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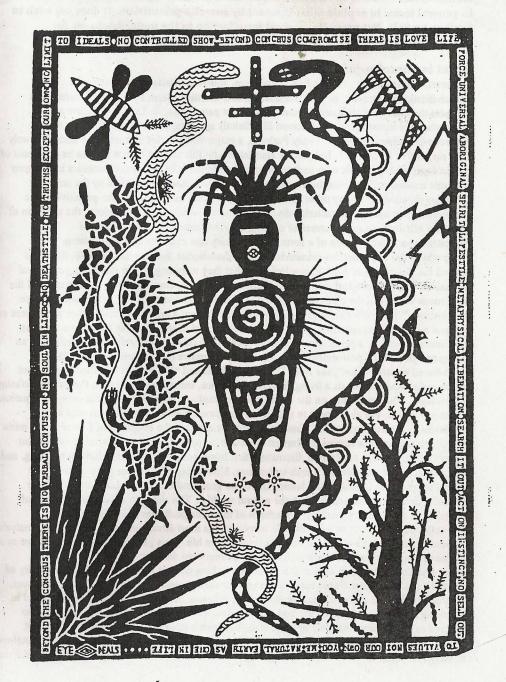
AN UNTITLED RANT

Many of us know in the depth of our being that civilization is death. We know that if we are to fully live, we must be free of it. It is a dance of death and we crave a dance of life. And we can find a dance of life in forests, in meadows, on mountains, in oceans. The dance of life is there and it is strong, vibrant, erotic, ecstatic. And it is calling for us to join. If we are to destroy civilization without destroying ourselves, we will need to get in touch with our own wildness, we will need to join the dance of life. As long as we remain civilized death-dancers, we will only be able to bemoan our fate. If we learn to be wild dancers of life, we will come to know our strength, come to feel our magic, living as friends and lovers with trees, rocks, bears, squirrels, rivers, mountains and oceans, fighting with them against civilization. We may not see civilization destroyed, but by joining the dance of life, we will live as joyfully as is presently possible. Isn't this really what anarchy is all about? If anarchy is what we want, let's start to live it now and maybe the magic of our desires will bring down the death-dance of civilization.

-Feral Faun   (1984)

A Primitivist Primer
By John Moore

A Primitivist Primer

Authors Note : This is not a definitive statement, merely a personal account, and seeks in general terms to explain what is meant by anarcho-primitivism. It does not wish to limit or exclude, but provide a general introduction to the topic. Apologies for inaccuracies, misinterpretations, or (inevitable) over-generalizations.

What is anarcho-primitivism?

Anarcho-primitivism (a.k.a radical primitivism, anti-authoritarian primitivism, the anti-civilization movement, or just, primitivism) is a shorthand term for a radical current that critiques the totality of civilization from an anarchist perspective, and seeks to initiate a comprehensive transformation of human life. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as "anarcho-primitivist ideology". Fredy Perlman, a major voice in this current, once said "The only -ist I respond to is 'cellist' ". Individuals associated with this current do not wish to be adherents of an ideology, merely people who seek to become free individuals in free communities in harmony with one another and the biosphere. , and may therefore refuse to be limited by the term "anarcho-primitivists" or any other ideological tagging. At best, then, anarcho-primitivism is a convenient label used to characterize diverse individuals with a common project : the abolition of all power relations --e.g., structures of control, coercive authority, domination and exploitation--and the creation of a form of community that excludes all such relations.

