A Race for Time?

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The accusation calling primitivists gleeful beckoners of "the collapse," or misanthropic proto-nazis, reflects a clear misinterpretation of most primitivist writing, and even more primitivist practice. Few who generally agree with the primitivist analysis of the origins of civilization, if any at all, envision "industrial collapse" as some sort of political strategy. In one sense, collapse can definitely be seen as nature's reaction to the pushing of ecological limits by industrial economies, but this perspective is not a value-based judgment. This possibility is but an observation of the predictable nature of wildness to do whatever it must to maintain ecological equilibrium.

The equilibrium is not merely struck among all the "wild" animals and plants out there in the biosphere, but among all species, exempting none from the sometimes dire consequences of evolution itself. Invoking the vision of ecological collapse is not the same as glorifying it. It's a recognition of a basic, observable physical pattern: "for every action there is a reaction". There need not be any glee associated with this situation, as it is indeed tragic, and has ultimately been done to most of us humans by a very few.

The praxis that often flows from this supposedly "doomsday" analysis includes infinite elements of resistance and renewal. Much is super-practical, yet subversive, in its unending questioning of the distance between our lives and the web of life we inhabit, including: rediscovering and practicing forager lifeways; fusing this nearly lost knowledge with more modern forms of ecological/low-impact living; and sharing and building on these skills with others forms a terrain of struggle for many primitivists.

Within these terrains, we can foster an exchange of critical analysis concerning the roles played by the effects of technology, class and race privilege, patriarchy and authoritarianism. These activities all seek to foment a consciousness from which it is hoped that a balanced and liberatory future can be seeded.

Some primitivists go beyond this more personal scope into political realms, involving themselves in the crafting of collectives and cooperatives for direct decision-making, to fulfill basic needs like food and housing, as well as direct physical confrontation.

Reformist-oriented activism, mass protests, and workplace organizing are low on the priority list for most primitivists. They so often fail to address the most pressing disaster that threatens all of our survival: the continued existence of industrial society. This disaster is unpredictable in its timeline and its targets, but is an ever-present inevitability, given the trajectory of civilization.

Social activists believe they must at least try to develop an alternative model of governance and economy ("another world") to replace the current systems, and possibly prevent these disasters. But many primitivists envision a deeper transformation of systems that questions the most basic assumptions about our species' role in the community of life. Developing more systems merely reproduces the disempowerment of institutional life, domesticating our imaginations and individuality. But self-organization and radical decentralization can mimic the wild flow of relationships. Cultivating our urges to thwart the systems that distort our connection with nature and each other can be an outgrowth of this same consciousness.

Through both strategic and spontaneous direct action and sabotage, instigating moments and situations, people might break free from the repetition of life while breaking laws or other norms of "civility." Rather than focus

on end results of such activity, as is so common among "activists," primitivists often see them as part of a process of rewilding—of becoming uncontrollable. Perhaps the idea of primitivism as a political ideology is an invention of anti-primitivists. It is a philosophical tendency that informs a praxis chosen by the individual and is always open to change.

Even if we in industrial societies do suddenly manage to turn our backs on the trajectory of "progress," it might already be too late. Some question this assumption as a cop-out, but the questioning could happen in reverse as well: how do we know the shit won't hit the fan before we can manage to liberate ourselves economically and politically from the capitalist elite? And in the (highly likely) case of such a turn of events, what will pass on? How will we provide for ourselves and our communities, in the absence of the systems we depend on for our basic needs? Will we merely appear in the streets holding paper mache replicas of "another world"?

And if we in industrial societies do ever succeed in liberating ourselves (and thus, the rest of the world) from the grip of the capitalist elite, how will we, as autonomous social groupings, recover the stolen wisdom we need to maintain the ecological balance?

Primitivists believe this liberated existence is not possible unless mass society and its industrial systems are abandoned. The number of people on the planet cannot be sustained within an agro-industrial civilization. To beckon the abandonment of such systems is not misanthropic, but is actually a call for self-preservation, and for the sparing of future generations from the worsening effects of industrialism.

While industrial systems may plug the dam for periods of time, even mainstream scientists agree that they will eventually fail and require another "quick fix," resulting in an even more disastrous failure, until there is nothing left to fix. We can't have it all—it's either technological progress, or future survival. Our generation stands face to face with a paradox, and we are truly in a race for time