

distancing and the loss of ancestral food sources.

Community becomes a relic, upheld in the ritual of drinking. Likewise, contemporary Tarahumara drink *tesguino* daily, only to drink more heavily during religious celebrations.<sup>116</sup> Just as the maize-centric elements of Tarahumara reality are a historical creation, so too are their amplifications. As we shall see shortly, it is the presence of civilizations that grabs a hold of any level of intoxicating ritual among indigenous society to use them as an entry point for colonization.

Just as the intoxicated trance supplants the communal trances attained through dancing, singing and hand touching, the interpretation of colonization on an unprecedented scale can only be understood through increasing intoxication.

This is why addiction rates are so much higher on reservations: the religious and spiritual council of the shaman seeks to reconcile the tensions within settled societies. The level of decimation and emptiness that those of us unfortunate enough to have been raised within civilization are simply used to make even less sense in the shadows of fractured community. Nomadic hunter-gatherers approached increasing tension through healing dances. If that didn't work, they moved.

The same circumstances that the Tarahumara faced which pushed them towards becoming maize farmers has kept them from subsistence farming in recent times: the civilizations that pushed on their lands only became more militant, more technologically assisted and more ecocidal.

This is the sad stage that has been set for indigenous societies the world over: civilization grows; its threats and consequences amplify exponentially alongside it.

In the case of the Tarahumara, Aztecs lost out to the Spanish. Their ancestral homelands became Mexico and they the subjects of its government.

The pre-historic Mesoamerican trade routes remained intact and yet the demand for trade items shifted immensely. By the 1980s, the Aztec and Spanish warriors would come to be replaced by drug cartels that forced the Tarahumara to cultivate marijuana and opium. Choice and mobility become fleeting options when

faced with armed cartels that couldn't care less about anyone's life.<sup>117</sup> Climate change induced drought directly impacts the Tarahumara corn crops, pushing them further into the arms of the cartels by making drug growing operations the only way left to eat.<sup>118</sup>

The mountains of the Sierra Madre are increasingly subjected to intensified logging and mining. The erosion that results washes away the thin topsoil. Cattle and goats overgraze what fertile land exists. The waterways are awash with the waste from all this along with the chemicals used in marijuana and opium production. And on top of all of this a United States backed "War on Drugs" funds the Mexican government to spray herbicides from planes onto the fields where marijuana and opium are grown: the very same fields where the Tarahumara plant their corn, beans and squash.<sup>119</sup>

As we shall see in the coming sections, this kind of cannibalistic clusterfuck defines civilization.

It doesn't improve from here.

We simply hide away. In lieu of community, we shrink further and further into ourselves and lose the ability to even have a baseline understanding about the span of our impact. I don't say any of this to fault or blame on an individual level, but there is absolutely no end in sight to any of this if we don't recognize the link between our own narcissistic indulgences with intoxicants, with social media, with technology, with consumerism, whatever escape it is we personally turn to, with the fate of the Tarahumara, the Huichol, with the Earth.

In looking at the Uto-Aztecs, we get a glimpse of what horticulture amplified can attain in its worst-case scenario through the Aztec and Mayan civilizations. That is not an inevitable fate, but it is a reality of domestication. The rise from horticulture to agriculture is the exception, not the norm. The self-imposed bounds of carrying capacity may have resulted in another millennia or two of civilizations popping up and collapsing throughout the Americas, just as it had in the thousand years prior to European colonization.

The difference is scale.

And it is in the nature of domestication within the rest of its points of origins that we get a clearer picture as to how things have

gotten to where they are now.

But the Uto-Aztecan case cannot be overlooked nor surpassed without further examination. The plight of indigenous societies still under the oppression of proxy European powers bares the violent and brute face of Modernity that those of us in the First World rarely see.

A Cultural Survival report on the struggle of the Tarahumara puts it bluntly:

*As modern industrialized Americans sit in their living rooms each evening and watch their flickering screens, a war of survival is being fought just south of the border. Nearly 400 Rarámuri have been murdered in the last decade.*<sup>120</sup>

And in the end, it is the euphoric dance of intact community that we all seek.

That feeling of place.

That feeling of belonging.

We may lack the ritualized revival of nomadic hunter-gatherer life that the Huichol and Tarahumara maintain, but that primal urge within does not die. It gets buried.

And it gets buried beneath mass graves.

### *The Conquests of Bread, or, Cheers to Industry*

*Researchers have often dealt with the process of sedentarization without understanding the true nature of the sedentary way of life. The stereotypical thinking has been that technical progress of subsistence made possible the efficient acquisition of food, which in turn made it unnecessary to be nomadic, or possible to be sedentary. Such a scenario is undoubtedly based on the mindset peculiar to sedentary people, that man must have chosen sedentarization whenever it was possible.*

- Masaki Nishida<sup>121</sup>

The history and presence of intoxicants among horticultural societies is in some ways anecdotal.

Among settled and settling societies, their presence is central.

So our focus begins to shift here.

The focus on cross-cultural differences between varying degrees of domestication and sedentism is important to understand how the grey area between the use and abuse of intoxicating and addictive substances arises. To a large degree, this is sifting the fine details, but sadly we know how this ends. We know the shaman isn't the bastion of domesticated life. We are far too aware of programmers and politicians and the history that we have collectively taken part in to not acknowledge that a historical shift set us off in an endemic direction by way of civilized life.

At this point, we are no longer looking at other societies to understand our own; we're looking directly at our own history, at the lineage of civilizations that brought us to this point. The link here is in how familiar the domesticating process is, how this innate that sense of being, disemboweled and repackaged for our consumption, has always been a necessary prerequisite for compliance. For our labor: for active participation in our own drudgery.

These worlds may arise imperceptibly from semi-sedentary hunter-gatherer bands, but the presence of temples, mounds, and altars, the turn from digging sticks to plows, herding animals instead of following their migrations, the change in the landscape from streams and rivers to diverted waterways and rows of crops; all of these things are absolute. They are basis for the history that civilization has written into each of us, that it has written into the earth.

Agriculture doesn't represent a new level of alienation; it is itself a cataclysmic shattering of relationships, reframed onto the needs of a rising state. It requires the subjugation of community just as it requires the subjugation of the land and all its relationships.

To have any discussion about addiction, agriculture is the defining point: these are societies built upon the original trauma of domestication.

Nomadism wasn't simply a matter of ecological necessity among hunter-gatherers: it was a cultural necessity. Ironic though it may sound, movement ensured rooting in a place. It brought and encouraged interactions and awareness not only with other humans,

but also with the entirety of life.

The presumption that humans would have chosen settled life, if given a choice, is a narrative of domestication. The same narrative that tells us that civilization brings us joy. A story that directly conflicts with the reality that nomadic hunter-gatherer bands danced in ecstatic joy as much as they wanted while our society is riddled with rising levels of addictions, suicides and over-the-counter mood altering medications. Where freedom is equated with the freedom to shop. Where we exemplify the advancements of our own lives with devices made in sweat shops from rare metals extracted from warzones and the existence of life-prolonging drugs, neither of which most of humanity can economically afford.

The question that digs at my mind about how some hunter-gatherer bands settled 10,000-12,000 years ago isn't why they may have settled, but why they stayed.

We know this: civilizations, by and large, did not emerge from a path of horticulture and pastoral societies banding together to start farming and move from there. Outside of the previous examples, civilizations were started by sedentary hunter-collectors, who were still technically hunter-gatherers. Presumably for ecological reasons, they temporarily "started to utilize starchy seeds as one of the major foods, such as wild wheat, acorn, chestnut, and water chestnut." These small seed heads required a lot of processing and technique to make what nomadic hunter-gatherers apparently considered "extremely undesirable and low-value foods."<sup>122</sup>

It is only through the lens of history that we can look back to this era and presume change was a matter of choice. Even with the few places where hunter-gatherers settled and became what archeologist Lewis Binford labeled hunter-collectors the timeline spreads over decades and generations, likely resulting in an imperceptible level of change for those taking part.

These societies did not immediately begin to domesticate. They had no need to. The grains grew in abundance naturally and most hunter-gatherers opted to just let them be. The meat that came from animals that grazed those fields was universally more valuable.

The difference lies in a change of strategy. I'll allow Binford

to define this phenomenon: “In contrast to foragers, collectors are characterized by (1) the storage of food for at least part of the year and (2) logistically organized food-procurement parties.”<sup>123</sup>

Agriculture is not a necessity for these societies to arise. Hunter-collectors arose in handfuls of areas seemingly at the same time when the domestication of grains begins to take root in other parts of the world. The results were remarkably similar: State-level societies arose with rampant inequality.

The difference is that agriculture allowed the manipulation of carrying capacity, or the size of the populations that can be supported by a land base. The domestication of grains, the expansion of their preferred habitats, the artificial redirection of water and use of labor (both human and animal) to turn soils, to tear down forests and stretch fields, create circumstances where you could almost buy the underlying principles of civilized life: might makes right.

Convuluted as it may be, our current reality would like to give the impression that we have truly conquered *nature*, that we have cracked its boundaries and limitations, giving rise to our hyper-technological present and future. But it doesn't take a weatherman to tell you which way the winds blow, or, more to the point, to tell you that the ecological instability we currently face is evidence that our actions are not without consequence. Agriculture doesn't shift carrying capacity in favor of supporting civilization (though it and the industrial systems it supports can certainly reduce it drastically), it merely prolongs and worsens the pitfall when a system of unlimited wants overstays its place in a world based on limited means.<sup>124</sup>

All civilizations inevitably collapse under the weight of this basic mathematical reality. The difference comes down to scale.