So why is the term anarcho-primitivist used to characterize this current? In 1986, the circle around the Detroit paper *Fifth Estate* indicated that they were engaged in developing a "critical analysis of the technological structure of Western civilization, combined with a reappraisal of the indigenous world and the character of primitive and original communities. In this sense we are primitivists..." The *Fifth Estate* group sought to complement a critique of civilization as a source of renewal and anti-authoritarian inspiration. This reappraisal of the primitive takes place from an anarchist perspective, a perspective concerned with eliminating power relations. Pointing to "an emerging synthesis of post-modern anarchy and the primitive (in the sense of original), Earth-based ecstatic vision", the *Fifth Estate* circle indicated "We are not anarchists per se, but pro-anarchy, which is for us a living, integral experience, incommensurate with Power and refusing all ideology... Our own work on the FE as a project explores possibilities for our own participation in this movement, but also works to rediscover the primitive roots of anarchy as well as to document its present expression. Simultaneously, we examine the evolution of Power in our midst in order to suggest new terains for contestations and critique in order to undermine the present tyranny of the modern totalitarian discourse --that hyper-reality that destroys human meaning, and hence solidarity, by simulating it with technology. Underlying all struggles for freedom is the central necessity: to regain a truly human discourse grounded in autonomous, intersubjective mutuality and closely associated with the natural world.... The aim is to develop a synthesis of primal and contemporary anarchy, a synthesis of the ecologically-focussed, non-statist, anti-authoritarian aspects of primitive life ways with the most advanced forms of anarchist analysis of power relations. The aim is not to replicate primitive life ways , merely to see the primitive as a source of inspiration and as a practical basis for postmodern anarchy."

For anarcho-primitivists, civilization is the overarching context within which the multiplicity of power relations develop. Some basic power relations are present in primitive societies (however, not too often) -- but it is in civilization that power relations become pervasive and entrenched in practically all aspects of human life and human relations with the biosphere. Civilization--also referred to as the mega-machine or Leviathan--becomes a huge machine which gains its own momentum and becomes beyond the control of even its supposed rulers. Powered by the routines of daily life which are defined and managed by internalized patterns of obedience, people become

One way is to contact Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous. Write to them and they can fill you in on any anarcho-primitivist activities going on. Some people involved in Earth First! also see themselves as anarcho-primitivists, and they are worth seeking out too. Contact them at Earth First! PO Box 1415, Eugene OR 97440.

Check out what the London branch of Earth First!ers had to say about anarcho-primitivism: "Primitivist ideas are central to many Earth First! activists (even if they don't call themselves primitivists!!) and emphasis should now be placed on achieving widespread acceptance and understanding of primitivist philosophies in order to popularize the visions that anarcho-primitivist advocate....John Moore's "Primitivist Primer" is perhaps the best introduction to the subject - no least because it is easily accessible for people new to the radical ecological movement. This and other primitivist texts should be used to both inform and achieve broader outreach - in doing so t possibility of dismantling techno-industrial civilization will become ever more a reality....The setting up of what Moore describes as "communities of resistance" or "microcosms" is a vital step in the direction of creating global green anarchy and is something that the Earth First! movement planning to implement in the near future".

"Earth First!" and "primitivism" are almost inseparable in philosophical terms and as such this text should be read and (hopefully) acted upon by as many activists as possible.

Suggestions for further reading:

Walden - Henry David Thoreau
One-Dimensional Man - Herbert Marcuse
Mirror of Production - Jean Baudrillard
Society Against the State - Pierre Clastres
People Without Government: an Anthropology of Anarchy - Harold Barclay
Stone Age Economics - Marshall Sahlins
Man the Hunter - Richard B. Lee & Irven Devore
In Search of the Primitive - Stanley Diamond
Green Rage : Radical Environmentalism and the Un-Making of Civilization - Christopher Manes
Questioning Technology : A Critical Anthology - Edited by John Zerzan & Alice Carnes
Against Civilization : Readings and Reflections - Edited by John Zerzan
In the Absence of the Sacred : The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations - Jerry Mander
Rebels Against the Future : the Luddites and their War on the Industrial Revolution - Kirkpatrick Sale
In Defense of Luddism - David Noble
Industrial Society and its Future : the Unabomber's manifesto

fact is that anarcho-primitivism is not a power-seeking ideology. It doesn't seek to capture the State, take over the factories, win converts to political organizations, or order people about. Instead, it wants people to become free individuals living in free communities which are interdependent with one another and with the biosphere they inhabit. It wants, then, a total transformation, a transformation of identity, ways of life, ways of being, and ways of communicating. This means that the tried and tested means of power-seeking ideologies just aren't relevant to the anarcho-project, which seeks to abolish all forms of power. So new forms of action and being, forms appropriate to and commensurate with the anarcho-primitivist project, need to be developed. This is an ongoing process and so there's no easy answer to the question: What is to be done?

