

Returning to Wirikuta: The Huichol and their sense of place

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Abstract

Sense of place literature has paid great attention to the ways in which people develop an understanding of and relationship with a place. These ways of building understanding and forming relationships with a place often center around Western societies' conceptions of place as tempered by the natural and built environment, the community at large, and the social structure. While many of these studies thus examine social capital, cohesion, and social construction models among Western societies, little attention has been paid to the sense of place developed by indigenous cultures with a long history of rootedness in a singular region.

This paper explores sense of place in the Huichol community, specifically highlighting the significance of peyote, the peyote journey, and the Huichol's deer-corn-peyote trinity. It will be argued that the Huichols' peyote use, journey, and related trinity, imbue the community with a rich sense of place that affords it resiliency, rootedness, and meaning. Through examination of the significance of peyote in forming the Huichols' sense of place, it will be made clear that peyote educates the community about the earth and about the Huichol themselves, allowing the people to form a unified vision of the world in which the community exists in harmony with the world's natural elements. Further, this paper offers an analysis of the Huichol sense of place and the peoples' relationship with peyote, suggesting models by which American culture might incorporate a psychedelic such as peyote and utilize it in developing a meaningful sense of place.

Keywords: Huichol, sense of place, peyote, psychedelic, pilgrimage, trinity

The Huichol People

The Huichol – who are known to themselves as the Wixáritari, although the term Huichol is more commonly known – number approximately 10,000 and live in small ranchos in the Sierra Madre Occidental of north-central Mexico. The Sierra Madre is a rugged and remote mountainous region that is, at places, difficult to access, which is perhaps one of the prime reasons why the Huichol have been able to retain their

culture and resist colonization and neoliberalism to a great extent. The first European contact with people in the Mexican states of Jalisco and Nayarit, where the Huichols reside, occurred in 1524 during the expedition of Francisco Cortes de San Buenaventura and again in 1530-1531 under the direction of Nuno de Guzman. (Myerhoff, 1974) While local populations were indeed affected by the initial conquests during the sixteenth century, it wasn't until 1722 that Spanish troops fully occupied and gained control of the area. The scene that followed the arrival of the Spanish troops is a familiar one.

Before long, the Jesuits began concentrating the Cora Indians in large settlements in their present locale, and the Franciscans attempted to establish missions among the Huichols, a project which met with little success. In the early and middle nineteenth century the Coras and the Huichols scattered to the coast for a time to escape military action. These dispersals accelerated the Huichol tendency toward residence in ranchos removed from the centralized communities, a preference which has remained a marked characteristic of their present settlement pattern (Myerhoff, 1974: 53).

Huichol tradition states that the community migrated to its fixed abode in the Sierra Madre after previously living east or northeast of their present locale. This situating of the Huichol in the desert region matches with evidence that “suggests a prehispanic occupation of the valleys and mesas of the Sierra de los Huicholes and the Mesa del Nayar to the north” (Myerhoff, 1974: 55).

However, more intriguing than even the oral tradition of the Huichol's original location is the significance of peyote and the peyote hunt. As ethnographer and anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff notes:

Their account of themselves as having originated from the desert region in the east is corroborated by the route taken on the annual peyote hunt, during which they journey out of the mountains through Jalisco, Zacatecas, and, finally, to the deserts of San Luis Potosi. If this historical reconstruction is correct, then in actuality and in myth they do retrace their route to the Ancient Ones. These First People are said to have left their homeland under duress, to have suffered and languished in the mountains until they were led back to Wirikuta [the land of the peyote and of the First People]...” (Myerhoff, 1974: 55-6).

Peyote plays an essential role in Huichol life – indeed the peyote hunt pilgrimage is referred to as a “search for one's life” (Benitez, 1968) – and this fact is reflected by its significance within the deer-corn-peyote trinity that is at the crux of the Huichol community and its sense of place. Fernando Benitez, a Mexican journalist and ethnographer, describes the trinity as directing the Huichol religion and way of life.