The limitation for hunter-collectors who focused on proteins is the animals themselves.

In the Pacific Northwest of North America, that looked like hunter-collector societies built around annual runs of salmon to be smoked and stored. Even with the limitations imposed by finite fish runs, these societies created warring political states complete with slavery. The Tsimshian, Tlingit and Haida tribes shared po-

litical structures of rank and inherited leadership positions.<sup>125</sup> The *potlatch*, an organized ritual of sharing amassed foods and cultural objects, was central to these states.

Despite its focus on sharing, the potlatch is about the “absolute power” given to chiefs.<sup>126</sup> As representatives of the group, individuals “potlatch in order to validate their own position”: asserting their own power as emblematic of the group. The chief, like the priest, must ground their asserted rights in terms of subsistence. Being so close in proximity to the means of nomadic hunter-gatherer subsistence, the fragility of power risked becoming even more apparent. If the shaman was the interpreter, the chief and priest are the manifestations of god/s. As Timothy Earle writes,

*The cultural and economic landscape was transformed to create a new physical world in which the chiefs existed as owners of the productive facilities and the earthly manifestations of the gods. The materialization of ideology transformed the legitimizing beliefs of the ruling elite into concrete, cultural things that could be controlled through the labor process within the local community.*<sup>127</sup>

The complexity these states developed is often spoken of as evidence of abundance, as though it was something non-existent for the nomadic hunter-gatherer. But the nature of these societies, the strict order that they attained is evidence of a more fragile reality here. There were times of “plenty,” but “it was not constant.” As anthropologist Wayne Suttles observes, “Abundance there consisted only of certain things at certain times and always with some possibility of failure.”<sup>128</sup>

In the plains and tundras, collectors looked like hunter-gatherers who began to domesticate or to herd pack animals to carry their surpluses permanently or seasonally. The Caribou Inuit and Plains Indians of North America are examples of this. Sedentary hunter-collectors are only limited by the size of fish runs or how long any food item can be stored, but for the mounted hunter-collectors, their limitation was based on how much they could carry. It should come as little surprise that these societies were, by and large, much more egalitarian in nature than the sedentary, collec-

tor societies.

There is a spectrum of hunter-collector societies from egalitarian to absolute hierarchy. While extremely hierarchical and state societies emerged from fish-dependent, sedentary hunter-collectors, civilizations did not.

Those were dependent upon grains.

Without grains, we would have no civilization.

Period.

In the places where civilizations arose, domestication was a consequence of settlement. We tend to treat it as a historic achievement, a part of our rise from savage animality. But hunter-gatherers didn't lack the knowledge of propagation. Every time a forager picks one berry over another and then excretes its seeds, they are taking part in that cycle, just like any other animal. Their knowledge of botany was unquestionable. They simply had no need for domestication.

The wild plants that humans settled and built civilizations around share a "weedy tendency," an ecological adaptation to "open, disturbed, or unstable habitats with bare soil and less competition from other plants."<sup>129</sup> A circumstance that arises from heavily travelled paths and settled areas. It is likely that the origins of agriculture's spread arose as "plants with weedy tendencies colonized kitchen middens and rubbish heaps and were thus gathered ... and, imperceptibly perhaps, brought into cultivation."<sup>130</sup>

Domestication, as it applies to humans, arose largely from our settlements.<sup>131</sup> Our slow change in social circumstance, amplified and reflected in a fragmentation of the world into economic, religious, political and social realms, each carrying its own self-serving narrative of hierarchy.<sup>132</sup> "Community" becomes an idea rather than a known reality: our sense of connection and belonging center around production of a surplus and its social expressions.

So while we will only ever have some degree of assumption around why certain hunter-gatherer societies settled around wild grains, we also have an indication as to why they stayed. Greg Wadley and Angus Martin broke the news in 1993:

*Recent discoveries of potentially psychoactive substances in certain*

*agricultural products -- cereals and milk -- suggest an additional perspective on the adoption of agriculture and the behavioural changes ('civilisation') that followed it.*<sup>133</sup>

They became addicted.

The diet of nomadic hunter-gatherers relied heavily on fat consumption, unlike civilized diets that are based predominantly on sugar and carbohydrates. Short of sporadic gorging on honey and seasonal access to berries and other fruits, sugars were relatively uncommon. Grains, were, at best, seen as secondary food sources.

In the extreme, Arctic and Sub-Arctic hunter-gatherers seasonally bordered on carnivorous diets, at times only having the vegetation within the stomach of animals available to them. They ate the organs, muscle and fat of the animals and thrived from it even in harsh environments.<sup>134</sup> Complex carbohydrates, such as grains, legumes, along with simple sugars, act like intoxicants in the body. As Nora Gedgaudas explains:

*Neurotransmitters are our main mood and brain regulators, and surges of blood sugar generate surges—and subsequent depletion or dysregulation—of the neurotransmitters serotonin, epinephrine, norepinephrine, GABA, and dopamine.*<sup>135</sup>

We get flashes of joy from these complex and simple carbohydrates, but they are fleeting. To borrow an analogy from Gedgaudas, fat burns for fuel in the body like a log on a fire, glucose (from sugars or from grains) burns like twigs on a fire. That is why hunter-gatherers had no problem spending hours to days dancing in ceremony or far less hours focused on procurement than agricultural societies. Breakdowns of caloric intake presume that all calories are equal which is simply false.

Sugar dependency breeds and amplifies addictions because it requires constant maintenance: “A brain that is dependent on glucose for its functioning will experience considerable compromise during those fluctuations, and moods, together with cognitive functioning, will tend to be unstable and at the mercy of blood sugar availability.”<sup>136</sup> Bled of persistent nutrition, our need and

wants for community and the connections it brings are amplified by a starving body.

Starches were hardly absent from nomadic hunter-gatherer diets, but the unnecessary complexity of harvesting and processing grains kept them at bay. The addictive nature of grains goes far beyond their transformation into glucose and stored fat in the body. Grains contain exorphins, a morphine-like compound.<sup>137</sup> Exorphins compound with opioid receptors in the body creating “a sense of euphoria, happiness, and sleepiness tends to be activated, as well as a reduction in pain sensation.”<sup>138</sup>

It should be little surprise that the grains that spurred domestication and that underpin so much of our daily reality are not only addictive, but that they're not seen as intoxicants themselves despite the fact that our bodies treat them that way. When removed from the diet, individuals “often exhibit cravings, addiction and withdrawal symptoms” in ways that are not dissimilar to drug addicts.<sup>139</sup> This isn't a coincidence, wheat contains 5 types of opioid peptides; dairy (which outside of breast milk, only comes with domestication) contains a similar amount.<sup>140</sup>

Grains, the staples of all agrarian and civilized life, are themselves intoxicating. They are the true opiate of the masses. We crave in mind, we crave in body, and so addiction becomes a defining aspect of our reality.

But there is one more aspect of grains that has given them the upper hand since the dawn of agricultural life: they can be fermented.

Enter alcohol.

### *Liquid Conquest*

Alcohol holds an unquestionable throne within civilized life. It is the center of social interactions, synonymous with unwinding from tense situations. A reputation gained despite its direct relationship with increased violence.

This isn't a new situation in any way. Alcohol is arguably the engine that fuels civilizations.

Alcohol covers up drudgery, has been used for subsistence, and has become an outlet, a means of escape from the monotony of

domesticated life. It is an excuse for “uncivilized” behavior, a signifier and unifier of cultural identity. It can induce ecstatic states and euphoric escapes.

But it is both the carrot and the stick for domestic life. Civilization may have never existed without it.

One of the earliest domesticated crops, and seemingly the most universal, was not meant for consumption. The domestication of *Lagernaria siceraria*, the bottle gourd, dates back 10-11,000 years before present. It has been adopted more widely than any other domesticated plant for thousands of subsequent years.<sup>141</sup>

The gourd was domesticated for storage, likely for cultivated wild grains.

It is worth noting that those wild grains that were cultivated and eventually domesticated early on were contemporaries or relatives of grain crops as we know them now: wheat, millet, barley, rice, and maize. All of which likely fermented in gourds creating alcohol. Sedentary hunter-collectors weren't just addicted to grains; they were getting drunk off of them.

The absence of carbonized or burnt grains and seeds in the areas where domestication originates seems to indicate that the first widespread use of the grains came from fermenting them for alcohol, not cooking them. Soaked grains are easier to process and any exposure to heat would have caused yeast to form. This is the recipe for alcohol.<sup>142</sup>

Alcohol is a mainstay of village life.

We see this among the pastoral Nuer of contemporary Sudan and Ethiopia, the brewing of beer from millet was relegated to village life over nomadic camps. Porridge and beer were dietary and social staples.<sup>143</sup> As steel axes spread manioc farming through horticultural societies, so too did manioc beer: made largely by women stirring a mash of boiled and chewed manioc until it ferments. By the late twentieth century, the Jívaro considered it “a basic part of their diet” and “consider it to be far superior to plain water, which they drink only in emergencies such as when their beer canteens run dry while they are out hunting.”<sup>144</sup>

This use of alcohol has a deep history that extends all the way back through the origins of sedentary and agriculture life.