At present, many agree that communities of resistance are an important element in the anarcho-primitivist. The word "community" is bandied about these days in all kinds of absurd ways (e.g. the "business community"), precisely because most genuine communities have been destroyed by Capital and the State. Some think that if traditional communities, frequently sources of resistance to power, have been destroyed, then the creation of communities of resistance--communities formed by individuals with resistance as their common focus--are a way to recreate bases for action. An old anarchist idea is that the new world must be created within the shell of the old. This means that when civilization collapses (and believe me, any thinking person will conclude that civilization, by its very destructive nature, will self-destruct)--through its own volition, through our efforts, or a combination of the two--there will be an alternative waiting to take its place. This is really necessary as, in the absence of positive alternatives, the social disruption caused by collapse could easily create psychological insecurity and social vacuum in which fascism and other totalitarian dictatorships could flourish.

For the present writer, this means that anarcho-primitivists need to develop communities of resistance--microcosms (as much as they can be) for a refuge of the torture to come--both in cities and outside. These need to act as bases for action (particularly direct-action and sabotage), but also as sites for the creation of new ways of thinking, behaving, communicating, being, and so on, as well as new sets of ethics--in short, a whole new liberatory culture. They need to become places where people can discover their true desires and pleasures, and through the good old anarchist idea of the exemplary deed, show others by example that alternative ways of life are possible and practical....However, there are many other possibilities that need exploring. The kind of world envisaged by anarcho-primitivism is one unprecedented in human experience in terms of degree and types of freedom anticipated...so there can't be any limits on the forms of resistance and insurgency that might be occur. The kind of vast transformations envisaged will need all kinds of innovative thought and activity.

How can I find out more about anarcho-primitivism ?

Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous, an anarcho-primitivist network, can provide you with a reading list, information and literature on anarcho-primitivist activities and a contacts listing to get you in touch with other anarcho-primitivist groups there address is PO Box 11331 Eugene OR 97440. You can also read Fredy Perlman's *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!*, the most important anarcho-primitivist text, and John Zerzan's *Elements of Refusal*, and *Future Primitive*, Bob Black's the *Abolition of Work*, and David Watson's *Against the Mega-machine: essays on the Empire and its enemies*. Check out the British anarcho-primitivist journal *Green Anarchist: For the Destruction of Civilization* and the US journals the *Black-Clad Messenger*, *Live Wild Or Die*, *Anarchy: A Journal Of Desire Armed*, *Fifth Estate*, and *Feral: A Journal Towards Wildness*.

How do I get involved in anarcho-primitivism ?

slaves to the machine, the system of civilization itself. Only widespread refusal of this system and its various forms of control, revolution against power itself, can abolish civilization, and pose a radical alternative. Ideologies such as Marxism, socialism, classical anarchism and feminism oppose aspects of civilization; only anarcho-primitivism opposes civilization, the context within which the various forms of oppression proliferate and become pervasive--and, indeed, possible. Anarcho-primitivism incorporates elements from various oppositional currents--ecological consciousness, survivalism, animal liberation, anarchist anti-authoritarianism, feminist critiques, Situationist ideas, zero-work theories, Luddite and technological criticism--but goes beyond opposition to single forms of power to refuse them all and pose a radical alternative.

How does anarcho-primitivism differ from anarchism, or other radical ideologies?

