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The Concept of “the Return to the Past” as an Inspiration for the Anti-Civilization Project of Utopian Primitivist Thought

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Political thought as reflection on society, its structure and function, power relations, the economic foundations of social existence and resource distribution, or, more broadly, the political sphere of the functioning of society, is the subject of numerous scientific publications. However, these publications usually focus on the possible solutions of contemporary problems connected with the shortage of goods or axiological systems represented by individual thinkers. Political scientists, sociologists and historians often analyze the ideas of thinkers who significantly contributed to the development of societies by conceiving visions the elements of which have been used in modern times. Rarely, however, do political science studies deal with those political thought directions which lie outside the mainstream of sociological thinking and represent peripheral concepts of solving contemporary problems. We must be aware that there are also currents, which – owing to their originality, uniqueness or even utopian nature – contribute to modern research more than the prevailing trends. This is because they focus on problems which are not addressed by scholars, politicians and political philosophers and, what is more, they show us that there are other, alternative ways of thinking about the future. What is one of such political thought currents is primitivism, which sees the criticism of civilization and “the return to the past” as an inspiration for the vision of the future. Researchers into

political thought thus ask questions: What is the subject of criticism of the creators and acolytes of primitivism? What vision of the future do primitivists have? What methods will they use to accomplish it? What is the place of primitivism in the spectrum of political ideas? Is primitivism a utopian idea?

Primitivism, as a marginal field of political studies, focuses on the criticism of modern civilization and its vision of future is an attempt to transfer the idealized elements of the past to the future. It is an idea of a utopian nature, which does not mean, however, that it cannot become an inspiring source for creating the concept of reforming modern civilization in its ecological and axiological aspect. The analysis of texts by modern primitivist thinkers and empathy when it comes to understanding the premises of primitivist thinking about the past and future will verify this hypothesis.

One of the persons that could be deemed the creator of primitivism is John Zerzan (1943). He was born in the United States. He obtained a degree in political science at Stanford University. After graduation, he cooperated with trade unions and he was close to Marxist, and then anarchist circles. He also continued his education and received Master's Degree in history, and later wrote his PhD thesis at the University of Southern California. Later, he was active as a writer and political activist close to anarchism and radical ecological movements. What was an important period of his publication activity was his cooperation with “Fifth Estate” magazine and, after that, with “Anarchy: the Journal of Desire Armed” and “Green Anarchy”. They were not the only journals that Zerzan cooperated with. Since the late 1980s, he published a lot of texts criticizing civilization. John Zerzan's thought, however, was still peripheral to the mainstream political ideas. It changed only after the terrorist activity of Theodore (Ted) Kaczynski (1942), also known as Unabomber, in the years 1978–1995. Zerzan was one of the people suspected of performing terrorist attacks motivated by the criticism of civilization, and Unabomber's case turned public attention to Zerzan's work. Increased interest in Zerzan and his studies was also observed in December 1999, after anti-globalization protests in Seattle¹. Apart from a large number of scientific and popular science articles, John Zerzan has also been the author of the following books: *Elements of Refusal*, *Questioning Technology* (co-edited with Alice Carnes), *Future Primitive*, *Running On*

¹ *John Zerzan Papers, 1946–2000*, <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv81752> (accessed: 20.11.2018).

*Emptiness, Twilight of the Machines, Future Primitive Revisited, Why Hope? The Stand Against Civilization, Time and Time Again, A People's History of Civilization*².

Among a number of the creators of primitivist thought was also a Brit, John Moore (1957–2002). Moore was the author of books and essays on anarchism, power, social problems and civilization: *Anarchy and Ecstasy, A Primitivist Primer, Lovebite, Book of Leveling*. His texts were published in, among others, “Green Anarchist” journal³.

Beginning from the 1970s to the second decade of the 21st century, primitivism has contributed to the evolution of political thought and to the development of contemporary social movements. It is an element of anti-globalization protests and may be considered to be a current of anarchism. Initially, groups of primitivists worked as editorial offices of printed press, and later they moved to the Internet. Despite a high degree of the activity of the leaders and adherents of primitivism in Europe and North America, this trend did not become dominant as independent political thought nor was it an element of anarchism or, more broadly, of anti-civilization or ecological movements.