A combination of porridge or mashes of grains and alcohol become a mainstay of labor from the first cities through industrialism and, as most of us can attest, remains within Modernity. That same mash was used to wean children at a younger age and opening the cradle to be filled with additional fodder for production. Tools and containers meant for the preparation of alcoholic drinks go back 10,000 years before present. In China between 7000-6600 BC, evidence of fermented drinks made from rice, honey, grapes and hawthorn berries become common. Through the Fertile Crescent and the Middle East, domesticated grapes for wine dates back to 5400-5000 BC. Uruk, one of the first cities, brewed alcohol on “an epic scale.”<sup>145</sup>

Defining agricultural life, beer “was treated principally as a kind of food” while the wine trade “was a stimulus to civilization in the Middle East.”<sup>146</sup> The Old Testament exalts wine. Priests took part in a long-standing duty of brewing.

Civilization was literally carried on the shoulders and backs of drunks. A religious devotion to production required a degree of inebriation to take root. Agriculture, the necessary fuel of civilization, defines drudgery. It defines work: monotonous, pain-staking, dull, and unending work.

Humanity would have never lifted its hand for surplus production if it weren't holding a raised glass.

This holds equally true for industrialism.

The production of alcohol itself didn't just fuel the Industrial Revolution, it was one of its first services: “Breweries were among the earliest modern industrial enterprises.”<sup>147</sup> Workers filled factories to earn wages used to get drunk and escape the monotony of drudgery. This is a hamster wheel that comes to define Modernity: the relentless pursuit of moments of elation, no matter what it takes to attain them.

In the 1840s, a young Friedrich Engels observed:

*It is not surprising that the workers should drink heavily. ... It is particularly on Saturday evenings that intoxication can be seen in all its bestiality, for it is then that the workers have just received their wages and go out for enjoyment at rather earlier hours than*

*on other days of the week. ... And when the revelers have no money left they go to the nearest pawnshop with whatever they have...*<sup>148</sup>

History also shows a painful trend where the more removed a society becomes, the more extreme the escapes will be.

While beer remained a source of fuel for industrial workers, that escape increasingly required a larger push. That came in particular from distilled spirits. Originally arising as anesthesia in the standard Western military kit to ensure that soldiers acted more like machines than living beings, liquor became a regular part of modernized life. As soldiers left the battlefield and came home, the taste for liquor that they brought back with them flooded industrial society. In many ways liquor “represents a process of *acceleration* of intoxication, intrinsically related to other processes of acceleration in the modern age.”<sup>149</sup>

If efficiency was the learned goal, liquor fit the times.

The need for escape among industrial workers was met with another stimulant promoted to the middle class and driven by a Protestant work ethic: coffee. Addiction to alcohol was a target of religious devotees to the Progress that a rising middle class upheld. It wasn't a target because of the addictiveness of alcohol, but because of the uncontrollability of drunks. Alcohol could be targeted because it could be replaced.

And for an industrializing world, coffee fit the bill perfectly.

Despite religious groups early ban on coffee (notably as Christians didn't want to partake in the perceived drink of Muslims), its role in increasing production placed it front and center in the Industrial Revolution. It allowed humans to act like machines:

*Medieval man did physical work, for the most part under the open sky. The middle-class man worked increasingly with his head, his workplace was the office, his working position was sedentary. The ideal that hovered before him was to function as uniformly and regularly as a clock.*<sup>150</sup>

The class divide over the stimulant of choice: either to promote production or to inhibit escape, only furthered a sense of

class camaraderie: a distinction that Engels and fellow socialists would ironically grasp onto. Liquor became the target of socialists while beer became their unifier for the working class.

Gin was a clear threat to proletarian identity. As historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch observes: "It provided alcoholic stupefaction, not social intoxication."<sup>151</sup> Despite the words from a young Engels, socialists saw that it was the tavern that would launch a socialist revolution. Karl Kautsky, a socialist and contemporary of Engels, took no qualms stating: "Without the tavern, the German proletariat has not only no social, but also no political, life."<sup>152</sup>

On the face of it, such a statement might seem contradictory. But that would only be true if the socialists had intended on freeing workers from the drudgery of industrial and agrarian life.

That is what they absolutely did not want.

Socialism catered to that same false sense of community peddled about by religious and political elites since the dawn of civilization: production for the sake of society is rewarding in and of itself. The link between individuals was their sacrifice for the greater good. Engels was aware enough to recognize the importance of an unquestioning sense of place to the human experience.

But he didn't dig deep enough and settled on the drudgery of production.

The prospects of Progress could be liberated beyond the binds of Capitalism. The success that socialists, communists, and anarcho-syndicalists achieved during the industrial era were due to the fact that their notion of community could arguably be found within a rising class-consciousness.

Proletarian identity was observable. There was a sense of belonging. But this was doomed to failure because it was a sense of belonging that was based on escapism, a mutual sense of dis-ease with the misery of work. That distaste lingers back to our hunter-gatherer minds, but could never take root fully because they were limited in their scope to never shed domestication.

Instead, they just blamed the current management. And there is some palatability to that, as anyone who has spent their free time with co-workers complaining about work can attest. And, again, the ritual of complaining about work with co-workers is one that most often revolves around alcohol consumption.

Our domestication requires a sober assessment; which is never an easy task when you realize how horrifically entrenched the values of civilization are within our psyches. If we seek to break the cycles of addiction and patterns of escapism, then this is where we must begin.

From here, the cycles continue to worsen.

None of these things happened in a vacuum. Alcohol wasn't the sole affliction of working class Europeans and Americans. The coffee that fueled the arising middle class came from colonies. Those coffee cups were filled by the forced labor of slaves, plantation systems, and the brutality of the frontier.

They still are and they will continue to be.

It's impossible to look at the sources of our addictive substances while being divorced from reality. The globalized world of this techno-industrial civilization has always come with a body count. Forests are destroyed to make way for cash crops. Societies are torn apart to create labor. Debt-systems are created to build railways, to enlist soldiers as cannon fodder, to perpetuate the maintenance and expansion of a civilization that must grow to survive.

Coffee consumption among the middle class in the industrial age was mirrored in the introduction of sugar, arguably one of the most deadly addictive substances in the world today. As Sidney Mintz unapathetically points out:

*England fought the most, conquered the most colonies, imported the most slaves (to her own colonies, and, in absolute numbers, in her own bottoms), and went furthest and fastest in creating a plantation system. The most important product of that system was sugar.*<sup>153</sup>

Though sugar becomes one of the most vital substances within modernity, it was hardly alone at the time. Workers in Russia were fueled by vodka. Chinese migrants were lured and addicted with opium. Given the opportunity for work abroad, Chinese migrants would arrive in distant lands carrying a debt that they would never be able to repay. But their brokers would gladly credit their labor with opium, only furthering their debts.

This too should sound familiar. Gangs and politicians run the world of immigration in a constant scheme that involves drugs, cash, and the arms trade. The promise of economic freedom ends in prostitution, trafficking, and industrial slavery today as surely as it did at the dawn of the Industrial era.

So as you hear that more “than a few sick and despairing Chinese finally stepped off the treadmill by the same means used to keep them on it: they took an overdose of opium”<sup>154</sup>: we can find the contemporary correlations in Third World farmers subjected to International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Structural Adjustment Policies where they are coerced into growing cash crops that require intensive applications of pesticides. Unable to escape debt and sick from contact with toxins, it is not uncommon for them to commit suicide by ingesting the pesticides directly.<sup>155</sup>

On the other side of that equation, you have more and more individuals willing to take extreme drugs like heroin, krokodil, crack, cocaine, and meth.

Our disconnect is unilateral in its impact. The further we are from each other, the more willing we are to turn towards drastic measures of escape. The more we indulge in those escapes, the less aware or caring we are of how those systems even arise and function.

In our attempts to escape misery, we further the reach of domestication.

And there are few places where that is more apparent than where intact communities are thrust into and met by our hollow and hallowed Modernity.

### *Forced Settlements*

*The Bushmen sat in the dunes, wondering, frustrated and angry. In their frustration, they had begun to turn on each other: there had been a lot of drinking and violence. Rikki, Jakob, even old Dawid, were beating up their wives almost daily, and the children were asking Belinda a question she couldn't answer: 'Why do the grown-ups drink?'*

*Sillikat, who had come back from Kagga Kama for a while, had answered the question one night: 'You want to know why I*

*drink? I drink because I feel like a caged animal. In the old days this clan, when we disagreed, would have split up, different families going off to live where they pleased, coming together again as they pleased, no problems, no fighting. So we drink, and when we drink, the anger comes, and we fight.'*

- Rupert Isaacson, *The Healing Land*<sup>156</sup>

Civilized narratives go to great lengths to bury the point of contact.

It is here that genocide is simply the norm. It is unironic to speak of domestication in terms of addiction, because there is no greater addict than civilization itself. It must consume life to perpetuate itself: to perpetuate its unchecked growth.

We repackage the wanton extermination of peoples under the guise of "tribal war." We chastise the "savages" for having the repugnant position of choosing the joys that they know from their own existing communities over the perpetuation of our need for resources to fuel our addiction-riddled wallow through apathy. We uphold the virtues of fillers as evidence of our superiority, taunting indigenous societies with sugar and steel, while we destroy everything that they know.

The Huaorani, whose perpetual singing to the forest I spoke of earlier, have their entire world threatened by the presence of oil that would account for thirteen days of oil for American consumption. Thirteen days worth.<sup>157</sup>

The realities of life for intact communities have always been tormented by the inability to rationalize the depravity and extent to which civilized societies will kill, rape, enslave and steal everything. Decimation of a culture, of a place, for nearly all of these peoples, both hunter-gatherer and horticultural alike, was literally unthinkable.