From the perspective of anarcho-primitivism, all other forms of radicalism appear as reformist, whether or not they regard themselves as revolutionary. Marxism and classical anarchism, for example, want to take over civilization, rework its structures to some degree, and remove its worst abuses and oppressions. However, 99% of life in civilization remains unchanged, precisely because the aspects of civilization they criticize are minimal. Although both want to abolish capitalism, and classical anarchism would abolish the state too, overall life patterns wouldn't really change all that much. Although there might be some changes in socioeconomic relations, such as worker control of industry and neighborhood councils in place of the state, and even (maybe) an ecological focus, basic patterns of life would still remain unchanged. The Western model of progress would merely be amended and would still act as an ideal. Mass society would essentially continue, with most people working, living in artificial, Industrialized environments, and subject to forms of coercion and control. Radical ideologies on the Left seek to capture power, not abolish it. Hence, they develop various kinds of exclusive groups --cadres, political parties, consciousness-raising groups--in order to win converts and plan strategies for control. These kinds of "organizations", for anarcho-primitivists, are just rackets, gangs for putting a particular political ideology into power. Politics, "the art and science of government", is not part of the primitivist project; only a politics of desire, pleasure, mutuality, and freedom.

Where, according to anarcho-primitivists, does power originate?

Again, a source of some debate amongst anarcho-primitivists. Fredy Perlman sees the creation of impersonal institutions or abstract power relations as the defining moment at which primitive anarchy begins to be dismantled by civilized social relations. In contrast, John Zerzan locates the development of symbolic mediation--in its various forms of number, written language, and time--as the means of transition from human freedom to a state of domestication. The focus on origin is important to anarcho-primitivism because primitivism seeks, in exponential fashion, to expose, challenge and abolish all the multiple forms of power that structure the individual, social relations, and interrelations, with the natural world. Locating origins is a way of identifying what can be safely salvaged from the wreck of civilization, and what it is essential to eradicate if power relations are not to recommence after civilization's collapse.

What kind of future is envisaged by anarcho-primitivists?

The anarcho-primitivist journal *Anarchy: A Journal Of Desire Armed* envisions a future that is "radically cooperative and communitarian, ecological and feminist, spontaneous and wild" a primitivist society would be decentralized, egalitarian, and self-sufficient and this might be the closest thing you'll get to a description! There's no blueprint, no proscriptive pattern, although it's important to stress that the envisioned future is not "primitive" in any stereotypical sense. As a

corrective to this common misconception, it's important to note that the future envisioned by anarcho-primitivism is sui generis--it is without precedent. Although primitive cultures provide imitations of the future, and that future may incorporate elements derived from those cultures, an anarcho-primitivist world would likely be quite different from previous forms of anarchy.

How does anarcho-primitivism view technology?

John Zerzan defines technology as "the ensemble of division of labor / production / industrialism and its impact on us and nature. Technology is the sum of mediations between us and the natural world and the sum of those separations mediating us from each other. It is all the drudgery and toxicity required to produce and reproduce the stage of hyper alienation we languish in. It is the texture and the form of accommodation at any given stage of hierarchy and domination". Opposition to technology thus plays an important role in anarcho-primitivist practice. However, Fredy Perlman says that "technology is nothing but the Leviathan's armory", its "fangs and claws". Anarcho-primitivists are thus opposed to all [industrial] technology, but there is some debate on how central technology is to domination in civilization.

A distinction should be drawn between tools (or implements) and technology. Perlman shows that primitive peoples develop all kinds of tools and implements , but not technologies: "The material objects, the caves and canoes, the digging sticks and walls, were things the individual could make, or they were things, like a wall, that required the cooperation of many on a single occasion....Most of the implements are ancient, and the [material] surpluses (these implements supposedly made possible) have been ripe since the first dawn, but they did not give rise to impersonal institutions. People, living beings, give rise to both". Tools are creations on a localized, small-scale, the products of either individuals or small groups on specific occasions. As such, they do not give rise to systems of control and coercion. Technology, on the other hand, is the product of large-scale interlocking systems of extraction, production, distribution, and consumption and such systems gain their own momentum and dynamic. As such, they demand structures of control and obedience on a mass scale--what Perlman calls impersonal institutions. As the *Fifth Estate* pointed out in 1981: "technology is not a simple tool which can be used in any way we like. It is a form of social organization, a set of social relations. It has its own laws. If we are to engage in its use, we must accept its authority. The enormous size, complex interconnections and stratification of tasks which make up modern technological systems make authoritarian command necessary and independent, individual decision-making impossible".