“...among the Huicholes the deer is Elder Brother Deer Tail, who predates one of the most ancient deities known as the Old God of Fire and is even older than Father Sun. This priority fits well into the Middle American religious context where the creator gods, the Makers, man and

woman, bear the calendrical names One Deer and One Deer... The deer was part of the natural world in America before corn; or rather, it was present before the beginning of the domestication of the corn plant, a process that lasted ten or twelve thousand years... Tamats Kauyumari, the Great Blue Deer, is Lord of the Deer... Tamats saved his brother Watemukame from death at the conclusion of the magical hunt; it is he who founded the religion and who made the peyote sprout from his brother's horns (Benitez, 1968: 119-21).

Myerhoff, whose study of the Huichol and peyote centered on an analysis of the deer-corn-peyote trinity, presents a cycle where the three elements interact in a symbiotic manner such that one element is essential for the functioning and maintenance of all involved. The trinity tells the Huichol people how to live in the proper manner and governs their relationship with the land, simultaneously informing their sense of place. This sense of place is not limited to the common meaning of the phrase understood in Western academia, but is a sense of place that speaks to the immediate relationship with the land and a sense of place and relationship in regard to the overall universe, world, and cosmos.

The religion and indeed the entire culture of the Huichols are not comprehensible apart from the deer-maize-peyote complex. Ramon stated this explicitly: 'Now I will tell you of the maize and the peyote and the deer... These things are one. They are a unity. They are our life. They are ourselves.' The understanding of this unity, the identification of the referents of the symbols and relationship between them, the function of the identification of the symbols with each other so that they form a single complex – these matters constitute the most difficult and the inescapable challenge in the study of Huichol ideology (Myerhoff, 1974, p.189).

Understanding sense of place

Place is a human idea, a cultural creation. Places are not “places” until a person or people identify them as such. A “place” is a spatial setting that has been given meaning based on human experience, social relationships, emotions, and thoughts (Tuan, 1977).

Essentially, a sense of place is a way of knowing a particular location with some degree of intimacy. One may possess certain kinds of knowledge (cultural, empirical, etc.) about an area, have a history of experiences or develop a feeling of connection to a specific site through an ineffable, immediate affinity that informs their sense of place.

Sense of place refers to the connections people have with the land, their perceptions of the relationships between themselves and a place, and is a concept that encompasses symbolic and emotional aspects. ... The process of transforming spaces into places is influenced by one's culture as the shared meanings that form cultures provide the frameworks for constructing a sense of place (Eisenhauer, Krannich & Blahna, 2000: 422).

As Stedman et al note: “Common to most definitions of sense of place is a three component view that integrates the physical environment, human behaviors, and social and/or psychological processes” (Stedman, Beckley, Wallace & Ambard, 2004: 581).

It is commonly theorized that sense of place is a cultural construction and it seems undeniable that it could be anything but a cultural creation. However, it is essential to note that sense of place can also be viewed in a manner such that one’s sense of place is subconsciously created and solidified by the elements of the natural environment that have thus informed culture, which has, in the end as in the beginning of the cycle, informed one’s sense of place (A similar discourse exists in the field of linguistics concerning linguistic determinacy and the idea that either culture informs language, language informs culture, or both). In this scenario, the place informs the people and the culture that reflect the sense of a place bequeathed to them by the place itself through the human means of perceiving the information conveyed by the place. So while sense of place is inherently a cultural contrivance, it is also a contrivance informed by the empirical reality of a place itself.

Places are embedding because they... have meanings and values associated with them that are passed along to the individual from, and shared with, the social group. Therefore, it is hypothesized that local community cultures influence sense of place because understandings of the environment are rooted in the cultural network of beliefs of an individual’s social group (Eisenhauer et al, 2000: 422).

Such an embedding of sense of place within a social group is indeed the case for the Huichol who have significant meanings and values associated with specific places – such as Wirikuta, the land of the peyote and of the ancient First People – that allow them to develop a relationship with a place as constructed and experienced via their worldview and cosmology. It is their specific network of cultural beliefs that has brought them to an understanding of and intimate sense of their place. This idea of a culturally construed significance surrounding place seems apparent as the same location that might be very important for a Huichol, a place like Wirikuta, might mean nothing much at all to a non-Huichol Mexican or an American tourist.

