

# Reconsidering Primitivism

## Technology and the Wild

Wildroots Collective

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This issue's theme opens up a universe of vigorous discussion and argument. All three concepts invoked by the title can be defined differently, depending on contexts, philosophies, ideologies, and world-views. The subject of technology often raises emotional responses as we grapple with our dependence on complex industrial systems that we don't understand or control for survival.

The conveniences that technologies provide often go unquestioned, as their penetration into our lives and identities deepen. Primitivism does not adhere to a single definition. Any person has as much claim to define this concept as any other. Some define it as a philosophy on the origins of civilization—that interconnected web of social, political, and psychological institutions that control and suppress individuality and desire. Those who identify this interlocking system as something to be dismantled often wish to do so as an end unto itself, believing that in the absence of these institutions, cooperative social relations will prevail.

Primitivists often go beyond this assumption, comparing ethnographies of pre-industrial populations to try to identify specific layers of dependency we might question, or even shed, in order to truly liberate ourselves. Others accuse its adherents of a variety of "sins"—everything from misanthropy to indolence—because of primitivism's supposedly faithful dedication to "the collapse." Our view on primitivism might depend on our motivation: do we seek reform or liberation?

The question of technology continues to be debated by those of us seeking to liberate ourselves from as many layers of dependency as possible. Some see tools and technology as interchangeable, and others see them as opposites. Some see tools as developed from our primal selves, and technology from our civilized selves—or from the mindset of civilization with its complex industrial systems. Others still see technology as a natural evolution of our species—an adaptation for evolution in a "harsh environment."

The Wild is a rather loaded and nebulous concept, carrying with it a bulging train-car full of cultural baggage. Human societies which exist in what is often described as a "wild" manner do not use this term to identify themselves. So "the wild" functions to name what we are not; it is a concept born in, and relevant to, industrial societies and their civilizations. It can be defined ecologically, as well as aesthetically, as that which is uncontrollable and interacts organically, constantly evolving. It maintains a constant "steady state" that is self-organized and efficient. It is often contained in order to be admired, but not really interacted with.

Hiking in wilderness areas, some of the few places left in the country that are relatively unspoiled by civilization, one might be disciplined by wilderness enthusiasts for eating wild foods, berries, mushrooms, and greens. For these enthusiasts, the wild is something to not be disturbed, or to be part of, the concept of human as part of the wild does not seem possible, and it seems much more appropriate to pull out a vacuum-sealed backcountry mealpack than to eat of the wild.

For some, wildness is a rude, unkempt, shady element to be discouraged or evolved away from. For others, it provides a positive analogy for everything from cooperative living to feminist empowerment, from radical activism to anarchic rowdiness, from living on land to learning our place in the web of life.

In the midst of raging debates on the origins of domination, a common question emerges: just how many layers do we have to peel away in order to achieve true freedom for all, not repeating the mistakes of the past. Primitivism has the potential to press us to look beyond what we accept as the limit of our liberation and to question our reliance on the current norms and perceptions of nature and humanity. It also has the potential to dictate a rigid prescription for the post-apocalyptic world, depending on who is calling themselves a primitivist and who is doing the interpreting.

Many of the contributions in this section will remind longtime FE readers of the magazine's "core" ideas. These perspectives challenge industrialism, domestication, and civilization, and these voices remind us to reclaim "wildness." Indeed, a non-ideological primitivism remains a valuable addition to the evolution of anarchist theory and the necessary creation of anarchy itself. It is an opening to many possibilities, intended to inspire the minds and hearts of those who will choose future directions that have not yet been charted.

These, like all writings, use our rather civilized language to try to discuss the practicality/desirability of concepts that go much deeper in our instincts, bodies, and in "pre"-history than can be reached with words. The challenge inherent in this sort of discussion is to examine for yourself your own relationship to civilized life and technological domination. How the following perspectives are translated into practice is up to our individual imaginations, collective desires, and subversive ambitions.

# fifth Estate

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