Anarcho-primitivism is an anti-systemic current: it opposes all systems, institutions, abstractions, the artificial, the synthetic, and the machine, because they all embody power relations (as well as domination and destruction of nature). Anarcho-primitivists thus oppose technology and the technological system, but not the use of tools and implements (that would be absurd!) in the sense as indicated here.

What about medicine ?

Contrary to popular belief, life before civilization was not "nasty, brutish and short", but, in fact, healthy, stable and leisurely. Primitive peoples had little, or no problem with diseases until coming into contact with civilization.

Ultimately, anarcho-primitivism is all about healing--healing the wounds that have opened up within individuals, between people, and between people and nature, the wounds that have opened up through civilization, through power, including the State, Capital and technology. The German philosopher Nietzsche said that pain, and the way it is dealt with, should be at the heart of any free society and in this respect, he's right. Individuals, communities and the Earth itself have been maimed to one degree or another by the power relations characterizing civilization. People have been psychologically maimed but also physically assaulted by illness and disease. This isn't to suggest that anarcho-primitivism can abolish pain, illness and disease! However, research has revealed that many diseases are the results of civilized living conditions, and if these conditions were abolished, then certain types of pain, illness and disease could disappear. As for the remainder, a world which places pain at its center would be vigorous in its pursuit of assuaging it by finding ways of curing illness and disease . In this sense, anarcho-primitivism is very concerned with medicine. However, the alienating high-tech, pharmaceutical-centered form of medicine practiced in the West is not the only form of medicine possible, there are many, many natural and/or herbal methods of dealing with illness that could substitute for Western techno-"medicine". The question of what medicine might consist of in an anarcho-primitivist future depends on what is possible and what people desire, without compromising the life ways of free individuals in ecologically-centered free communities. As on all other questions, there is no dogmatic answer to this issue.

What about population ?

A controversial issue, largely because there isn't a consensus among anarcho-primitivists on this topic. Some people argue that population reduction would be necessary; others argue that it would on ecological grounds and/or to sustain the kind of life ways envisaged by anarcho-primitivists. George Bradford, in his *How Deep is Deep Ecology?* argues that women's control of reproduction would lead to a fall in population rate. The personal view of the present writer is that population would need to be reduced, because the current population level is unhealthy for both humans and the Earth, but this would occur through a natural process--i.e., when people died, not all of them would be replaced, and thus the overall population rate would fall and eventually stabilize. Anarchists have long argued that in a free world, social, economic, and psychological pressures towards excessive reproduction would be removed. There would just be too many other interesting things going on to engage people's time! Feminist primitivists have argued that women, freed of gender constraints and the family structure, would not be defined by their reproductive capabilities as in patriarchal societies, and this would result in lower population levels too. So population would be likely to fall, willy-nilly. After all, as Perlman makes plain, population growth is purely a product of civilization: "a steady increase in human numbers is as persistent as the Leviathan itself. This phenomenon seems to exist only among Leviathanized human beings. Animals as well as human communities in the state of nature do not proliferate their own kind to the point of pushing all others off the field". Another thing that is important to point out is that safe, humane, natural forms of abortion, like herbal remedies for instance, were available to human communities long before industrialization or civilization. So there's really no reason to suppose that human population shouldn't stabilize once Leviathanic social relations are abolished and communitarian harmony is restored.

Ignore the weird fantasies spread by some commentators hostile to anarcho-primitivism who suggest that the population levels envisaged by anarcho-primitivists would have to be achieved by mass die-offs or Nazi-style death camps. These are just smear tactics. The commitment of anarcho-primitivists to the abolition of all power relations, including the State with all its administrative and military apparatus, and any kind of party or political organization, means that such orchestrated slaughter remains an impossibility as well as just plain horrendous.

How might an anarcho-primitivist future be brought about?

The sixty-four thousand dollar question! (to use a thoroughly suspect metaphor!). There are no hard-and-fast rules here, no blueprint. The glib answer--seen by some as a cop-out--is that forms of struggle emerge in the course of insurgency. This is true, but not necessarily very helpful! The