Experience in the setting drives evaluations such as attachment and descriptive meanings. All settings are imbued, to varying degrees, with multiple place meanings, based on mode of encounter. Some suggest that because meaning emerges through individual experience...place meanings are completely individualistic: a given setting will contain as many different meanings as there are people using the setting (Meinig, 1979; Relph, 1976). Others (Grieder & Garkovich, 1994) assert that meanings are based on social categories and therefore potentially shared by others within these categories because people construct and share the categories used to describe and understand the environment (Stedman et al, 2004: 582).

This paper adopts the position that while it is possible for each individual to harbor a sense of place that is unique to their singular personhood, people are also affected by social constructions and thus people with similar worldviews and cosmologies will tend to “share... categories used to describe and understand the environment”. This position does not contradict the idea that a Huichol Indian will see Wirikuta as a sacred land of origin while an American tourist will see it as a barren desert. The Huichol will harbor a sense of place about Wirikuta as informed by cultural conventions, but this does not mean that one Huichol’s sense of place concerning Wirikuta is exactly the same as the sense of place held by another Huichol. Although one might expect the tendency would be higher that two Huichols share a similar sense of place, there is no evidence to suggest that each individual’s sense of place would be exactly the same as the other’s and remain unaffected by individual ego and interpretation.

Place attachment is a byproduct of sense of place and is developed via one spending a significant amount of time in a certain area as to know it intimately. This knowing is often the realization that a location is the reflection and creation of the people residing there and the essential environment of which they are but one component along with many others. While Yi-Fi Tuan notes that “Attachment... is seldom acquired in passing”, the specific amount of time one spends in a specific locale is not the sole determinate of sense of place or attachment to a place. As Tuan explains:

...the philosopher James K. Feibleman noted: ‘The importance of events in any life is more directly proportionate to their intensity than to their extensity’... A man can fall in love at first sight with a place as with a woman. The first glimpse of the desert through a mountain pass... can call forth not only joy but, inexplicably, a sense of recognition as of a pristine and primordial world one has always known. A brief but intense experience is capable of nullifying the past so that we are ready to abandon home for the promised land (Tuan, 1977: 184).

The intensity of experience Tuan speaks of is applicable to the Huichol. While the Huichol have fostered a sense of place for their everyday, immediate surroundings in the Sierra Madre, they have expanded beyond that and foster a significant sense of place concerning Wirikuta and the locations visited during the journey to Wirikuta; areas a Huichol may visit perhaps a few times in one’s life or never at all. The intensity of the experience during the journey to Wirikuta and arrival at the place itself can trump the proportionately short amount of time the Huichol spend in such an environment. By undertaking the intense peyote pilgrimage and partaking in the equally intense peyote ceremonies, the Huichol have developed a sense of place concerning their own existence and their position or role in the grander scheme of

the cosmos and the universe. Through the development of a sense of place, constructed both culturally and organically, the Huichols have managed to bring meaning to their lives; to bring meaning to places they inhabit and visit; and to construct a worldview that is symbiotic and ecologically conscious.

Peyote, the peyote pilgrimage, and the Huichol sense of place

The peyote hunt pilgrimage is a journey that allows for the Huichols an embedding of place in the consciousness of individuals and the community alike. Observing rites and ceremonies related to sites associated with the peyote journey, consuming the peyote itself, and governing the community and individual's life via the deer-corn-peyote trinity has allotted the Huichols a distinctive sense of place that is strongly tied to the natural environment and to the realms of plants and animals.

The peyote hunt is the central ceremony in the Huichol religious calendar and the pivotal event which unites the Huichols with one another, with their deities, and forges into a single complex the deer, the maize, and the peyote (Myerhoff, 1974: 112).