One of the reasons for the marginalization of primitivism is the substantial (radical) way in which this current of political thought criticizes civilization. It rejects the technological and industrial civilization achievements and interprets changes in the world in terms of two conflicting visions: the contemporary, self-destructive world and the return to the past as its alternative. In 2006, John Zerzan wrote in “Green Anarchy”: “Productionism or the primitive future, two materialities. One brought on by the extinguishing of spirit, the other by embracing spirit in its earth-based reality. The voluntary abandonment of the industrial mode of existence is not self-renunciation, but a healing return”⁴.

Primitivism is the criticism of civilization defined as the period of human development after the savage era and the time of hunter-gatherer economy. For primitivists, social changes that occurred between the hunting-gathering society to the agricultural era became the cause of social stratification, control and alienation. Before society evolved towards agriculture, people lived in small, nomadic, egalitarian groups. It was agriculture, however, which contributed to the formation of the

² *Bibliography*, <http://www.johnzerzan.net/books/> (accessed: 20.11.2018).

³ J. Filiss, *Interview – John Moore*, <http://www.primitivism.com/moore.htm> (accessed: 20.11.2018).

⁴ J. Zerzan, *The Path Ahead*, „Green Anarchy”, Summer/Fall 2006, Issue 23, p. 5.

division of labour, social hierarchy and power. Primitive societies were, as Karl Polanyi and Marshall Sahlins referred to them, “gift economies”, where goods were valued for their usefulness and beauty, commodities were exchanged in order to satisfy needs rather than trade in values, while work was done “without the concept of labour” – not for money or any personal benefits⁵.

Primitivists see the capitalist world as the reality of people alienated from nature and other individuals, as the reality devoid of humanistic values and dominated by the power of technology. John Zerzan believed that people have less and less influence on their own lives in such a world. It is a seemingly diverse world, but in fact it has become standardized. It is marked by the ecological crisis manifested in the extinction of species and the pollution of water, soil and air⁶.

According to primitivists, illnesses, especially mental ones, are a direct effect of civilization⁷. People are engaged in monotonous activity. Civilization makes people numb and alienated, which in turn leads to depression, psychological disorders, suicides and drug addiction. Television, movies, pornography and video games have become substitute ways of existence. Civilization is also a source of authoritarianism, constraint, bondage and social isolation. Widespread representative democracy (rather than direct democracy) does not contribute to the elimination of hierarchy and power. Hierarchical institutions, territorial expansions and mechanization are necessary for administering and mass production⁸. John Moore, referring to the views of another representative of anti-civilization thought, Fredy Perlman (1934–1985), wrote in *A Primitivist Primer* that the turning point in the development of master-slave relations was the establishment of impersonal institutions and abstract relations of power. It was then that civilized social relations started to supplant primeval anarchy. Quoting John Zerzan’s words, he also emphasized that it was the symbolic culture – in the form of numbers, language, time, art, and agriculture, too – that facilitated civilization changes consisting in moving away from the state of freedom. Primitivists, as anarchists, seek to abolish all forms of authority, including those formed in relation to nature. According to John Moore, the recognition of the origin of

⁵ *Droga do domu czyli jak ugryźć prymitywizm?*, „Inny Świat” 2005, no. 22, p. 33.

⁶ *John Zerzan w Polsce*, „Inny Świat” 2007, no. 25, p. 54–55.

⁷ *What’s Wrong with Civilisation? Primitivism & Deep Ecology*, “Organise! ...for revolutionary anarchism. The magazine of the Anarchist Federation” (no date of publication), no. 58, p. 15.

⁸ *Against Mass Society*, „Green Anarchy”, Summer 2001, no. 6, p. 1, 5.

power makes it possible to find out what can be saved from the ruins of civilization and what should be rejected not to have master-slave relations resumed in the primitivist future, i.e. after the fall of civilization⁹.

Primitivists also sharply criticize technology. In *A Primitivist Primer* John Moore quoted John Zerzan's definition of technology: "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 domination at any given stage of hierarchy and domination"¹⁰. He also quoted the words of, presumably, Perlman, who said that "technology is nothing but the Leviathan's armory"¹¹.

