Reclaiming Primitivism

Fierce Dreams

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the idea of primitivism and widened the parameters for myself, and I use the word without irony and with commitment. I hope that one day the competitiveness and the limits imposed mass society will wither away, and we can include any rebels that wish to strip away the technological and digital layers of repression and confinement. All of the things we don't need, that are forced upon us by civilisation's superstructure, we can begin to let go of and/or destroy. My project will be to steal what we need, and burn the rest, living one day as wild creatures in liberated habitat.

> It takes years of socializing to subdue the power & beauty of a child's primal instincts. This process is reversible. It is possible to become feral by overcoming the numbness of the civilized condition & become fully human. We can be wild again.
> Griffin 'Reclaim Rewild'

"Far from being a utopianist ideal, anarcho-primitivism worked for humans and our relationships with the earth since the dawn of our species. It is an easily observable fact that before technology, society, the work week, or the alienation of our current day malaise we knew how to live, we knew how to play, we knew how to eat and we knew how to thrive. Without police stations, churches, interstate commerce or monetary greed. Just like all other creatures we knew what to do and not to do because we were connected to the earth, instead of at war with her."
Back to the Primitive, Walter Bond

BUT WE CAN'T GO BACK!

When the topic of primitivism is discussed on internet message-boards, infoshops, and anarcholeftist bookfairs around the world, the term is met usually with a wave of reflexive eyeball-rolling, closefully followed by a chorus of disapproval. The organisational-ists and urbanarchists, civilisation's reformists and apologists, continually assert that they are living in the 'real world' and operating with 'common sense'. They say they are challenging the system via the proper and correct channels, making a difference in their community, and fighting for social justice. All this wishful thinking and activist programming deliberately avoids the basic tenets of ecology, anthropology, and the geopolitical dimensions of industrialism, mass society and domestication. Furthermore, if one questions the premise and foundations of civilisation, some (who have an allegiance to cities, technology, and mass society) tend to take it personally and react defensively; discouraging, derailing, and sabotaging attempts further analysis.

PLASTIC SKIN, DIGITAL VEINS

The contemporary disconnection and estrangement from life's natural processes is profound and all encompassing. Despite civilisation's smokescreen, the fact remains that the things we need don't simply materialise. It comes from somewhere specific. What we eat either comes from the earth, sea, forest, garden – or from a fluorescently lit building, wrapped in plastic. The ability to flick a switch and stay warm, the artificial lights and glowing screens, all arrive from somewhere. Usually a network of coal fired power stations pumping out electricity along power lines, as opposed to traditional methods; a campfire or the sun. For those who have not totally abandoned the idea of community, this phenomenon also doesn't appear from thin air. It either forms from people living together, creating trust, helping eachother and resolving problems. Or – from a facilitating mechanism that sells an idea of community; such as a mall, internet messageboard, punk show, or workplace. Beyond just the basics of survival, all the trinkets and tawdry thrills of civilisation also arrive from somewhere else. In Australia, plastic niknaks usually come a factory in China, entertainment from America, building materials from the jungles of Indonesia, diamonds from Africa, and the list goes on. Failing to recognise the implications of all this globalised production and importation, the red anarchist hordes (herds?) dismiss out of hand the anarchoprimitivist assertion that civilisation itself is the problem and the enemy. There remains an acceptance of factories, cities, and technology, and a stark failure to delve deeper or imagine a radically different way for humans to live and function. The failure of the left is the inability to confront the reality that as domesticated humans, living within the confines of civilisation, we will never be in control of our own lives, communities, or fate. The liberal lemmings seem content to plod along, pleading for things to be slightly tweaked and adjusted until civilisation flows smoothly, efficiently, and with an 'acceptable' minimum of oppression.

through all the institutions of civ. This process can be practiced anywhere, anytime, with a response appropriate to the situation. To resist domestication simply go outside. To escape the trap of wage slavery work less, share and scam whenever possible. To restore your health change to a diet with less processed foods. To practice your attunement to the natural world one can stalk or create a sit spot for themselves. To break the subservient docility enforced on us, some may choose to lash out at civilisation in a direct way, of dismantling the physical structures and apparatus' as they exist. This could have a healing and cathartic effects, as well as benefits to their habitat.