In the past, the journey from the Sierra Madre to Wirikuta was made exclusively on foot (nowadays pilgrims often take motorized transport) and took about "40 to 45 days, approximately 20 days of straight walking, with additional time spent in preparations and post-Wirikuta ceremonies at home". Located outside the defunct colonial mining town Real de Catorce, Wirikuta is about 300 miles from where the Huichol reside in the Sierra Madre. Along the way, the pilgrims who observe rites or partake in ceremonies marking their progress and stage in the journey make stops at various places. Purification is a major, recurring theme as is respect, admiration, thanks for the earth, thanks for the places stopped at, and thanks for the peyote that allows the Huichol to continue their life cycle. The central principle underlying the entire journey and the hunt for the peyote is the perpetuation of the Huichol as a people and their ability to achieve sacred communication with the gods via the divine cactus. This spirit of sacredness is invoked for the entirety of the pilgrimage and informs the Huichol of the type of relationship they have with the place where they reside in the Sierra Madre and their holy place, Wirikuta, in the San Luis Potosi desert.

At Tatei Matinieri, near the beginning of the journey, the pilgrims stop to drink the sacred water that is found there in order to transform themselves into sacred beings, able to enter the place of the gods to which they are travelling. This ceremony is formative in the Huichol sense of place.

“Common to most definitions of sense of place is a three component view that integrates the physical environment, human behaviors, and social and/or psychological processes” (Stedman et al, 2004: 581). The small ceremony at Tatei Matinieri articulates the relationship between the Huichol and the land, and describes the way a Huichol should behave in life and in Wirikuta. Additionally, the ceremony affords the pilgrims with a sense of place both physically rooted in the land and psychologically rooted in the cosmos and the history of their people.

...the camper bumped to a stop at a place undistinguished to a non-Huichol but known, relevant, and obvious to the *peyoteros*. ... then the group set out toward a series of tiny water holes about a quarter of a mile away... Tatei Matinieri consisted of about a dozen little dirty puddles, a series of permanent springs beside a small marsh ... Ramon squatted beside the largest water hole and taking up some in his gourd bowl removed Carlos' hat and poured water into it. He then touched both of Carlos' eyes with his plumes, sprinkled water on his head, and had him drink that remaining in the bowl. The ritual varied somewhat for the *primeros* [those making their first pilgrimage]... After they had drunk the Sacred Water instead of sending them back to their places in line he removed their blindfolds and urged them to gaze up and behold the sacred place to which they had returned as gods. He pointed out the important features of the landscape, the places the gods had stopped and rested, eaten, sung, or talked with the animals while travelling back to their homeland (Myerhoff, 1974: 142-3).

Such a ceremony, as simple as it may seem, obviously holds great significance for the Huichol. Drinking the sacred water and transforming to sacred beings ready to encounter the land of the First People is meaningful in that it connects the Huichols to the ancient time when the First People could transform to gods, animals, and plants. Also, the ceremony serves as a testament to the idea that – for the Huichol – the sacred and the holy, that which is the spirit of all life and venerated as such, is found here on earth, in places accessible to the people who have been going there since time immemorial. Unlike Christianity, where the most sacred holy land is found in a realm beyond the earth after death, the Huichol live and interact with the sites where their people first came to being and encounter the most sacred holy land here on earth during their lifetime. By gazing upon a landscape and viewing the spots where the gods and First People lived and formed the Huichol world, a strong affinity is achieved between place, culture, and community. When a person or community is able to actually visit the site of their sacred, divine origination and partake in the rites therein, their connection to such a place, both individually and collectively, will be of a magnitude surpassing any such notions typically harbored by Western cultures.

After stopping at locations where the rabbit got tired during the journey and decided to stay put at the midway point, where heads are washed in purifying rituals that prepare the Huichols to enter Wirikuta as sacred beings, where sexual transgressions

are admitted and absolved, and where numerous other rites and ceremonies are observed (Anderson, 1996; Benitez, 1968; Myerhoff, 1974; Schaefer & Furst, 1996), the Huichols reach Wirikuta.