So you see how their worlds are contorted and it makes you sick.

The intoxicated state of shamans amongst native North Americans gave the colonizers an entry point. Drunkenness, which was "perhaps more destructive than any other European influence besides epidemic disease" was met with familiarity. It was treated as "akin to ritually entering an inspired altered state and met with

little initial cultural resistance.”<sup>158</sup>

By the time the impact of substances were obvious, the damage was already well underway. Alcohol was used to lure Native Americans into a barter system that was absolutely foreign to them. Their land was being stolen, their people raped, tortured and systematically killed, while negotiations over property, a framework that they didn't share, resulted in one of the greatest episodes of land theft in the history of the world.

Alcohol became a tool of escape in the same way civilized societies had always used it.

A situation that was not unacknowledged as this early recorded interaction shows:

*“When I come to your place with my peltry,” one Pennsylvania Indian rebuked a trader, “all call to me: ‘Come, Thomas! Here’s rum, drink heartily, drink! It will not hurt you.’ All this is done for the purpose of cheating me. When you have obtained from me all you want, you call me a drunk dog, and kick me out of the room.”*<sup>159</sup>

There was no illusion as to what the colonizers were doing here. A colonial era letter from a Canadian agent of the Hudson Bay Company shows how different native societies were “tamed” by their barter system and how to approach those that hadn't been.

*In the plains, however, this system will not do, as they can live independent of us, and by withholding ammunition, tobacco and spirits, the Staple articles of Trade, for one year, they will recover the use of their Bows and spears, and lose sight of their smoking and drinking habits; it will therefore be necessary to bring those Tribes round by mild and cautious measure...*<sup>160</sup>

Approached as a bait-and-switch view of civilization, the idea of introducing barter systems sought to give colonization an air of credibility, as though the joys of civilized life were universals. Australia in the 1890s undertook a vast and intentional policy of moving from military force to a policy of rationing. The government specifically targeted peripheral groups in ways to destabilize their self-sufficiency. Baited with free bread, the Aborigines were

brought into settlements and then rations turned into barter for labor. Cash, naturally, bought alcohol and tobacco as well.<sup>161</sup>

Sugar is an introductory substance of choice. Its distribution has been synonymous with the spread of Progress throughout the world. First offered by missionaries or “charities,” the enticed recipients are then drawn into labor to purchase more.<sup>162</sup> Along with “store food,” this is the key reason why diabetic rates among Native Americans, particularly the previously near-carnivore Arctic and Sub-Arctic hunter-gatherers, are among the highest in the world.

Slowly or quickly, civilization settles for nothing less than the complete abolition of hunter-gatherer and horticultural societies by death or assimilation. It is their very existence, the mere possibility of another way of life outside of civilization that threatens the narratives that make the domestication process possible.

Even in a defeated, withdrawn, and corralled state, unless they succumb to the vices of Modern life, they remain a too familiar semblance of what life can be. A reminder of what community can look like and how it can persevere.

Any reminder of the thing that we are all so desperately searching for must be eradicated so that we keep on seeking it out ourselves. So we go to work, so we consume, so we embrace and perpetuate our own misery and emptiness.

It is probable that there is no more of an apparent point of diffusion and forced settlements than roads.

Cutting through forests, opening up deserts and prairies, increasing traffic or increasing access for mining, logging, and hunting, while expanding the reach of governments, corporations, and missionaries, roads carry the means of civilization and its spoils.

For the San of the Kalahari, the presence of roads made it more permissible for neighboring BaTswana tribes to take over more land, putting up fences that block wild migration patterns and keep grazing domesticated animals in their way, sinking boreholes to supply water for livestock. The animals they would otherwise hunt end up dying along agricultural fence lines on what becomes “private property” or, worse, land preserves that bare their names, where they are persecuted for subsistence hunting.

The situation is dire.

*With the exception of a few clans still living outside the grasp of the ranchers, most of the Bushmen had found themselves, within a few years, enclosed by wire, their age-old food source gone, reduced to serfs looking after other people's cattle on land that had once been their own.*<sup>163</sup>

The roads carry in tourists who bring cash with them. It's a horrid fate that their want to see people living as the whole of humanity is rooted: as nomadic hunter-gatherers, are contributing to the death of their cultures. Tourists brought marijuana into the Kalahari, which has become heavily used by the San.

Among San settled in farming villages, anthropologist Mathias Guenther observed that the economic dependency that arises resulted in the commodification of the healing dance itself. The trance dancer becomes a professional just as the trance is gutted of sharing, that "central mode and spirit."<sup>164</sup> It is the reality of cash "as a medium of exchange and remuneration" that cements "the context of the wage economy."<sup>165</sup> In light of the commodification of the sacred, the San only turn further towards intoxication and addiction as their escape.<sup>166</sup>

This fosters a tense reality, these nomadic hunter-gatherer societies by large knew of intoxicating substances and avoided them. Yet as roads tore into previously uncontacted or inaccessible areas, they brought the scourge of domestication with them. They brought drugs, they brought alcohol, but, more importantly, they brought a reason to use them.

Roads tear apart communities as they bring in the outside world. Miners, workers, armies, missionaries, tourists, governments; the road brings civilization closer and the need to escape that reality rises. And the intoxicants flow in. Arab traders introduced the Pygmies to marijuana. Plains Indians knew of peyote but didn't begin using it ritually until contact had already started to fray their culture. The hunter-collector Ainu of Japan began drinking alcohol after they started growing millet around settlements.<sup>167</sup>

Tobacco, at times symbolic of American exploit, spread from the agrarian tribes of the south and east of what is now the United

States. For the hunter-collector Tlingit of the Pacific Northwest, tobacco was the first crop that was grown.<sup>168</sup> Smoking tobacco was a different acculturation spreading from the point of contact. Amongst the Inuit, they were taught about smoking tobacco from neighboring Russians.<sup>169</sup>

These newly acquired substances can become a source of cultural identity.

Among the Australian Aboriginal cultures, it is widely reported that the use of tobacco and alcohol were long standing native traditions. Alcohol, typically a mild version made of the fermented, sweet sap of the Palm and Miena Cider Gum trees from their crevices, became in some ways emblematic of Aboriginal tradition.<sup>170</sup>

This presumption comes from the fact that Aboriginal societies had such intense reactions to the liquor of the Europeans. Leading to rampant alcoholism, rapidly increasing levels of domestic violence, eventually building a movement that would be countered by contemporary native “anti-Grog” (anti-alcohol) campaigns. However, this method of cider making bares exact resemblance to the Arrack that the Macassan trepangers (sea cucumber fishers) from Indonesia brought to Australia and Tasmania alongside a tradition of smoking tobacco. Like the fermented sap of palm trees, Arrack is a saccharine juice made from fermented sugars and saps.<sup>171</sup>

The Macassan impact on native culture was widespread; the substances that were acquired made their way into the indigenous identity and culture as ingrained traditions.<sup>172</sup> Yet they are overlooked because of the Western bravado around first contact. This occurs despite the fact that cave art depicts the presence of Macassan trade relations as early as the mid-1600s, a timeline that is backed up with the remains of Macassan goods.<sup>173</sup>

It is not improbable that these relationships encouraged coastal Aboriginal societies towards semi-sedentary lives, complete with a loss of social egalitarianism between ages and sexes. Egalitarianism here is not fully buried. As Elder Rosalind Langford stated, “Traditionally, our mob has used plant medicines, healing hands, and spirit to help us move through that and heal.” Unfortunately, “nowadays most of our mob use alcohol and drugs to suppress our pain and grief or we use pills.”<sup>174</sup>

Intoxicants don't simply arrive on the scene and get added to communities. They become replacements, substitutes. Healing dances wane in lieu of individual intoxication. And it is the communities that suffer.

Pain becomes personal. The social identity of the society and their means of resolution are lost to forced settlements and arguments fueled by alcohol. Dances sometimes are revived for tourists, almost mocking the original form and purpose.

Like us, fragmented lives are subjected to fragments of escape. In the shadow of community, addicts arise.

Where there is money and defeat, there will be alcohol and escape. As Frank Marlowe observed among the Hadza, tourism within the last two decades increased 10-20 times over. The tourists are eager to pay the Hadza for any cultural relic to take home with them. But once the tourists leave, "neighboring tribes waste no time bringing the Hadza alcohol and leaving with all the tourist money. ... Drinking leads to arguments and fights and injuries and murder. A few recent alcohol-related murders have caused the murder rate to soar."<sup>175</sup>

For the Jarawa of the Andaman Islands, the road has turned them into a tourist attraction. They become a sight seeing trip for the morbid fascination of wealthy Indian travellers. Expensive hotels offer the road through the Jarawa territory as a must see exhibit. The Jarawa were once known for the reclusive behavior and militancy against settlers. But as roads are cut and loggers clear the forests and settlers poach game, they are left coming to the road for handouts.

This has brought alcohol, tobacco and a narcotic betel leaf into their society, but it has also brought endemic disease, such as a measles and pneumonia outbreak, in 1999, that impacted up to half of the population. Poachers, settlers, bus drivers and tourists have notoriously abused, assaulted and raped Jarawa women.<sup>176</sup> It has become a form of drive-thru frontier.

