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## **Keywords**

intellectual communities, alcohol, communitas, graduate students, symbolism

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## Ale and Alliances: Beer Symbolism at the University of Western Ontario Graduate Pub

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Robert Wishart

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### ABSTRACT

There has been a tendency in the social sciences to focus on societal ills when studying the relationship between the consumption of alcohol and society. Recently, some anthropologists have called this predilection into question. This paper attempts to explain, through the historical context of drinking in Western society, how the choice to consume British style beer (known for its complex sensory characteristics) by the patrons of the Society of Graduate Students' Pub at the University of Western Ontario, aids in creating intellectual *communitas* between graduate students and professors. It is argued that this action of *communitas* occurs in a liminal phase in the daily existence of the graduate student, a phase significant in stimulating thought and learning.

In *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology* (1987), Mary Douglas begins her analysis of the work done on alcohol by scientists and social-scientists by pointing out that most earlier studies done on alcohol have been from a deviance-oriented research stance. Medical and sociological researchers have traditionally viewed alcohol as the cause of societal ills and, therefore, only excesses have been noted.

Anthropologists, however, do not necessarily take this position. When in the field, anthropologists have often noted the importance of drink in ritual behaviour and, as a consequence of doing ethnographic research, they do not start with the same deviance-oriented stance as other social-scientists. I have found Douglas' critique seems to be justified. In the process of researching this paper, I was able to find precious little on the analysis of drink other than materials on alcohol abuse and treatment programs.

One area of research which has received particular overemphasis is the manner in which the popular media have often sought, and indeed still seek, to uncover the antisocial characteristics of alcohol consumption among university students. Such brief and often sensationalistic studies have, to my knowledge, only been done on undergraduates and, furthermore, have usually only focused on first year students. Undergraduates have reasons and meanings attached to the consumption of alcohol which, while interesting in their own right, do not suffice to explain what is really going on with the patrons of other university based drinking establishments. For instance, from the observations I have made, and from the conversations that I have had with other patrons of the University of Western Ontario Graduate-Pub, I can find little evidence of the machismo or sexually loaded meanings that are often attached to the undergraduate drinking experience. Furthermore, alcohol does not seem to be consumed in the large quantities typical of undergraduate drinking rituals, and

the quality of drink seems to be better than that of the typical undergraduate fare. Graduate students drink less (at least within the context of their university drinking establishment) but they also drink more of the premium brands of available alcoholic beverages.

This paper will investigate the symbolic meanings that have been associated with alcohol by previous works in the social-sciences, explore the practice of drinking among the patrons of the Grad-Pub, and, as a result of insights gained from these, analyze the reasons why Graduate students drink at this sort of establishment and the symbolic associations that can be made about their choice in drink.

I first became interested in this area of research when I noticed that at the Grad-Pub there are a wide selection of draft beers which conform to British styles. In addition, I have observed that such beers seem to be very popular with the students and professors who frequent this bar. I found this interesting because while doing my undergraduate degree at Concordia University, the undergraduate bar experimented with selling three different imported British draft ales; and, while they were popular with a few of the students, by the end of the fiscal month it was discovered that most of the beer had gone bad and had to be discarded. This waste resulted in an overall financial loss. Consequently, the student government at Concordia decided to discontinue serving British ale and replaced foreign kegs with those of more popular domestic brands. At the UWO Graduate-Pub, on the other hand, I have never been served a sour pint; and I have heard nothing about having to waste large quantities of stock. This observation should not be taken as an attempt to declare that every graduate student prefers British ale, but rather that a discrepancy exists which needs explanation.

### PREVIOUS SYMBOLIC ANALYSES OF ALCOHOL

#### 1: Dwight Heath's Generalizations

In the introduction to *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*, Dwight Heath lists seven generalizations concerning cross-cultural studies on alcohol use. They are:

1. In most societies, drinking is essentially a social act and, as such, it is embedded in a context of values, attitudes, and other norms.
2. These values, attitudes, and other norms constitute important socio-cultural factors that influence the effects of drinking, regardless of how important biochemical, physiological, and

pharmacokinetic factors may also be in that respect.