As far as I could see, Wirikuta was not very much different from the desert we had crossed on our way to Catorce. It was the same bleached, gravelly soil, with the same coarse, ragged cover of cactus and microphyllous plants. ... But where was the divine and luminous? ... The pilgrims had spied it ... Tatewari Mara'akame [the shaman] arrow in hand, gestured five times toward a spot on the mesa; then he moved forward and planted the arrow among some rocks. He had found the first peyote. ... Soon the site took on the aspect of an altar. There were votive gourd bowls... another deer's head... a round stone carved with Tamat's [the sacred deer] image; a deer's tail; candles adorned with ribbons... a piece of dried deer meat pierced by an arrow... bottles of holy water; ears of corn and votive arrows (Benitez, 1968: 75-6).

Once the altar is erected and the peyote successfully hunted and slain, the Huichol enact ceremonies and prayers that thank the peyote-deer for its sacrifice and for allowing the Huichol people to survive in accordance with the land. As seen above in the account of Benitez, the discovery of peyote is a moment of supreme significance that informs the Huichol of their sense of place, the nature of their land, and the nature of their people.

When the candles had been lighted, the mara'akame chanted: '... We have arrived at the holy land of Wirikuta; we have surrounded and killed our brother... Now we offer the gods their tribute, their water and their wine, their blood and their ears of corn, their bowls and their arrows. ... We appeal to all of you, we implore all of you to guide us and give us luck in the hunt. O Elder Brother, who wept like a deer when we hunted you down, forgive us. The gods have spoken: if there is to be life for all of us, the deer must die' (Benitez, 1968: 76-7).

The hunting of the peyote as if it were a physical, four-legged deer and the offerings and prayers made to the peyote further illuminate the significance of peyote and the deer to the Huichol. The above scenario also informs the Huichol sense of place. The Huichol recognize they are in the ancient land of their ancestors, enacting the rituals and ceremonies necessary for the perpetuation of the Huichol people. This sense of place, realized via a rightful, ceremonial return to the sacred land of their birth, allows the Huichol to form an important bond with the land and an understanding of their greater place in the world and the cosmos. Myerhoff notes how the journey reconnects the Huichol to the sacred places of their culture.

Ecologically, during the peyote hunt the Huichols achieve a spiritual relation to their physical environment – not a neutral setting, not a mere place to live or exploit for a living. The very landscape is sanctified – the caves, springs, mountains, rivers, cactus groves – and the features of the mythical world are elevated to cosmic significance. 'Plants' and 'animals' become only labels, conventions, mere human categories of thought. Distinctions between them are illusory. *Man is*

nature, he is an extension of it (Myerhoff, 1974: 259-60).

This connection to the land and the worldview that humans are nature, an extension of nature, and that humans and nonhumans are one in unity, could easily be described as a specific deep ecology philosophy. Deep ecology, as formulated by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the early 1970s, recognizes the inherent value of all human and nonhuman entities and realizes their significance in the healthy operation of the unified whole. Further, Australian philosopher Warwick Fox interprets deep ecology as a transpersonal ecology requiring a realization and identification of self that extends beyond the personal ego and even beyond the realm of humans to include the entirety of the nonhuman world with which one is interconnected. In light of such a worldview, it is easy to understand the sense of place developed by the Huichol and how it prescribes their way of life and behavior. Such a worldview also lends insight into the Huichol's corn-deer-peyote trinity.

Today, the Huichol's connection to and sense of place associated with Wirikuta is threatened. A Canadian mining company, First Majestic Silver Corp, has purchased rights to mine for precious metals in the region where the Huichol hunt for peyote. The Wirikuta Natural and Cultural Ecological Reserve, where the company plans to mine, is an UNESCO-protected site noted for its cultural significance and its flora and fauna species. The peyote plant itself is under threat owing to the mining company's plans, and with it, the culture and sense of place of the Huichol is also in jeopardy. In July 2013, the Huichol filed for an injunction in federal court to halt exploratory drilling for gold and silver in Wirikuta.