In a global overview of hunter-gatherer and hunter-collector cultures, Carleton Coon states without question that "Drugs, along with new diseases and new foods such as flour and rice, share the principal honors for the decline of hunting populations

throughout the world, plus the social disturbances caused by the presence of traders and colonists in recent times.”<sup>177</sup>

Roads simply facilitate those interactions.

It is the certainty of genocide that draws indigenous societies away from the road, but it is the reality of ecocide that forces them closer. The illusions of Progress, preached from a sugar-coated pulpit that creates the desperation where hope for survival overcomes the fear of assured cultural assimilation.

The uncomfortable back and forth of this reality is best spoken of by the Awa of Papua New Guinea, who share suffering on both sides of this ambiguous colonial reality:

*To them, however, the road remains a metaphor for culture change and ‘development.’ Men talk about it feverishly and insistently point to the high rain forest where it will eventually come. The road-to-be is a symbol of salvation, of endless economic gain, a path toward material wealth and increasingly accessible consumerism.*

*But not all of the villagers find this talk comforting. ... Still others, mainly of the older generation, know that a road will be their final death cry. They could already see the end coming in the past several decades of contact with the uninvited arrival of pale, gum-booted Australian kiaps (patrol officers), Western currency, trade stores, and wage labor migration that carried their young sons on airplanes to the coastal plantations that they themselves would never see.*<sup>178</sup>

Perhaps sharing in the delusion, my hope is that the civilization building these roads bleeds itself dry before any more can be built. But this is the reality of our shared situation that we also must face.

Our lives are not without consequence.

### *Drugged Warriors, Drug Wars*

*Of all of civilization’s occupational categories, that of soldier may be the most conducive to regular drug use.*

- David Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*<sup>179</sup>

A history of drugs, like any other facet of civilized life, cannot ignore a primary antagonist: warfare.

There is perhaps no greater truism than anthropologist Stanley Diamond's statement that "Civilization originates in conquest abroad and repression at home. Each is an aspect of the other."<sup>180</sup>

Liquor was distilled through military personnel before it found its way into mainstream society. The same can be said about nearly every other hard drug. Heroin and cocaine are perhaps the worst of it, but just as soldiers bring their newly formed addictions home, so too do those addictions fuel war.

There is no distinction to be made here. The further civilization carries on, the more intoxicants become another resource to war over. Warriors arise early in the trajectory of domesticated societies, as we've seen among the Yanomami and other horticultural societies. But here warfare becomes social in nature. The cult of the warrior serves to limit populations by creating a preference for having boys instead of girls, resulting in higher rates of female infanticide. Brutal though it may be, when the ecological benefits of slow population growth within nomadic societies are lifted, that is a pattern that is largely efficient in limiting numbers.

But warfare within horticultural societies is a very real thing.

And we see that in some regards the rituals surrounding horticultural warfare run contrary to warfare as we know it. Amongst horticulturalists in Papua New Guinea, for example, battlefield warfare was mired in ritual. Pigs were slaughtered and feasted upon before battles, warriors gorged on food, and there were ritual limitations on drinking water. Parched and overstuffed, these moves reduced the potential duration of battles. Death tolls were reduced. This, however, isn't to give the impression that horticultural warfare was less violent: the flipside of battlefield warfare was a shorter and nastier pattern of raiding which involved sneak attacks, a massive loss of life and abduction of women and children.<sup>181</sup>

It becomes clear how things like steel tools and manioc beer, or its localized equivalent, alongside epidemics of new diseases exponentially increased the drastic impact of contact.

Unfortunately, we don't need imagination to see what that

looked like.

Unlike the horticultural warrior, the soldiers of civilization became intoxicated to prolong their rampages, not to shorten them.

The arsenal of soldiers, specialists in killing and subjugating populations, contained intoxicants as rations. In contrast to the methods of horticultural warriors, civilized soldiers were meant to be more deadly, fiercer: more machine-like. Liquor allotments in the era of industrializing military forces were required for anaesthetization, or, “to make the soldier an integral member of the mechanical corps.”<sup>182</sup> It shouldn’t be surprising that the use of those same intoxicants would be used “to allay the boredom and fatigue inherent in military life.”<sup>183</sup>

The problem with soldiers is that they’re still human.

Killing is no easy task, but it is the involvement in mass killing and mass destruction, often in areas or places removed from what one may call home, that fragments an experience of the world. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is most discussed as it impacts soldiers. Traumatic experiences were created by war, but removed from any communal background and then often put back into civilian life; there is no way to process those traumatic experiences.

Soldiers may be examples of this, but they’re not alone. PTSD is often a gateway to addiction and with the trauma of the domestication process, none of us are exempt from it. Logically, soldiers tend to face PTSD the most and they’re also on the frontline of addictive substances used to self-medicate.

A mixture of trauma and intoxication was crucial in the cathartic transformation of warlords and their ranks, often including children. Themselves outcasts of horrific violence and civil wars, refugees left to wander alone after witnessing the death of their families and the destruction of their homes. Child soldiers were initiated through acts of horrific violence. Their first kills, sometimes their own family members, were never with bullets, but often hacking with a machete or equally brute and direct forms of violence.

Taking part in this brutality actually allowed them to “psychologically distance themselves from it.” As individuals involved in campaigns to rehabilitate former child soldiers saw over and over

again: “The children suffered more trauma from seeing someone hacked to death ... because they were witnesses, not the executioners.”<sup>184</sup>

A former child soldier of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone, Ishmael Beah, spoke of the role drugs played in coaxing this initiation into an altered reality:

*We walked for long hours and stopped only to eat sardines and corned beef with gari, sniff cocaine, brown brown, and take some white capsules. The combination of these drugs gave us a lot of energy and made us fierce. The idea of death didn't cross my mind at all and killing had become as easy as drinking water. My mind not only snapped during the first killing, it had also stopped making remorseful records, or so it seemed.*<sup>185</sup>

*Brown brown* is a drug of choice amongst African warlords. Often considered to be a mixture of gunpowder and cocaine, it is more often than not gunpowder mixed with heroin or amphetamines.<sup>186</sup> Heroin increasingly became an option through the region as it spread from Afghanistan following its rise to opioid-fueled prominence in the early 2000s.

This relationship between intoxication and war overrides all religious and political boundaries. It has been found that radical Islamic militants will promote and lethally enforce Sharia Law on one hand and drug their warriors without hesitation on the other.

Boko Haram's involvement in the drug trade and use of drugs is well known.<sup>187</sup> While jihadist fighters within the death cult of ISIS use a drug called Captagon, “an amphetamine pill that can cause a surge of energy and a euphoric high.”<sup>188</sup>

Like every aspect of domestication, we cannot cease to be humans, but domesticators will seek to use our needs against us. Diverting our want for belonging and place into jihadist death cults or imperialist forces fueled by nationalism serves no different force.

In the end, it all looks the same.

Heroin use among Vietnam Veterans was an epidemic. While GIs were restricted from liquor and marijuana on bases, heroin could be mixed with tobacco and smoked without notice from superior

officers. But even more importantly, heroin was accessible.

*Heroin was available at roadside stalls on every highway out of Saigon, and on the route to the main US army base at Long Binh, as well as from itinerant peddlers, newspaper and ice-cream vendors, restaurant owners, brothel keepers and their whores and domestic servants employed on US bases.*<sup>189</sup>

It is estimated that in 1971 over 10 percent of enlisted US soldiers in Vietnam were addicted to heroin. That equates to at least 25,000 men.<sup>190</sup> In the same year, there were roughly 10,000 Veteran addicts at home in New York City alone.<sup>191</sup>

This trend didn't end with the Vietnam War.

The destabilization of Afghanistan caused by the current and now long running war there resulted in its ascendancy to the number one producer of opioids in the world. As millennials are shuffled into the military, their lives shaken by the nationalistic fervor of their youths surrounding the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in the US, they have found a pipeline for heroin akin to what was seen in Vietnam.

If you compare the contemporary maps of the highest per capita use and overdose from heroin with a map of active military bases, they overlap exactly.<sup>192</sup> This cannot be coincidental. And as we shall see, it never has been.

The United States government has a long-standing tradition of its own involvement in the international drug trade. In the 1950s, in an attempt to subvert the rise of Communist China, the CIA had been backing anti-communist opium producers to destabilize the region. Communism was not thwarted, but the Golden Triangle was created. While this is often attributed to the CIA turning its head for an enemy's enemy, it was a far more insidious involvement: "In short, the CIA became inextricably entangled with the Golden Triangle opium trade, handling opiate consignments, flying drug runs and tolerantly turning a blind eye to the affairs of their criminal allies."<sup>193</sup>

Cocaine was arguably even worse.

Gary Webb shined a light on the involvement of the CIA in what became the crack-cocaine epidemic that overtook largely

African-American low-income neighborhoods, leading to higher involvement in the criminal system and steeper punishments for possession of crack than possession of cocaine, another form of the same drug used more heavily by whites.

Webb's reporting did not go unnoticed even though official government confirmation came out silently in the media just as the Clinton-Lewinsky sex scandal took over the headlines. Webb himself would be found dead a few years later, his death ruled a suicide despite having died with two bullets to the head.

What came of this was that in Nicaragua the US was funding the Contras, a particularly vicious paramilitary group, in their war against the socialist Sandinistas. Unable to give direct funding, the CIA built a pipeline for funding through the trafficking of cocaine. In the process creating intricate networks of stateside drug gangs and international drug cartels.