3. The drinking of alcoholic beverages tends to be hedged about with rules concerning who may and may not drink, how much of what, in what contexts, in the company of whom, and so forth. Often such rules are the focus of exceptionally strong emotions and sanctions.

4. The value of alcohol for promoting relaxation and sociability is emphasized in many populations.

5. The association of drinking with any kind of specifically associated problems - physical, economic, psychological, social relational, or other - is rare among cultures throughout both history and the contemporary world.

6. When alcohol-related problems do occur, they are clearly linked with modalities of drinking, and usually also with values, attitudes, and norms about drinking.

7. Attempts at Prohibition have never been successful except when couched in terms of sacred or supernatural rules (Heath 1987: 46).

Concerning Heath's generalizations, the most valuable aspects to comprehend as a foundation of the analytical stance which this paper is taking are numbers one, two, and four:

1. In most societies, drinking is essentially a social act and, as such, it is embedded in a context of values, attitudes, and other norms.

3. The drinking of alcoholic beverages tends to be hedged about with rules concerning who may and may not drink, how much of what, in what contexts, in the company of whom, and so forth. Often such rules are the focus of exceptionally strong emotions and sanctions.

4. The value of alcohol for promoting relaxation and sociability is emphasized in many populations.

These three generalizations are in correspondence with the idea presented in this paper that once alcohol is analyzed not for the problems it may cause but, rather, as a component of cultural behaviour, a more profound understanding of its symbolic meanings and contexts can be brought to light.

## 2: E.M. Jellinek's Culture-Historical Approach

In "The Symbolism of Drinking; a Culture-Historical Approach," E.M. Jellinek argues that the consumption of alcohol is an extremely old custom that still exists in many cultures despite the futile attempts made to eradicate it. Previously, scholars have perpetuated the theory of alcohol acting solely as an anxiety reduction agent and they have, therefore, made little attempt to understand the symbolic attributes associated with the imbibing of alcoholic beverages. Jellinek goes on to discuss how alcohol has historically been symbolically interchangeable with water, milk, and blood. Alcohol eventually replaced such symbols of fertility and life because of its pharmacological effects, and, hence, alcohol has often been semantically expressed as a symbolic extension of these fruitful symbols. For example, when distilled spirits were first introduced to Europe (or first invented there, depending on whether you accept the diffusion or independent invention models of cultural acquisition) they were called, in several languages, what can be roughly translated as "water of life." Examples include: "aqua vitae," Latin; "eau de vie," French; and "usequebaugh" Gaelic (Jellinek 1977).

When alcohol started to be symbolically associated with blood, the properties of blood became affiliated with alcohol. As blood is the essential stream-of-life, alcohol also took on this dimension. Jellinek suggests that "... the stream-of-life symbolism means power" (1977: 857). What follows from such weighty symbolic significance is the structuring of prestige around the substance, and this prestige becomes obtainable through the act of consumption. Hence, what has often occurred has been an association between religious figures and alcoholic drink. Examples of such a connection are many: Tonarikan, for the Cora of Mexico; Dionysis, for the Ancient Greeks; Isis, for the Ancient Egyptians; and, of course, Jesus for the Christians (Jellinek 1977). Alcoholic drink, once symbolically connected with blood, could become further correlated to the social group as a whole. Sharing alcohol can be associated with group identity, and as such, it is not to be drunk with just anyone. Rather alcohol should, under such circumstances, be consumed with people who are to become, in some way, socially bonded. Jellinek cites the *Iliad* as an example:

Seeing the Trojans have thus smitten thee, and trodden under foot the oaths of faith. Yet in no wise is an oath of none effect and the blood of lambs and drink-offerings of unmixed wine and the hand-clasps, wherein we put our trust. For...with a heavy price do men make atonement, even with their own heads and their wives and their children (Homer cited in Jellinek 1977: 859).

The above quote illustrates the symbolic value placed upon the sharing of wine. The Greeks are upset because the Trojans, after confirming a cease-fire through the ceremonial process of shared drink, break the truce. The Trojans, therefore, also breach socially constructed ties and, hence, the Greeks are left believing that they were mere perfunctory brethren.