The corn-deer-peyote trinity

The corn-deer-peyote trinity is at the nexus of the Huichol worldview and cosmology and subsequently informs their sense of place. The three elements play essential roles in the livelihood of the Huichol as they provide food, nourishment, spirituality, and communication with the divine and sacred. Nearly all scholars of the Huichol speculate that the group was originally a nomadic hunting community following the deer along its migratory path. The deer would have been the primary source of food for the Huichol, elevating the animal to a totemic status wherein prayers, rituals, and ceremonies – invoked to retain harmony and balance between humans and the nonhuman world – become a necessary part of the hunt for the deer. The eventual forming of a religion or spirituality surrounding the deer is similar to the relationships formed by other indigenous, nomadic, hunting cultures with the animal that served as the most essential for their survival (Anderson, 1996; Benitez, 1968;

Myerhoff, 1974; Schaefer & Furst, 1996).

The deer is the sacred and magical animal of the Huichols. He gave them peyote on the First Hunt and reappears during all subsequent hunts, bringing peyote... The deer is the animal to which one is grateful. He gives the Huichol his blood as well as the peyote. ... The deer blood makes the maize grow, and more important, makes the maize nourishing (Myerhoff, 1974: 199).

Thus, the Huichol are the people of the deer. Their recent past as deer hunters maintains their strong ties to the animal – despite its increasing scarcity in the 21st century – and the realm of the spiritual world. The deer serves as the teacher of humans and, specifically, as the teacher of the shaman. As Myerhoff notes:

As such, he [the deer] served as the first and closest link between a mortal and a deity. ... The deer... stands midway between the Huichol and the gods in his duties and in the hearts of men. He is an intermediary who bridges the mundane and the ideal, transcending the merely human but beyond human reach and comprehension. Such a figure would kindle more affection and gratitude than awe and fear (Myerhoff, 1974: 202-3).

The deer brings forth the peyote, the medium by which the Huichol communicate with the deities and the nonhuman world. Without the deer there is no peyote and thus no way to transmit the knowledge of the deer and the deities to the humans. Thus, the deer serves as the primary deity for the Huichol and the deer's message is communicated via the peyote. In such a manner do the deer and peyote work in tandem and are both required for the perpetuation of Huichol life. Without deer for sustenance the Huichol would not survive (this is perhaps less true today than a few hundred years ago) and without the peyote brought by the deer the Huichol would not know the proper way to live and interact with their place and all that is found therein.

As the Huichol view the deer and peyote as the same, they also see themselves and the corn as being the same. While corn is certainly the most recent addition to Huichol life among the trinity elements, it has nonetheless achieved a monumental significance for the community. Corn is the primary sustenance for the Huichol living today and has been an essential aspect of their culture and diet for approximately 10,000 years (Benitez, 1968; Myerhoff, 1974). Ramon, a Huichol interviewed by Myerhoff describes his people's attachment to the corn as follows:

Those sorcerers, those evildoers, throw out the spirit of maize. So that there will be no life for us, because the spirit of the maize – what is it? It is its own essence. How does it take nourishment? How does it breathe? Well, it does so in the same manner as we. So the spirit of the maize thinks while it is upon this earth (Myerhoff, 1974: 205).

Ramon asserts that the corn is essentially irreducible and that its essence is itself, it cannot be deconstructed further. It is no different than human beings, he infers, in that it breathes, takes nourishment and thinks like humans do. In such a worldview, sense of place is reinforced through the people's relationship to that place via the sustenance offered by the corn and its unity with humans, the deer and the peyote.

The maize cannot grow without the deer blood; the deer cannot be sacrificed to the Sun until after the peyote hunt; Parching the Maize, the ceremony which brings the rains needed to make the maize grow, cannot be held without peyote from Wirikuta; the peyote may not be hunted until the maize has been cleansed and sanctified and the children told the stories of the First Peyote Hunt. Every ceremony is dependent upon the presence of the three symbolic items, and their sequential procurement makes the entire religious calendar a closed circle. Thus on both the exegetical and operational levels... deer, maize, and peyote constitute a single symbol complex (Myerhoff, 1974: 221).

And it is this symbol complex of unity that informs the Huichol of who they are as a people and how they relate to the location where they reside and journey to. This circle of life and the tasks and ceremonies it initiates connect the Huichol to the landscape and allow them to formulate a sense of place based on meaningful, significant interchange with their environment of which they are a part.