> *"Get outside and break your dependence upon the civilized matrix as much as possible. Spend as much time as you can, & do whatever you can, to live your life outside of climate-controlled house-boxes, clock-time, work, industrial technology, the mass media & the cash economy. These all come together to create a false environment where the politics of domination make the psychology of alienation not only inevitable, but absolutely necessary on many levels. Learn the various arts of primitive self reliance— tracking, gathering, hunting, trapping, fishing, shelter, crafts, calling Fire, etc—and integrate the lessons into your whole life. Also, be open to having your encounter with these arts change you in fundamental ways—primitive survival is often a question of being, not of technique. Let your resistance to civilization spring naturally from this fundamental shift in being, and the revolution in which you take part will be Primal in both character and effect."*
> *RedWolfreturns from reclaim rewild*

A prevalent criticism of anarchoprimitivists remains that they don't 'do anything' or urbananarchists/activists do not see any concrete position taken by anti-civ anarchists. I have tried to open up

what one might classify as a primitive skill, and these ideas are very generalised and broad-brush attempt at creating this picture of skills useful for life without technology. Some skills will appeal more to some people than others. All of them can be practiced in an urban, rural, or bushland environment if one is to use their imagination. At some stage these were the everyday skills that everyone possessed. Apart from the logical rationale for retaining primitive skills for practical purposes and personal empowerment, fun, and entertainment, it also offers some remedy for the pathology of civilisation, counteracting the symptoms of frustration and anxiety that infiltrate our daily lives.

The question of what is a primitive skill do not need to be modelled on what we have seen on 'Dual Survival' or Ray Meares' programs (as good as they are), but rather, 'What are the broad skills we need to create a long term community outside of civilisation? How will we not only survive, but remain happy and healthy? How do we defend ourselves against the encroachment of civilisation'? Many have already started asking these questions, but there appears to be reluctance to embrace the term primitivism. Many others have advocated terminology such as anarchoprimitivism and primal war, and encouraged primitive skills, but it is certainly becoming a dirty word in contemporary anarchist circles. I would like to state for the record that anarchoprimitivists are here, and not going anywhere. We will be around, annoying you with our unassailable logic that civilisation sucks, and if some say we aren't primitive *enough* for their liking, that's just too bad.

> *"Domestication is a disease. Yet even in the poodle, wolf genes remain.*
> *Given time enough and freedom, wildness returns". (Laurel and Skunkly, Rewild, Resist)*

I believe that the antidote to this disease of civilisation is to start to break the patterns instilled in us from birth and reinforced

LIFE WITHOUT LEVIATHAN

The difference between civilised and non-civilised life is deeper than we can probably imagine. Rather than systematically dominating and exploiting the earth and reaching as far as possible, band societies were seamlessly integrated with the natural elements and nonhuman animals, As Kirkpatrick Sale points out,

> *"The fossil record indicates little of the adversarial relationship with other creatures that existed at the core of Sapiens hunting society, and permits the conclusion that they must have lived in a deep, permeating bond with the natural world that the philosopher Owen Barfield has called "original participation," a "primal unity of mind and nature".*

Addiction to civilisation is understandable and nearly unavoidable. The civilising process took generations to take hold and will take generations to undo. But buried beneath he layers of psychosis, abstraction, and synthetic substitutions there is a lifeway and a source that has not been eliminated from humans. This has been explored deeply by the important work of anti-civilisation theorists, anarchoprimitivists and many prominent anthropologists. Our species has remained unchanged significantly for hundreds of thousands or millions of years, depending whose research you believe, but our habitat has changed greatly. The greatest threat to any species is habitat destruction and this is no more true than for humans. Humans genetic makeup has not changed and their needs have not changed. To paraphrase Marshall Sahlins, 'rich' peoples are the ones who have their needs met. By these standards, many of the most affluent are deeply impoverished. This is shown wherever we care to look; shown through civilised folks' fractured minds, depleted and weak bodies, untrusting and hostile communities, and complete reliance and misplaced trust in the technosphere.