Not unlike the viciousness inherit in targeting indigenous populations; the CIA "had assisted the transformation of the powder cocaine market to crack cocaine in the early 1980s." Cheaper and now widely available, crack tore communities apart.<sup>194</sup> And as it remains a cheap high and offers quicker escape through smoking, it still does.

Ironically, though the intent was to defund socialist revolutionaries, cocaine has since become a primary funding source for FARC, a merciless Communist army in Columbia, among others. As the Columbian drug trade originated in the 1970s with marijuana, FARC denounced the trade under Communist Party principles, resulting in burnt plantations and running their owners out.

Cocaine, a higher priced commodity, was different. For FARC, "the benefits were too big to ignore, and the guerillas' logic shifted. Soon, what was against their ideals became "just another crop" that the rebels decided to tax."<sup>195</sup>

The presumption of war for ideological reasons falters constantly under a reality that all lines cross. All civilizations, regardless of stated religious or political affiliation, require resources. And here cash is a secular king.

And it is all of us, with our incessant search to fill the void within, who are footing the bill.

As the former President of Columbia, Virgilio Barco Vargas

accurately stated: “The only law the narcoterrorists don’t break is the law of supply and demand.”<sup>196</sup>

The drug cartels that were a proxy of CIA counter-insurgencies during the Cold War didn’t fade away. They grew. And they continue to grow more powerful and more deadly.

In Mexico, the lethality of these cartels is impossible to overlook. Between 2007 and 2014, there were 164,000 drug-related homicides in Mexico.<sup>197</sup> Mass kidnappings, executions, drive-by shootings; the United States market for marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamines pays for all of this carnage.<sup>198</sup>

Those 164,000 bodies are absolutely foreign to us.

We attribute them to violence between drug cartels, but that is only a fraction of it. The reality here is grisly. At times the morgues in Mexico City are overrun with bodies. Lives lost to organized and disorganized violence. There is no shortage of documentation here despite our aloofness and involvement in the entire ordeal.

The day-to-day violence can look like this: On May 13, 2012, 49 decapitated and dismembered bodies were found alongside a highway in Nuevo Leon. On September 26, 2014 gunmen opened fire on buses carrying students and soccer players in southern Mexico, leaving 3 dead and 43 missing. Those 43 were declared dead the following January.<sup>199</sup>

In two instances that amounts to 95 lives lost to drug-related violence, a drop in the bucket for that total number of 164,000. And these instances are happening daily.

But they are not confined to Mexico.

Mexican drug cartels use would-be migrants riddled with impossible debts to guard and maintain devastating marijuana plantations within US National Forests.<sup>200</sup> Josh Harkinson summed up the damage in around the San Bernardino National Forest in 2009.

*Growers clear land year-round, plant crops in the spring, and haul out the harvest in the fall, often leaving behind mounds of trash and dead animals, denuded hillsides, and streams full of sediment and human waste. Last year, the community of Snow Creek, California, traced feces in its water treatment plant to a*

*grow in the nearby San Bernardino National Forest.*<sup>201</sup>

These illegal growing operations have destroyed 10,000 acres of National Forest. All of this for marijuana: grown for and sold to Americans.

The lavish extravagance of the cartel's drug lords is so ridiculous that it can be best exhibited not in how they lived, but in how they were buried. The mausoleums of the cartels are well documented for their exuberance. Cemeteries for the cartels look like high-price gated condominiums.

Ignacio Coronel, a founder of the Sinaloa Cartel and the self-proclaimed "King of Crystal" for his role in the manufacture and distribution of methamphetamine in the United States, is entombed in a \$450,000 mausoleum with state-of-the-art music and security systems, Wi-Fi, and air conditioning. Arturo Guzman Loera, brother of notorious drug lord El Chapo, is enshrined in a modest two-story, air-conditioned mausoleum with 24-hour surveillance, and en-suite bedrooms with a price tag of \$1,200,000.<sup>202</sup>

This globalized, hyper-technological civilization distributes consequences, not wealth. Profit from misery is distilled into a small global elite and that is who the rest of us are busy producing for. And when we're not busy just trying to get by, we are buying substitutes for the community of nomadic bands that was our birthright for the 2.5 million years leading up to our lives as *Homo sapiens*.

We are the products of a historically created and horrifically malicious system that seeks to tear apart our being and sell it back to us piecemeal. And the price is complicity in our own enslavement and the enslavement of all other life on the planet.

This is the unforeseeable consequence of hunter-collectors settling around wild grains 10,000 years ago. A cycle perpetuated by unthinkable levels of violence and an inability to psychologically reconcile the consequences of our actions, worsened as technology casts our shadow further and deeper throughout the world.

So raise your glass in cheers to the conquest of nothingness: the endless pursuit of completion.

It only gets worse.

*Modernity and Other Distractions*

*The peculiar, vomitorious genius of modern capitalism is its ability to betray our senses with one class of products or services and then sell us another to cope with the damage so that we can go back to consuming more of what caused the problem in the first place.*

- David Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*<sup>203</sup>

If the goal of domestication is to subvert innate human desires towards consumed impulse, then there is no finer closing for civilization than our current era of late Modernity.

We, the children of Progress and Empire, have run the mill. Our lineages are divorced from place. Community is increasingly about many weak online connections rather than deep and meaningful interactions.

We take part in the dreams of programmers. Our hesitations for drudgery are reflected onto the potential of technology to take on mundane tasks and, seemingly, human action. If domestication were able to deliver on its promises of substitutes for ecstatic states, this would be it. We equate freedom with the freedom of choice between products. We believe that we are free to do as we please: that if we chose to we could walk away from civilization.

And we are miserable.

The myths of the domesticators ring hollow. They have offered to us the technology, the medications, the stuff, the sugar-laced foods, and the machines. We consume them in such frenzy that they get old quickly and we crave more.

Addiction defines Modernity because it must. The more our society offers the rewards of Progress, the more apparent it becomes that they are filler: the dreams of cyborgs.

And so we consume.

Everything.

Capitalists long ago recognized that dopamine, that source of joy that floods our brains quickly, brings about euphoric states. It gives us that feeling that we are getting what it is we need in life. Unfulfilled we come back for that hit, again and again.

This chronic need for fulfillment feeds into the role we have taken on as spectators. We no longer take part in the creation and exaltations of communal joy: we become voyeurs. Healing dances are replaced by stages, by mass spectacles of State power, or exhibitions of individual ability. Situationist Guy Debord referred to “the society of the spectacle” as “an epoch without festivals.”<sup>204</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich follows on his sentiment: “Instead of generating their own collective pleasures, people absorb, or consume, the spectacles of commercial entertainment, nationalist rituals, and the consumer culture, with its endless advertisements for the pleasure of individual ownership.”<sup>205</sup>

In the absence of community, indulgence of the Self takes over.

But we still seek and desire that sense of belonging, that sense of place: that moment of euphoria.

And so we consume it regardless of consequence.

I often wonder how anyone in our society could turn to heroin, crack or similar heavy drugs. There’s no absence of information about what happens. How the brain can stop producing serotonin on its own and how this furthers dependency and worsens withdrawal.

But I knew Mike.

We grew up together and both of us were witnesses to how all problems could be solved by consumption. If you have a physical problem or any level of discomfort, there is a pill for that. Attention issues? Moodiness? Anger? Sadness? Each one had its pills. And the more pills you take, the more you must increase the dosage to feel the effect.

We see this in literally every aspect of life within Modernity. Our solutions are always to increase the synthetics and to amplify the effect. We expect immediate gratification. We expect to be entertained and coddled. Catered and comforted. We’ve reduced our needs to the chemical level and then reassemble them in pieces.

Oxycodone is a natural step in. Global poppy supply increases, first in Afghanistan, then in Latin America where the “War on Drugs” resulted in ridgelines of forest wiped out with glyphosate to combat coca operations pushing the growers into valleys where

poppy grows easily. The cost of opiates drops and the drug companies react.

Opium use, in either heroin or painkillers, exploded simply because it was cheap and powerful.<sup>206</sup> Doctors began prescribing Oxycodone for increasingly less severe pain. Age was never a consideration; children and teenagers were and are being given opiates for relatively minor injuries.

I feel a sense of haunting over me after hearing the torn and pain-ridden words of a Massachusetts mother who lost two sons to heroin, an addiction that began as their high school football injuries were treated with Oxycodone. They were hooked and when the prescriptions ran out, heroin was there, and cheaper. In her words:

*Back in 1999, Perdue Pharmacy spent 200 million dollars pushing opiates. . . What was supposed to be a life ending severe pain we start giving for wisdom teeth. Why are we pushing these drugs?*<sup>207</sup>

On the streets, the cost of a single Oxycodone pill can run \$80.

A hit of heroin can cost \$10.

In the words of users: “I fell in love with the feeling. And it’s cheap.” “Heroin was amazing. It was like a fountain of warmth shooting out of the top of your head, covering you in a velvet blanket.” “I don’t shoot heroin to get high, I shoot it to get well. . . . I don’t know how to have fun without drugs.”<sup>208</sup>

There used to be a myth of Progress that pervaded the language of civilization: a notion that things were better and that they would continue to improve. As technology and social media use increase, we no longer talk of Progress: we live it. We expect the gratification of desires and it keeps us from even having to look up. Consequences take place in a time that isn’t now, so it simply doesn’t matter.<sup>209</sup>

This is the epitome of addiction: I will do what it takes to get this sensation immediately.