The Huichol sense of place, psychedelics, and American culture

Ethnopharmacologist Terence McKenna sees the role of the plant as essential for the continuance of human life on the planet. In a manner similar to the Huichol and their relationship with peyote, McKenna suggests modeling human behavior after plant behavior and taking seriously the information contained within plants concerning the nature of the world.

I propose that we should adopt the plant as the organizational model for life in the twenty-first century... This means reaching back in time to models that were successful fifteen thousand to twenty thousand years ago. When this is done it becomes possible to see plants as food, shelter, clothing, and sources of education and religion. The process begins by declaring legitimate what we have denied for so long. Let us declare nature to be legitimate. All plants should be declared legal, and all animals for that matter. The notion of illegal plants and animals is obnoxious and ridiculous. Reestablishing channels of direct communication with the planetary Other, the mind behind nature, through the use of hallucinogenic plants is the last best hope for dissolving the steep walls of cultural inflexibility that appear to be channeling us toward true ruin (McKenna, 1992: 218).

McKenna, an American who lived in the 20th century, recognizes a break in humans from the nonhuman world reaching back to at least Plato's account in the *Phaedrus* where Socrates, the father of Western philosophy, states that "...I am a lover of

learning, and trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in town do". This disassociation of man from nature is often theorized to have developed fully in monotheistic religious cultures employing an alienated God operating beyond the realm of human affairs and indeed the earth itself. In animistic, polytheistic cultures connected to the land through earth-based spirituality, this disconnect is seen far less frequently if at all. It is this connection to the earth and the group's specific place therein – in the same manner that the Huichol are connected to the land and their group's specific places of importance – that provides humans with a meaningful sense of place in both the local, physical sense, and in the spiritual, cosmological sense.

The plant-human relationship has always been the foundation of our individual and group existence in the world. ... The closer a human group is to the gnosis of the vegetable mind – the Gaian collectivity of organic life – the closer their connection to the archetype of the Goddess and hence the partnership style of social organization. ... My conclusion is that taking the next evolutionary step...the rebirth of the Goddess, and the ending of profane history will require an agenda that includes the notion of our re-involvement with and the emergence of the vegetable mind (McKenna, 1992: 219).

The relationship between plants and the Huichols is obviously an important one that maintains the life cycle of the people. Through accessing the knowledge contained within plants, namely the peyote, the Huichol have obtained the "gnosis of the vegetable mind" and have thus, as McKenna theorized, formed a social structure that is symbiotic rather than parasitic. That symbiosis is the primary natural element of survival and evolution is apparent throughout the course of the earth's history. The Huichol's symbiotic relationship with nature reflects a well established sense of physical and cosmological place that allows the Huichol to continue their way of life based on the model of the plant and its knowledge.

Could such a symbiotic accord with nature leading to a meaningful relationship between humans and the nonhuman world and humans and their physical/cosmological place operate in typical Western society and culture? While it is difficult to imagine a culture with little to no symbiotic relationship with plants suddenly adopting a worldview wherein plants are the model for developing a way of life and sense of place, it is apparent that anything short of such a conversion for Western culture will set the stage for further alienation of humans from nonhumans and the earth. Perhaps combining McKenna's idea of a plant-based culture with a manifest example of his idea in the Huichol culture can provide a framework.

If there is movement in the consciousness of plants then it must be the movement of spirit and attention in the domain of the vegetal imagination. Perhaps this is what the reconnection to the

vegetal Goddess through psychedelic plants, the Archaic Revival, points toward: that the life of the spirit is the life that gains access to the visionary realms resident in magical plant teachers. This is the truth that shamans have always known and practiced (McKenna, 1991: 220).

While any methods by which an archaic revival or psychedelic plant communion yielding the “gnosis of the vegetable mind” would operate in Western culture are speculative and somewhat dubious, such an approach is necessary. Using the Huichol as an example of a culture and people that have formed a meaningful sense of place that is both physical and cosmological, Western societies would do well to discover their sense of place and the vegetal knowledge of the world via psychedelic plants with proper ceremonies and rituals enabling a healthy, positive atmosphere where the plant can be elevated to its former status as an essential tool for humans in learning how to live in the world.

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