Most anarchists continue to ignore the obese, depressed, internet-fixated elephant in the room. They prefer to push aside important questions until after a mythical moment of 'total collapse', as if it isn't unfolding before our eyes. This persistent, irritating, and presumably Hollywood-infused attitude contains a basic oversight – any 'primitive skills' take a lifetime of consistent practice and adjustment to even gain a low level of competency. Wouldn't be better to attempt to break our addiction sooner, rather than later, while we have a chance? Are these folks waiting for total crisis and meltdown to try to learn fundamental 'nuts and bolts' life skills?

THOSE WACKY, ZANY, MADCAP, SUICIDAL, HOMICIDAL, GENOCIDAL 'PRIMITIVISTS' …

The term anarchoprimitivism, and the general abbreviation primitivism, was apparently not of the early writers' own invention, but a peculiar label that after some time they couldn't shake it. Nowadays it is often thrown around by the left in a dismissive or pejorative tone, a shorthand term of several pathetic and glib refutations. "We can't go back". "The train has left the station". "That ship has sailed". This echoes and reinforces assumptions of linear progress, and that 'primitive societies' are an evolutionarily inferior, infantile previous version of current-day civilised humans. A 'work in progress' that has culminated in modern day civilised human societies, the zenith, the pinnacle, the triumph. Between the lines is a hostile and condescending attitude toward noncivilised peoples, equating primitive societies as backwards and in the early stages of 'development'. Never mind that these societies continually astound any social scientist that cares to study them, displaying a way of being in the world that seems almost magical to our dulled senses and skills.

Without civilisation folks won't have the luxury of hanging onto petty squabbles, and they would be sorted out in different ways, usually face to face, possibly with a respected mutual friend or elder assisting.

- **Teaching** is the original primitive skill but we have become inept at sharing and listening, distracted, unfocused, impatient and bored. No skill has been learned properly until one reaches the level where they can pass it along…

"One person's choice to leave might involve reading a few pages of a plant-identification guide at night between a full time job and intense familial commitments. Another's might look like attending primitive skills events and leveraging every possible chance to inhabit wild spaces. Another's might look like writing books and treatises that catalyze further 'momentum' against civilization."
Cricket – 'For the civilized to leave civilization'

'I DUNNO, THAT SOUNDS LIKE SOME KINDA LIKE IDEOLOGY….'

Nowadays it is impossible to advocate anything without being labelled an ideologue, dogmatic, prescriptive, or creating some kind of party line. All of the above diatribe may sound prescriptive, and of course to the ever-growing posse of nihilists it will surely sound as if I am espousing an ideology. I am willing to live with these accusations! At some point rebels need to establish a position and say what they are interested in, and stand their ground, or simply float around following the latest trend or current of analysis forever. Of course, anti-civilisation theory is critical; and is changing, adapting and open to critique. It should go without saying that these practices are simply some ideas and an incomplete suggestion of

- **Becoming mobile, resilient, mentally and physically strong.**

- **Practicing and refining concentration and focus.**

- **Hunting, fishing, diving, drying and preserving food**.

- **Cordage and container construction.**

- **Shelter construction/ improvisation.**

- **Guerilla attacks, going unnoticed, stealth.**

- **Foraging and scavenging.** We can start treating certain products properly so they will not make us sick, but also not being squeamish.

- **Working on awareness, attunement, concentration, focus, and balance outside of the urban habitat.**

- **Paying attention to the moon, stars and tide.** Navigation without Google Earth or topographic maps. This is greatly discouraged by 'outdoorsy' types wearing North Face and Patagonia clothing!

- **Breaking the sedentary existence and staying active. Eating wild foods and using non- chemical medicine.**

- **Fostering relationships with human and nonhuman animals.**

- **Conflict resolution.** (Nowadays folks throw out friendships like yesterday's trash (or recycling).. An unwillingness to forgive, and a propensity toward trash talking, gossip and simply being an asshole seems to be a trait of civilised people. Primitivists are not immune from this, quite the contrary they can be some of the biggest assholes imaginable, I should know! But I don't think this should be encouraged.