A new drug, Krokodil, drives that home. It is also appropriately called ‘the zombie drug’ and its name taken from the reptilian-es-

que skin users develop as a result of missing the vein while injecting, even slightly.

Krokodil has been an epidemic in Russia, but hasn't stopped there. Junkies use it because it is cheaper than heroin and a relatively similar high, but it is easier to manufacture. It is made from mixing codeine with "a brew of poisons such as paint thinner, hydrochloric acid and red phosphorus scraped from the strike pads on matchboxes."<sup>210</sup> Life expectancy for users is drastically short even compared to heroin users: typically one year, maybe two.

Where users inject the drug, "blood vessels burst and surrounding tissue dies, sometimes falling off the bone in chunks."<sup>211</sup> If you miss the vein, that area of flesh will die right away. If there is a worse drug out there, I don't think I can stand to hear about it.

A Russian krokodil user shares no illusion about the nature of this particular mix of poisons:

*"You can feel how disgusting it is when you're doing it," he recalls. "You're dreaming of heroin, of something that feels clean and not like poison. But you can't afford it, so you keep doing the krokodil. Until you die."*<sup>212</sup>

Krokodil may be the more extreme case, but it is not abnormal.

Any place where the will to live is gone, this is what you'll find. For Inuit communities, they are losing their children to an addiction of huffing gas.<sup>213</sup> Indigenous societies in Canada that have been subjected to the decimation of their communities have a suicide rate ten times the national average.

The Guarani of Brazil have been committing suicide in droves. In 1995, suicide ended the lives of 56 Guarani. But suicide isn't what caused their death, the destruction of their culture did. The sentiment was not hard for remaining Guarani to understand:

*Young people are nostalgic for the beautiful forests... A young person told me he didn't want to live anymore because there was no reason to carry on living—there is no hunting, no fishing, and the water is polluted.*<sup>214</sup>

The search for extremes in getting high has led to a flood of Western hipsters seeking *ayahuasca* for a new high. This has resulted in the deaths of European and American teens from using synthetic alternatives for the drug (native to South America) during sessions with faux-shamans.<sup>215</sup>

Not to be outdone, *Vice Magazine* wasn't going to miss out on this "new" trend, paying \$230 per session with a "shaman" in Berlin, selling the trip as horribly as possible:

*For late thirtysomething affluent vegans who don't go to clubs anymore and who spend Christmas in India so they don't have to visit their parents, it's about as hip as partner swapping.*

Confirming their own expectations, after elaborating on the violent sickness that comes hand-in-hand with this intoxicant:

*In a way, it takes you back to your original essence in nature, and that's no bad thing if, like me, your regular connection with nature is watching your tomato plants slowly die on the windowsill each summer.*

Have no fear, that's not the only perk:

*Oh, and seeing your dick as tall as a building, rendered from solid, impenetrable stone is something all insecure young boys, who grow into secretly insecure men, need to see at least twice.<sup>216</sup>*

"It is a measure of our general deprivation" states Barbara Ehrenreich, "that the most common referent for *ecstasy* in usage today is not an experience but a drug, MDMA, that offers fleeting feelings of euphoria and connectedness."<sup>217</sup>

For most of us, these extremes may come as unfamiliar. We can see them from the safety of a distance. We can judge and we can lie to ourselves.

The dopamine response that heroin users become addicted to lacks scrutiny with more acceptable social behaviors. As we mindlessly swipe the screen of a smartphone looking for updates, the

mind releases dopamine in ways similar to receiving good news.<sup>218</sup> The hit of dopamine that comes from getting “likes” on Facebook “fools our brain into believing that loved ones surround us.”<sup>219</sup>

A new trend has arisen in cities where there are “cuddle parties” or “snuggle buddies.” These are explicitly non-sexual interactions where the purpose is simply to be touched. One company offers the service for \$80 an hour and sessions up to 10 hours. Advertising the service as a cure all for everything from depression to aging, there is no question that the oxytocin released in our brains when we are in contact with another being creates a sense of joy.<sup>220</sup> But this industry is kind of a sad call back to the healing rituals we opened with.

There are moments when our search for community comes so close in form and function to those healing rituals, but deprived of context, it all becomes a kind of perversion. What we want, what we need, is right in front of us, but we are all too damaged to reach out. Paying for a service is far more in the comfort zone that has been provided to us.

It is consumable.

Addiction is a patterned behavior: a self-reinforcing cycle. Stripped of place, dopamine and its feelings of joy within our bodies becomes another drug. Psychologist Amy Banks explains our altered relationship with dopamine:

*In an ideal world—one that understands the centrality of healthy relationship to health and wellness—the dopamine reward system stays connected to human connection as the primary source of stimulation. Unfortunately, we do not live in this ideal world. We live in a culture that actively undermines this precious dopamine-relationship connection. We raise children to stand on their own two feet while the separate self is an American icon of maturity. It is making us sick.*

*This disconnection is a set-up for addiction as we search for other sources of dopamine. The “other sources” look shockingly similar to the list of common cultural complaints—overeating and obesity, drug and alcohol abuse, consumerism, chronic hooking up. Not only do these addictive, destructive behaviors get paired to the dopamine reward system but they create a feedback loop of*

*isolation that pushes people towards more addictions.*<sup>221</sup>

The problem for domesticators is that we're still human. We're still animals.

We always have been and we always will be.

As depressing and hopeless as an exploration of addiction and civilization can feel, the common thread throughout all of this is that we never give up. The hunter-gatherer within us is not dead. We are captive animals. Distracted though we may be, it is the existence of our emptiness, the depravity of our search for that connection that keeps programmers awake at night.

Removed as we are from the world as we were meant to inherit it: our want for community struggles against all odds.

And it is that undying spirit that may ultimately bring the end of civilization.

### *Revival of the Spirit*

*The last communities do a ghost dance, and the ghosts of the last communities will continue to dance within the entrails of the artificial beast. The council-fires of the never-defeated communities are not extinguished by the genocidal invaders, just as the light of Ahura Mazda was not extinguished by rulers who claimed it shone on them. The fire is eclipsed by something dark, but it continues to burn, and its flames shoot out where they are least expected.*

- Fredy Perlman, *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan*<sup>222</sup>

Rupert Isaacson sought out the San for his own reasons. He wanted to enter the Kalahari to find his wholeness, to take part in an ancestral society with its healing dances and intact community. What he found in his journeys at the turn of the twenty-first century was a radical departure from those expectations.

At this point, we know what happened to the San.

We know that forced settlements, an influx of intoxicants and an illegalization of subsistence hunting and nomadism took its toll on their culture. During his time with the San, Isaacson was forced

to take a realistic assessment of what had happened and what future lay ahead for this captive society of hunter-gatherers as they struggle to fight for their land rights.

Before leaving the Kalahari, Isaacson witnessed a minor victory in the fight for land rights. An occasion met with the unthinkable: a healing dance. Outside of the world of tourists, this relic of their communal life had not vanished completely.<sup>223</sup>

Against all odds, the potential for healing, the potential for community survives.

It does no good to blame addicts.

That's not grounds for absolving or justifying behaviors. But the problem is that if we don't confront the nature and presence of our own addictions then we are simply denying our complicity with civilization, with the perpetuation of our own domestication.

We need a sober assessment of our situation and we need action to follow. It is not enough to blame the lack of community for indulgences. Rebuilding community is certainly no easy task, but it is the task at hand. Resistance against domestication, if it is not grounded in the world of the known rather than a philosophical notion of what could be, will never be successful.

This is also not the hippies call to the commune. Proximity alone is not enough.

Functioning community is a place where resolution comes from contextualizing conflict and handling problems on their own terms. Rooted in subsistence, community requires a connection to place and a basis in subsistence or, at the very least, a turn towards it.

We have to shed utopian and liberal delusions and the belief that we can and always will get along; we need to embrace those aspects of human emotion and behavior that only the primal anarchy of nomadic hunter-gatherer life can endure. And I say this knowing full well that nothing in life is this easy. We all have our conditioning and we are under assault on all fronts from the world that civilization has created.

But we have to start somewhere.

Like addicts, no one can make us change if we don't seek it out ourselves.

Like nomadic hunter-gatherers, engagement of community makes it immediately apparent that any illusion of freedom to leave civilization is a hoax. If it was simply accomplishable indigenous societies would have never taken up settlements or been forced to take up arms against armies, missionaries, developers, and corporations. To engage with the world, we can't carry delusions. Community begins with honest communication, with allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and emboldened at the same time.

This will not be a quick journey.

Rewilding can only be measured in terms of generations, not individuals.

Without resistance, there will never be the chance to see that through.

Our spirits need an awakening: a place to open up. A place where we can truly feel the crushing anguish and despair that suicidal Guarani peoples feel as they see the state of the world thrust upon them.

We need a place where our sense of comfort in conformity is challenged by sustenance.

And we will not get there alone.

Our ability to effectively bleed the machine that has stripped us of our community will be a rage born of healing: a euphoric catharsis within the context of the dispossessed.

*Kia* and *Molimo* are not ours for the taking, but they are part of a legacy of primal healing. Our dance has yet to be found, but it exists. That the seed of community hasn't been killed already should give us hope. As should the need of colonizers to target the healing dances. If the veneer of domestication begins to crack, the threat posed by communities of resistance arises.