Another interesting example, this time from English society, is the term to "hobnob." The term is now used for a description of social interaction that is usually, but not always, associated with the consumption of alcohol. "Hobnob" originated in the 16th century, when one would turn to a neighbor at a banquet and ask: "Will you hob or nob with me?" Hob derives from the Anglo-Saxon "haebbe", meaning to have, and, conversely, nob is from "naebbe" – not to have. If the response to the inquiry was hob, then the participants would drink together, and, subsequently, create a social bond. Conversely, if the reply were in the negative, nob, then they would not drink together and this action was taken as a sign of aggressive rejection. (Jellinek 1977).

Jellinek characterizes many drinking situations as having what he calls "adventitious symbolism." The term adventitious means "from the outside," or "out of place," and he uses this term to describe situations where alcohol is consumed at times not normally considered appropriate; an example being occasions when many people consume a drink consisting of Champagne and fruit juice during breakfast on New Years Day. As many of the occurrences of "adventitious" drinking take place during transitional periods in rites of passage, I find his usage of this term problematic in that "adventitious symbolism" does not describe an act that is out of place, *per se*, but, rather, a situation which has special social connotations. In the sense that transitional acts are "neither here nor there" (Turner 1969:165), "adventitious" drinking could be said to exist outside of normal action. However, to deem the practice fully "out of place" is misleading due to the fact that a symbolic bridge is being constructed between two or more recognized social categories. It is only from the outside perspective that transitional behaviour appears to be out of place, and it therefore becomes necessary to further analyze such situations so that the internal logic of the act in question can be brought to light. For example, I have a good friend whose father upon waking up at the cottage will fix himself a drink consisting of two ounces of 151 proof rum which he mixes with six ounces of orange juice. This powerful drink is then served in a coffee cup, and is affectionately called, by him and his friends, a "Fuzzy Arsehole." This drink is only made on the Saturday morning, the first day of the Weekend. When asked why this ritual occurs, my friend's father invariably replies that it is just a good way to begin the weekend. When further asked about serving the drink in a coffee cup, he reasons that it just wouldn't look good to have a cocktail glass in one's hand a seven in the morning: a coffee cup is more fitting. He will often further justify

the choice of vessel by talking about how his wife cannot tell what the cup contains.

His emic response has a few problems. The first is that this drinking act occurs before anyone else is around and, therefore, discretion is not really at issue. The second is that his wife is perfectly aware of this behaviour and that he makes no attempt at hiding other evidence of this practice – the rum bottle is left out, and both the jigger and the empty glasses are left in the sink with the dregs still in them. Furthermore, when his wife fondly asks him if he had his "fuzzy" that morning, he makes no effort to deceive her, and she shows no signs of disapproving of this action.

Due to the contradictions between my friend's father's explanations and actions, a more etic analysis is needed to further our understanding of what can be derived from such an out-of-place drinking ritual. This act does not occur in the city whether it be a holiday or not; in the city, coffee is served in coffee cups. What is occurring is an act of liminality – coffee is replaced by a drink that has the opposite effect – it is a time period for complete leisure and, hence, a relaxing drug is substituted for one that prepares a person for work. This is not to say that no coffee will be drunk later on; only the first cup, the symbolic eye-opener, is replaced.

Jellinek (860-862) cites other cases of adventitious symbolism that characterize transitional periods in rites of passage. In the middle ages, when a boy entered a guild to become an apprentice he would distribute drink to all the members. This act symbolized his transition into a new status and also confirmed him as one of the group. In modern times teenage drinking occurs at a time period between childhood and adulthood. By drinking, the teenager symbolically attempts to assert a change of status and to declare that he/she is ready for the responsibilities and authority of adults, and an attempt is made to connect with that world, even though the drinker's attempt is often looked down upon by the members of the adult group.

An Irish wake, where large amounts of alcohol are usually consumed, provides a third example of adventitious drinking. Here it is the transition from life to death that is played upon

...we have a rite of separation; the act of drinking, of taking in the stream of life, symbolizes the separation of the living from the dead (Jellinek 1977: 861).