When someone proclaims themselves an anti-capitalist, they encounter little resistance amongst anarchists. However, if they proclaim themselves anti-civilisation they encounter a barrage of scepticism and sneering. The typical shallow criticism revolves around their perceived 'shortcomings' as a primitivist or anti-civilisation anarchist. They may use cars or computers, live in an urban environment, and work a steady job for pay. The potshots will usually be focused on the fact that they need civilisation to survive, as if we have a choice at the moment. My response to this kind of cross-examination has been to ask, *'Are you against capitalism and wage slavery?'* The reply has always been yes. When I ask, *'Did you spend money this week?'* usually the answer is silence.

I make no apologies for advocating a primitive way of life and do not run away from the term primitivist, even though I do not live in a nomadic band society, and live as a civilised human being myself. I don't care at all about what standards others hold me to, I define these for myself, set my own challenges, and expect others to do the same. However, I take the position that civilisation is the enemy, and nothing much will change until it is dismantled or nosedives by itself. Primitivism is a direct personal response to the onslaught of civilisation in my life and the world around me, and it describes generally the kind of world myself and other anarchoprimitivists would prefer to live in.

> *"When critics of anarcho-primitivism suggest we are "hypocrites," they often make the hidden assumption that we are all autonomous individuals situated within a society that places no constraints on our ability to survive. The insinuation is that we can 'love it or leave it' and simply walk away. This is simply not the case. First, this ignores the fact that civilized institutions and the individuals who run them have been actively destroying alternative lifeways for thousands of years. Second, and related, if our choices are to work or die, many*

*understandably choose the former. If our choices are
to pay the rent or be homeless, many understandably
choose the former. Wavering between two awful options
is not unfettered choice. Rather, this choice is always
mired in points of coercion."*
Cricket, For the Civilized to Leave Civilization

LIVE WILD OR DIE TRYING

This article argues for a return to the word primitivism as a description of a tendency in anarchism, without irony, disclaimers or asterisks. The Collins Dictionary defines primitive *'as of or belonging to the first or beginning; original'.* In world that has detoriorated into the abstract, a return to the primtive, the foundation, is the most appropriate response possible. In a society where all interactions are mediated and scripted, it signals a move toward immediacy and spontaneity. In a world where the division of labour of and specialisation has become unquestioned, it is an expression of a tendency toward self-reliance, and directly threatens ideas of the commodity. In the context of a ubiquitous mass society that worships increasing complexity, it reveals a hope for simplicity and a degree of reliability. As a response to the homogenisation of our world it proposes a unique sense of place and a path to become connected to it. Primitive skills inherently are against concepts of technology and domestication. A primitive tool, as opposed to an instrument of technology, is easily replicable, replaceable and available to all members of a community. I tend to think of primitive skills as the primary and fundamental skill set for our species, which we have lost as we have become dehumanised under civilisation's stranglehold.

I argue for a redefinition of 'primitive skills' beyond the usual connotations. The clichéd, typical usage of this term refers to someone who maybe does some hunting or skinning, gathers roadkill or wild edibles, and can make fire with sticks. As useful and necessary as these skills are, and have been for humans for our entire time on the planet, they are barely scratching the surface of what I would define as a 'primitive skill'. The immediate correlation between these type of skills and 'primitivism' is what limits it to a small subculture or novelty act rather than a more radical current with more potential. The avalanche of abysmal reality 'survival' shows have not helped at all – relegating this practice to just another hobby within 'the spectacle'. The trend of hipster 'professional rewilders' who write books on the topics or run workshops claiming to be an authority on the subject are equally irritating. However, the kinds of skills that have been largely lost, abandoned or neglected were the day to day tools for our non-civilised ancestors and modern day tribal band societies. Without techno-industrial system supporting us like an iron lung, civilised humans will one day need them too.

These include

- **The art of conversation and getting along with people**

- **Bird language and identification, stalking and observation of patterns**

- **Appreciation of sunrises, sunsets, storms, and general attention to the seasons**

- **Learning to keep a fire going/ relationship with fire**

- **Self defense and martial arts, making weapons**

- **Stealing and raiding from the enemy, setting traps**

- **Singing and dancing as a group** (Rather than just by 'professionals' for entertainment as others watch. Nowadays this practice is considered embarrassing, daggy and lame. However rotting your brain and binge-watching 12 hours of your favourite TV show is totally acceptable. Go figure).