"This is the real bone of contention between civilization and collective ecstasy," Barbara Ehrenreich observes, "Ecstatic rituals still build group cohesion, but when they build it among subordinates—peasants, slaves, women, colonized people—the elite calls out its troops."<sup>224</sup>

The minor victory that Isaacson had witnessed did not last. The settled life of the San had carried on. *Kia* became a thing of memory. Or so it would seem. The anthropologist Charlie Good-

win living amongst the San happened to catch a group of drunk San engage in *kia*.<sup>225</sup>

The hope of communal survival springs forth again in dance.

Among present day Baka, hunting was a source of social cohesion: one that has been stripped away by the weight of Modernity. And yet when large groups gather, the songs and dances return.<sup>226</sup>

Despite everything that we have seen about the world that we have created, the world we were born into, it is resiliency that has carried humans as far and wide as we have moved. It is that same resiliency that allows the body to continue existing even as we assault it with chemicals, intoxicants, and poisons, subject it to sedentary life, and attack our senses with the sights and sounds of civilization instead of immersing ourselves in the wild.

For whatever reason, against all odds, our bodies still function.

It is easy to see that as a misfortune: to see what it is that civilization has done to this world, our home, and to be able to carry on. It's a privilege that we take for granted as we lose ourselves in screens and empty relationships, in production and consumption.

And yet it is that resiliency that keeps us searching.

Against all of the hopelessness in the world as it is, it is this constant nagging and want for life that gives me reason to fight.

To resist.

To undermine the logic of domestication.

The urge that led Mike to inject heroin into his veins lives on with me. Within all of us.

I can only imagine what may happen when our healing begins. What we may be capable of when we find our place again and are forced to confront the civilization that threatens to exterminate it.

May we one day dance in euphoria upon its ruins.

As wild beings freed from captivity.

As wild, euphoric communities.

*Dedicated to Mike and Danielle.*

*Endnotes*

1. David Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World*. Harvard UP: Cambridge, 2001. Pg 92. I can't speak highly enough of this book.
2. Cited in Chellis Glendinning, *My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization*. Shambhala: Boston, 1994. Pg 99.
3. Ibid. Pg 98.
4. Ibid.
5. 'The Heroin Epidemic in 9 Graphs', US News & World Report. <http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2015/08/19/the-heroin-epidemic-in-9-graphs> Accessed 12-24-2015.
6. 'Today's Heroin Epidemic' CDC, <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/heroin/> Accessed 12-24-2015
7. 'Opioid Addiction Disease 2015 Facts & Figures' American Society of Addiction Medicine. <http://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/opioid-addiction-disease-facts-figures.pdf> Accessed 12-24-2015
8. [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/01/07/us/drug-overdose-deaths-in-the-us.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/01/07/us/drug-overdose-deaths-in-the-us.html?_r=0) Accessed 2-25-2016.
9. John Zerzan, *Future Primitive and Other Essays*. Autonomedia: Brooklyn, 1994. Pg 137.
10. The distinction between immediate and delayed return hunter-gatherer societies is absolutely crucial to understanding domestication. For more on this, see James Woodburn, 'Egalitarian Societies'. *Man*, New Series. No 17, Vol 3 (Sept 1982).
11. Colin Turnbull, 'The Importance of Flux in Two Hunting Societies' in Lee and Devore (eds), *Man the Hunter*. Aldine de Gruyter: New York, 1968. Pg 132.
12. Turnbull, Woodburn, et al, 'Resolving Conflicts by Fission' in Lee and Devore, 1968. Pg 156.
13. Colin Turnbull, *The Human Cycle*. Simon and Schuster: New York, 1983. Pg 45.
14. Turnbull, 1968. Pg 156.
15. For more on this, see my essay 'To Speak of Wildness' in *Black and Green Review* no 2, Fall 2015.
16. Turnbull, 'The Ritualization of Potential Conflict Among the Mbuti' in Leacock and Lee, *Politics and History in Band Society*. Cambridge UP: London, 1982. Pg 142.
17. Cited in Frank Marlowe, *The Hadza: Hunter-Gatherers of Tanzania*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, 2010. Pg 60.
18. Carleton Coon, *The Hunting Peoples*. Nick Lyons Books: New York, 1971. Pg 187. Coon specifies in this line about the "vast majority of hunting and gathering peoples" and highlights "habit-forming drugs", but the book includes immediate and delayed return HG societies. As we see here, numerous delayed return HG societies do use intoxicants for ritualistic purposes, hence the qualifications in this particular line. The study does specify which societies do and do not use intoxicants.

19. I have to admit my hesitancy in adding this clarification. I've spent the last decade trying to disprove the correlation between nomadic hunter-gatherer life and a distinct lack of intoxicating substances and cannot disprove it. However, I've chosen to leave this a bit more open and ambiguous because if someone were to find a skeleton of an individual Pleistocene-era hunter-gatherer with handfuls of opium somehow, the link between ritualistic and habitual use still stands. Egalitarianism is the nature of nomadic hunter-gatherer societies, in terms of individual behavior; this gives the space for true individual freedom should one wish to take that to whatever ends they imagine.
20. Glendinning, 1994. Pg 126.
21. Laura Rival, *Trekking Through History: The Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador*. Columbia UP: New York, 2002. Pg 138.
22. Note that I have standardized all references to *n/um* despite some variation in how the term is spelled within the ethnographic record for the sake of consistency.
23. Richard Katz, *Boiling Energy: Community Healing Among the Kalahari Kung*. Harvard UP: Cambridge, MA, 1982. Pg 52.
24. Ibid, Pg 44.
25. Richard Lee, *The Dobe Jul'hoansi (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)*. Wadsworth: London, 2003. Pg 130-131.
26. Mathias Guenther, *Tricksters & Trancers: Bushman Religion and Society*. Indiana UP: Bloomington, IN, 1999. Pg 181.
27. Katz, 1982. Pg 35.
28. Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*. Vintage: New York, 1983. Pg 299.
29. Katz, 1982. Pg 52.
30. Shostak, 1983. Pg 296.
31. Lee, 2003. Pg 132.
32. Guenther, 1999. Pg 182.
33. Ibid. Pg 183. It is worth noting that Nisa claims that sometimes adolescents are given a root to help ease their transition into *n/um*, but I have not been able to find anything in detail about what the root is and whether it may be an intoxicant or an herbal remedy. Regardless, it is only used for "training" purposes, not to induce *n/um*.
34. Shostak, 1983. Pg 299.
35. Ibid, Pg 296.
36. Guenther, 1999. Pg 183.
37. Katz, 1982. Pg 37.
38. Lee, 2003. Pg 135 and Shostak, 1983. Pg 296.
39. Daisuke Bundo, 'Social Relationship Embodied in Singing and Dancing Performances Among the Baka'. *African Study Monographs*, Supp. 26: 85-101, March 2001. Pg 96.
40. Ibid. Pg 86.
41. Jerome Lewis, 'How Language Evolved from Singing'. <https://vimeo.com/114605825> . For more on this subject, see my essay 'Subjects Object!' in *Black and Green Review* no 2 (Fall 2015).
42. Rival, 2002. Pg 101.
43. Kevin Duffy, *The Children of the Forest: Africa's Mbuti Pygmies*. Waveland

- Press: Prospect Heights, IL, 1996. Pg 54.
44. Turnbull, 1983. Pg 44.
45. Colin Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*. The Natural History Press: Garden City, NY, 1965. Pgs 132-133.
46. Ibid. Pg 72.
47. The absence of fire and even moonlight (during the Hadza's *epeme*) is worth further exploration. It seems probable that this dance is so primal that it incorporates a rejection of fire and a complete absorption into wildness without any element of mediation.
48. Marlowe, 2010. Pg 59.
49. Ibid, pg 68.
50. Bundo, 2001. Pg 96.
51. Paul Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. Island Press: Washington DC, 1998. Pgs 91-92.
52. Hunter-collectors are discussed in greater detail in the "Conquests of Bread" section, also see my essays 'The Forest Beyond the Field' and 'To Produce or To Not Produce' in Tucker, 2010.
53. For example, see Masato Sawada, 'Encounters with the Dead Among Efe and the Balese in the Ituri Forest: Mores and Ethnic Identity Shown by the Dead'. *African Study Monographs*, Suppl. 25:85-104, March 1998.
54. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton UP: Princeton, 1974. Pg 84.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid, Pg 109.
57. David Riches, 'Shamanism: the Key to Religion'. *Man*, New Series, Vol 29 No 2 (June 1994), Pgs 381-405. Pg 389.
58. Ibid. Pg 382.
59. Eliade, 1974. Pgs 222-223 & Pg 221.
60. Ibid. Pgs 222-223.
61. An act made famous enough in Siberia to channel animal spirits that it became a target during the onslaught of relentless Soviet persecution of Siberian shamans, see Piers Vitebsky, *The Reindeer People: Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia*. Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 2005. Pg 261.
62. Andy Letcher, *Shroom: A Cultural History of the Magic Mushroom*. Harper Collins: New York, 2006. Pg 15.
63. Ibid, Pg 28.
64. O.T. Oss & O.N. Oeric, *Psilocybin: Magic Mushroom Grower's Guide*. Quick American Publishing, 1993. Pg 20.
65. Letcher, 2006. Pg 28.
66. Ibid, Pg 17.
67. Paul Gahlinger, *Illegal Drugs: A Complete Guide to their History, Chemistry, Use, and Abuse*. Plume: New York City, 2003. Pg 273.
68. Letcher, 2006. Pg 29.
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