Jellinek's analysis is distinctly evolutionary, and, as such, is susceptible to the sort of critique which Evans-Prichard (1965) used for religious symbolism. The danger of this approach is that it is speculative, attempting, as it does, to extrapolate cultural traits from isolated incidents and examples. For example, I do not believe that it is necessary, or applicable, to analyze beer drinking in the Grad-Pub as a rite of symbolic blood, milk, or water consumption. I do, on the other hand, think that it is valuable to analyze some of the concepts that stem from Jellinek's romp through the supposed history of alcohol symbolism. The problem



with secular rituals, such as beer drinking among graduate students, is that often no action is really expected, and in such a case it can be difficult to analyze the outcome. Rituals in these instances should be looked upon as expressive acts (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:15). The ideas that are expressive, in Jellinek's analysis, and should be further investigated are those of group identity, liminality, and transformation.

### **3: Joseph Gusfield's Symbolic-Interactional Approach**

Previously I told the story of my friend's father's ritual of drinking rum and orange juice the first morning of weekends spent in the country. Here alcohol was used as a symbol of the transformation of work-time into leisure-time, and was symbolically opposed by coffee as attested by the mediating symbol of the coffee cup. This phenomenon of the opposition of alcohol and coffee has been recognized by others who deal with the symbolic nature of beverages (Douglas 1987, Gusfield 1987). Joseph Gusfield (1987: 83) elaborates on this subject by pointing out that in American society coffee is the agent of sobriety and as such is the antithesis to alcohol. This opposition between coffee and alcohol has also led to the myth of coffee being an antidote for drunkenness, a myth which has absolutely no scientific validity to back it up. Furthermore, coffee is used symbolically to end both parties and meals and, as a breakfast food, coffee recalls the drinker to the "serious mien of the work-place" (83).

Gusfield, a symbolic-interactionist, is particularly interested in the time frames that alcohol occupies in American life. It is his contention that American life has become, through the industrial and postindustrial ages, definite and bounded in relation to work and leisure. People travel from one arena to another, spatially defining their time categories: organization and work become juxtaposed to home and leisure, and alcohol has become symbolic of this passage (Gusfield 1987).

Just as food and the process of eating becomes a "field of action" and, therefore, a medium through which "other levels of categorization become manifest" (Douglas 1984: 30), so also has alcoholic drink become a medium through which American society communicates the border between work and leisure. It is this connection to a frame of time that sets the standards for proper and improper settings for alcohol consumption. "It's time for a drink" (or perhaps more recently: "It's Miller Time"), is a phrase that connotes the end of work activities. Gusfield (1987:78) clarifies these connections between time and frame in a passage which deserves full quotation:

There is a time for work and a time for play; a time for drunkenness and a time for sobriety. Day and night, weekday and weekend, work-time and leisure-time; these mark the boundaries of ordinary separation of abstinence-

time from drinking-time in a wide range of American groups and sub-cultures.

In North American society, alcohol is widely believed to be a mood-setting substance, and the psychological boundary between work and play demands a shift in mood which alcohol can provide. Gusfield lists three reasons for this mood-setting attribute. The first is the cover that alcohol gives one in determining the acceptability of social behaviour. To many people, it is defensible to explain away embarrassing behaviour by assigning the blame to a state of intense drunkenness. The effects of alcohol can be used to excuse: lapses in responsibility; unmannerly behaviour; and immoral and improper actions (and at the present, in Canada, criminal actions). The shift of the burden of explanation, places a frame around alcohol consumption which then "mitigates effects in other spheres of life." (Gusfield 1987:79).

The second attribute of alcohol, assigned by many in North American society, is its festive characteristic. Alcohol is assigned to "party time," while work, conversely, is often referred to in opposition to this: "It's no party". Leisure is supposed to be spontaneous, and alcohol is used as a tool of spontaneity. Conversely, work is the antithesis of spontaneity – it is measured and completely ordered (Gusfield 1987).

The third attribute of alcohol is its accompaniment of social solidarity. As alcohol is identified with leisure time and contrasted to organized work, it dissolves social hierarchies. Alcohol, therefore, marks the time when one goes from a socially bonded vocation with limited role types into an individual characterized by self-expression (Gusfield 1987).

