

George Jack
gjack@hotmail.com
www.typeabpositive.com

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DRINKING AND THE ART OF DRINKING APPRECIATION

An Essay by George "Fatback" Jack and Eric "Bone" Waite

Drinking has been with us since the beginning of time. At the very least, it has been with us since the Assyrians and the Babylonians starting brewing beer around 4,000 years ago. Since then, its place in our everyday lives has made it a part of our living history as well. It is a collective backdrop against which friends are made, experiences are shared, memories are kindled, and cultures may be defined. Since drink may be seen as a defining facet of culture and life, so may we infer that drinking and its place in our lives may be appreciated in many ways

and on many levels, whether aesthetic, social, or emotional. Drink is such a common thread stitching its way through the awareness of humankind that often our relationship with it escapes notice. A multifaceted art which may not be so much lost as it is hidden, the art of drinking appreciation.

Every art form, every movement in art needs its artists and artisans. In terms of the drinking culture, the artists are the craftspeople who produce the variety of beverages that mankind imbibes of and boozes from, such as the brewer who crafts the beers, ales, stouts, lambics, and lagers; the vintner and grower of wine; the distiller of hard liquor and our various other boozes. Their art may be traced to the dawn of the history by which they invented and perfected the techniques of crafting the drinks we share and toast each other with today. Then there are the bartenders and waitresses, whose art lies in the way that they help to make the drinking experience pleasant and memorable. Whether it be the conversational, friendly, and/or physically attractive attributes of the good waitress or bartender; or the crafters of our various boozes; inhabiting the drinking culture are the various sorts of artists who have not only founded its tradition,

but help keep its own movement and enculturation as alive and thriving as it is today.

The drinking culture itself is not without its own works of art, such as the masterpieces that hang on our barroom and apartment walls, as well as resting on our coffee tables and bar counters so subtly that they have become a part of our drinking culture without our necessarily noticing it. Whereas the artisans of the Greek and Roman empires sculpted statues of their goddesses in order to worship them, in their place today we have posters of the most beautiful models on Earth in various settings displaying their 'wares' - enticing but only loosely related to partying by the alcohol related logo with which they share their likeness. Often a classy bar's walls will be adorned with serving trays whose old timey logos and designs not only advertise their particular cocktail but give an onlooker a sense of perspective as the designs serve to hearken back a viewer's perspective to a different time and place in history. When those articles combined with the designs on mirrors and coasters we use at bars and house parties come together they create an art movement running within the scope of the art of drinking appreciation. This movement was initially started (and is still spurred on) by the advertising industry, but has also

served to bookmark our living history by providing a ready glimpse into our cultural heritage, whether drinking-related or not.

Just as poetry has its coffeehouses, painting and sculpture have their galleries, and practitioners of the endomorphic ballet of sumo wrestling ply their delicately savage art in the dohyo, so too does the drinking culture have its various atmospheres, settings, and environments in which its rituals, artistic endeavor, and customs are observed. For we of the drinking culture, the environments in college settings were the keg parties, "late nights", and happy hours we frequented. When we weren't throwing these crazy shindigs, we would get tips earlier in the day on where they were going to take place, whether at a friend's house, a friend of a friend's house, or the occasional fraternity house.

These places were where your pals were where they were at, where the scene was; where one could find an economical cup of good cheap keg beer, sit in on a drinking game or two, and observe the best and worst traditions of the drinking culture being upheld. These were and are the most intimate settings in which one might see the aforementioned artworkings of the drinking culture such as beer/alcohol related marketing posters, or the coasters and mirrors with

booze logos on them. Drinking aesthetics, especially at the more intimate gatherings, are observed in all their glory; the sounds of a beer tab being pulled and snapped back, the screw top off of a bottle of cheap wine cracking as it's turned for the first time, or the pop of a champagne bottle at its initial uncorking; the sight of beer, champagne, wine, or other boozes being poured into a glass or mug; the crisp, bitter, individually crafted taste of skill and sacrifice in every cocktail, and the feeling of living history that drinking the same recipe that has been made for generations engenders; and the chanting, rally cries, and other sounds of camaraderie with a din echoing throughout the ongoing memories of some of the greatest nights that can never be duplicated, the great boozing times.

The real art of drinking appreciation may be ultimately said to lie in the appreciation itself, meaning that appreciating what one has going on while it's going on tends to cast a better, more social light on what one is doing at the moment, and this may be said to include a night with friends that involves delving into the drinking culture as part of that social backdrop. Drinking cannot be dismissed as wasteful idiocy, although as idiotic wastefulness goes, it's arguably not the worst way one

could go about it, when one takes into account the camaraderie it fosters in small groups, in public bars or houses, or on global levels, as observed at Montreal Jazz Weekends, the running of the bulls at Pamplona, Rio's Carnivale, as well as various Beerstocks and Oktoberfests observed around the world on an annual basis. The power of drinking appreciation lies not only in its spontaneity and the magic of the moment, but in its universality and inobservance of temporalness. Time slips by though, and before one knows it friendships, even among the best of drinking buddies, end or may be sorely tested by distance and circumstance. In light of that, it's incumbent upon practitioners of drinking and the art of drinking appreciation to retell those old stories before they get too blurrier, while they're in the midst of making new ones; take the best drinking games from yesterday and today and share them with anyone who wants, nay, needs to play; and to point out that, as a case of beer must come to its logical conclusion at some point during the night or before the sun comes up, so should drinking appreciation lend itself to a certain amount of brevity. Drinkers and drinking game players are charged with enjoyed the day and the golden years of drinking while one can. Drink; whoop it up; yeah baby, work it; celebrate; hold the days and

nights to be fun and special; play drinking games; know the drinking lingo; pass the drinking culture on to one's sleeping next door neighbor who hopefully has to work the next day; booze some more; keep the art of drinking appreciation alive in men's hearts; and make the memories good.