Following Goffman, Gusfield (1987: 80) describes alcohol as a "keying" device that allows one to distinctly know that the frames of daily life are undergoing transformation. Goffman describes keying as: "the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else" (Goffman, cited in Gusfield 1987:80). In order to understand alcohol as a keying device, it is first necessary to understand the liminal period which it occupies.

Victor Turner describes the attributes of liminality as necessarily ambiguous:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols (Turner 1969: 95).

Gusfield (78) describes the time period between work and play as liminal because of the way society has sharply segregated the workplace from the home. What happens between work and home is necessarily

ambiguously framed. "Cocktail hour" is a common after work experience whether at home or in a bar. Bars call this period of time "happy hour," and it symbolizes a shift in mood, style and behaviour. Even the price of drinks become ambiguous with numerous shifts, specials, and deals not available during other times. According to Gusfield, in America the most common time for the consumption of alcohol is just upon entering the household, and is used, once again, as a shift to relaxation. This shift of frame is usually followed by other markers, such as a change of dress. It should be noted that this keying process does not demand that large amounts of alcohol be drunk; it is its use as a cue that is important, not its intoxicating effects (Gusfield 1987: 81).

Alcohol's role in dissolving social hierarchies is particularly important from the standpoint of this paper. Utilizing Turner's distinctions between structure and *communitas*, Gusfield points out that the work world is structured and rule-bound and that the relationships between people are mediated and regulated by the structure in such a situation. When drinking, this structure is put aside, first names are used, and organizational placements tabooed. We often have to act differently towards the same individual depending on the setting. Drink-time is an occasion of liminality: *communitas* takes the place of structure and prepares one for the deregulated sphere of leisure (Gusfield 1987).

#### AT THE GRAD-PUB

This paper argues that what transpires at the Grad-Pub is largely an action of *communitas* which occurs during a liminal phase in the daily existence of the grad student. In order to demonstrate what this paper means by liminality and what its connection to *communitas* is, it is appropriate to consider the associations made between liminality and *communitas* by Turner:

...certain kinds of liminality may be conducive to the emergence of *communitas*... In our society, it seems that the small groups which nourish *communitas*, do so by withdrawing voluntarily from the mainstream not only of economic but also of domestic familial life. The social category becomes the basis of recruitment. People who are similar in one important characteristic, withdraw symbolically, even actually, from the total system... to seek the glow of *communitas* among those with whom they share some cultural or biological feature they take to be their most single mark of identity (1977:47).

What then can be made of the actions of graduate students when they are drinking alcoholic beverages at the Grad-Pub? The pub is most often frequented by students and professors after their classes or meetings. However, this action does not signal the end of the work day. Most often, the patrons of this bar will, upon leaving, go home and begin their evening academic

work load. In the sense that this "leisurely" activity occurs between two periods of responsibility in the day, alcohol can not simply be seen to mark the boundary of work and leisure that the authors noted above have described. Indeed, many people do not consider the Pub to be a place that is devoid of academic merit; they do not recognize it as just another bar, but rather as a place where serious discussions may arise. Often the students and their professors drink together and discuss the day's subjects of investigation. *Communitas* of the sort described by Turner explains such a situation where alcohol is not directly associated with rest or leisure. The students are going from situations where they are being lectured to in "school," to a situation where they are alone with their own thoughts; i.e. at home. The pub works well as a middle phase because here they are able to discuss ideas and theories in a relatively structure-free environment, and bonds are created through such discussions, both between the students themselves and with their professors. In this way the introspective mode of inquiry, necessary for doing academic work by one's self, is gently brought forth out of the lecture format; and it is the action of alcohol in dissolving hierarchies that largely allows this to happen. This change in learning patterns, which occurs on a daily basis, can be made less stressful by a brief period of even-handed discussion with peers. I would further argue that the intoxicating effect of alcohol really has little to do with such a change in learning methods; drunkenness cannot be the goal because being intoxicated would be detrimental to the work that is required of the student in the evening. Rather, it is the action of drinking with those with whom one shares interests that is the transitional phase.

When asked, most people would not go to the Pub if their peers were not also going. The reason given by most of those whom I asked, was that it would be cheaper and easier just to have a drink at home. When further asked if they do have a drink at home when such an occasion occurs, many replied that they rarely do. I would argue therefore, that when consumed at home, alcohol loses the symbolic context of *communitas* and becomes a drug used purely for relaxation. When consumed at home, alcohol becomes a symbol of leisure, as attested to by the fact that most people who said that when they do drink at home they rarely plan to do any serious work afterwards, and that this is the case regardless of the amount of alcohol consumed.

#### Jackson: Beer Style

To this point, the analysis falls short of explaining, as was suggested in the introduction, why, at the Grad-Pub, draft British style beers are so popular. When asked why they drink these beers, customers of the Grad-Pub usually mention good taste, colour, and nose (the later criterion was the least frequently given). When asked if these people drank similar beers at home or in other less academic drinking settings, the majority said that it was rare for them to buy or order imported beers outside of the Pub, and that they considered such

drinks to be special and not really fitting to the nightclub scene. As it was the sensory profile of such beers that was most often given as the reason for consumption, I feel it necessary to describe briefly the drinks on which I am focussing.

Jackson, who coined the term "beer style," describes British beer as being different:

Britain and the Republic of Ireland are the only countries where all the principal home-grown beers are brewed by top-fermentation... What the rest of the world gains in the thirst-quenching edge of cold beers, the British especially gain in the richly varied palates of their brews (Jackson 1977:145).

It is, in fact, almost impossible to do a complete sensory analysis of British beer. Unlike other nations where beer is uniform in taste, colour, nose, and carbonation level, British beer is anything but consistent. Hence, in brewing nations other than Britain, beer tends to be described with a simple lexicon consisting of just a few terms. One scientist (un-named by Jackson) who attempted to discover a similar simplicity in Britain found, to his dismay, that the British describe their beer with a vast number of terms. In fact, after this particular scientist "discovered" 250 terms used to describe beer, he gave up and went elsewhere to do a similar study. As Jackson points out, British beer is top-fermented – the hallmark of an ale – and such a fermentation process gives to beer a wide variety of olfactory and gustatory characteristics. This complexity is further compounded by the fact that British brewers utilize varieties of hops that have been abandoned by lager brewers for the more subtle and consistent tastes and odours of the noble Continental cultivars (Jackson 1977).

I have found that people who dislike British ale often describe it as not tasting like beer. While this sort of opinion actually runs contrary to the reality of brewing history (lager and its uniformity being relatively recent in origin), it does point up the real distinction to be made between British style ale and the copper coloured lager that many countries, including Canada, call their own style. This observed difference is not to disparage lager, but rather to point out that while lager does vary across nations and brands, the subtle differences can be hard for the inexperienced beer taster to recognize when compared to the striking differences which are to be found in ale.

### **Styles of Ale at the Grad-Pub**

The Grad-Pub serves two general styles of draft ale. The first, which is represented by four labels, is the style broadly known in Britain as "bitter." True to its name, "bitter" is usually characterized by a generous level of hops, and this imparts a bitter after-taste to the palate as well as a complex nose when combined with the esters and diacetyl which arise out of warm

fermentation of the complex malt sugars (Jackson 1977). This style varies greatly from brand to brand, and true to form, the four that are available at the pub could not really be mistaken for each other.

The second style is referred to as bitter or "Irish" stout. This style has become synonymous with the Guinness brand, and this one brand has taken over the market almost completely both in Britain and in other foreign markets where it has been imported (Jackson 1977). Guinness, which is not surprisingly the brand sold on tap at the Grad-Pub, is a black beer that has a strong bitter flavour-profile, a profile made more complex by the acrid taste of the roast barley which gives it its colour. Both of these characteristics, in conjunction with creamy carbonation levels, endow Guinness with a sharp, smooth, lingering taste and a distinctive nose.

### **Special Beers and the Liminal Phase**

While the aesthetic features described thus far are interesting in their own right, a further analysis must be done to discover why such beers have become attached symbolically to a liminal phase characterized by *communitas*. It could be said that the people who drink these beers do so because a special beer is better suited to sipping; hence it allows for a lingering conversation. However, I feel that there is more to this practice than a simple explanation of special beers. There is a reason why such beers come to be called special: their characteristics must in some way fulfil a symbolic role that is fitting for the time, place, and situation. I believe that the beers are sensorially engaging and, accordingly, a brief investigation of Sensory Anthropology is warranted.

In "Percussion and Transition," Rodney Needham points out that musical percussion is apparently universal in its symbolic association with transitional periods in ritual life, and that this connection joins the logical structure of category change with the affective emotional impact of percussion (Needham 1967 cited in Howes 1991:128).

David Howes, following Needham's intellectual lead, argues that olfaction is equally universal in its association with liminality (Howes 1991). Howes presents many interesting examples from cross-cultural sources to substantiate his theory, ranging from puberty rituals through magical incantations to communication with supernatural beings. The sense of smell works as a liminal sense because of the way an action or event is often preceded by an odour which is generated for that particular ritual.

An example, which would seem to be practically universal, is the way in which a meal is almost always preceded by the smell of cooking. As the smell of preparation often comes before the actual action, the sense of smell is more like a keying stimulant than a thing, and, hence, smell operates to bridge the transitional period. Furthermore, smell has the psychological effect of transporting one "as the poet



Baudelaire would say – back to the event with which it is originally associated” (Howes 1991:132), and one, thereby, relives that moment. This phenomenon also has a biological explanation: the center for the reception of scent impulses in the brain is the limbic region where the processing core of emotions and memory is also housed. It is the presence of this conjunction of biological functions which should make us “ripe for the suggestion that a transition is taking place” (Howes 1991:132). Smell works at both the cognitive and the emotional levels, and it is this property which makes the sense of smell such a good symbolic associate of transitional rites; smell is formless, and it is this lack of boundary that allows for the crossing over of social categories (Howes 1991).

I am not going to argue that it is the smell of English ale that is solely responsible for its choice as a symbolic attachment to a period of *communitas*. Rather, I would like to argue that sensory information which is deemed special can act as a key to bridge over a period of transition.

When tasting beer, one receives most of the information about the substance through the olfactory center of the brain (Jackson 1977). It may be this action that recalls previous events of *communitas* and, therefore, places one in the mood for a more extensive joining of ideas. I do not believe that this explanation is complete. There are, of course, other sensory characteristics to be taken into account. British ale looks, and has a “mouth feel,” that is more disparate than domestic beer, as well as possessing a unique nose and flavour profile, and none of these sensory aspects should be relegated to an insignificant role. An analysis which takes both the sensory characteristics of ale and the process of *communitas* into consideration is required.

At first an individual enters the pub knowing that he/she should enter into an exchange of intellectual material, and, in some cases, may be committed to doing so. Turner (1969:132) refers to these instances respectively as “normative” *communitas* (knowing one should) and “ideological” *communitas* (being committed to doing so). After the “special” beer is in hand and has been experienced first visually, and then through the combined senses of taste and smell (which key well remembered, similar, and previously enjoyable events), a genuine or “existential” (Turner 1969:132) feeling of *communitas* may occur, bridging the cognitive predisposition for intellectual exchange with the emotional “glow” of true *communitas*. Of course, one should not forget the fact that alcohol, even in small doses, does have a relaxing biological effect, an effect which can only serve to aid the aforementioned process when consumed moderately.

### CONCLUSION

There are many questions that arise out of my analysis concerning the universality of this practice and the fact that many people do not conform to the framework of this study and nevertheless achieve the

type of *communitas* mentioned in this study. Such questions, however, require analysis which goes beyond the narrow focus of this paper. However, I believe that I have clearly demonstrated a drinking situation that is not socially deviant or divisive, but rather aids in forming a condition of *communitas* among graduate students and their professors. Alcohol, by being symbolically associated with the liminal frame of the pub, bridges the frames of school-work and home-work. Furthermore, because the pub is a place where students and faculty meet and discuss intellectual concepts under a relatively non-hierarchical framework of exchange, the consumption of alcohol is a symbol of this sort of communication. British ale, being special in its sensory profile, adds to the experience of *communitas* through the physiological connections that the senses have with the center of emotions in the brain, and when joined with the cognitive realization that *communitas* is proper in such an academic situation, a pint of fine ale becomes a felicitous choice.

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