However, Moore distinguished between tools and technology. Once again, he referred to Perlman's words: "The material objects, the canes 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"¹². Hence, Moore argued that tools had been manufactured on a small scale by individuals or small groups. Such production provided no grounds for the system of control or coercion. By contrast, technology involves large scale products, manufactured by a complex of interrelated systems of mining, manufacturing, distribution and consumption, which require mass structures of control and obedience. Referring to the publication of "Fifth Estate", he pointed out that technology is not just a tool, but a form of social organization. After people began to use it, they also had to accept its authority. Anarcho-primitivism, as Moore emphasized, is not in opposition to technology, but is against the use of tools. However, he did not rule out the possibility that some forms of technology would be retained in the primitivist future – such a technology would have to be justified by people's needs rather than being against the essence of humanity. It was the same case with medicine – primitivists negated

⁹ J. Moore, *A Primitivist Primer* (brochure, no place of publication, no date of publication).

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibidem.

the activity of pharmaceutical corporations, although they did appreciate medical achievements¹³.

John Zerzan is also critical of technology. He calls it a rather strange phenomenon, since, although it is in the centre of public life, it remains hidden. According to him, a lot of people find technology to be a neutral phenomenon, but it is wrong because technology has never been neutral. One look is enough to see that manufactured goods expressed certain values on each stage of human history. The tools for which the division of labour is not needed, i.e. those that everyone can make, reflect a totally different type of society. Modern technology means becoming subject to experts' control; thus, it leads to the restriction of freedom. It should be pointed out that people who claim that technology is neutral believe that it is a positive phenomenon. However, it is difficult to discern values it reflects. John Zerzan referred to the case of so-called “Internet mourning” described in one of US magazines. One might say that there is no point going to a funeral as it is enough to send an e-mail expressing one's grief after someone's death. Thus, technology is not neutral. Statements that it would provide us with new opportunities are false, because it has actually led to dehumanization. Moreover, according to Zerzan, the more common technology becomes, the less influence people have on their lives. Another popular belief is the conviction that owing to technologies, we can connect with people in new ways. Despite this, however, individuals are becoming more and more isolated in modern society. We have fewer and fewer friends and an increasing number of people live alone. The world seems to be rich and diverse, but, in fact, we live in totally standardized reality. The statement that we will not need paper and we will save forests also turned out to be false. What is more, Zerzan's opinion on globalization processes is negative. He believes that they lead to the dehumanization crisis and to the growing devastation of the natural environment. According to Zerzan, it all began when man decided to rule the earth instead of living in harmony with it¹⁴.

In an interview from 2015, John Zerzan was asked about him using technological devices. The thing is, if he is against technology, why does he use it? Isn't it hypocrisy? Zerzan responded: “The way I look at it is: Where's the free choice? Sometimes I'm told: ‘Well, if you were really

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ *Archiwalna relacja z wizyty Johna Zerzana w Polsce, w 2007 r. oraz wywiad, udzielony Agnieszce Marii Wasieczko i Januszowi Krawczykowi dla „Imnego Świata” (nr 25, 2007), 14 April 2016, <https://zielonaanarchia.wordpress.com/category/john-zerzan/> (accessed: 22.11.2018).*

a primitivist you'd live in a cave. You wouldn't be doing a radio show that streams all over the world'. That's sort of true, but how can you make a contribution if everybody's online. If you don't have email, you're not in communication with people. I don't like it, but I'm not just going to sit in my room and sulk, or go off to a cave and ignore everything. I try to point out that contradiction. Actually, I know people – you know, green anarchist types who I totally respect – who don't do email. They refuse. But as every day or week or month goes along I realize that they – and I'm in contact with them – don't know what's going on. They just don't. I couldn't do my weekly radio show without all these sources that depend on technology. We wouldn't even know about the crisis of the environment. It's a sad situation that we're so removed, that we can't have the direct contact, but at the moment that's the way it is. So it seems a little privileged to just say: 'I refuse'. It doesn't get you anywhere"¹⁵.

Primitivists hold a view that what is the antithesis of mass society ruled by technology and an alternative for humanity is the "recreation" of the model of existence idealistically inspired by the idyllically interpreted past of the primitive era. The analysis of one of the publications "Green Anarchy" shows that, according to the acolytes of anti-civilization thought, people used to live in small social groups based on egalitarianism, in multi-generational families, and made their livelihood from land. Such groups had a lot of free time and spent no more than four hours daily working. Problems connected with hunger and war were rare. People enjoyed good health and average life expectancy was longer than in agricultural and early industrial communities. Leadership in primitive societies was temporary and was based on persuasion rather than force. This model of existence began to vanish as agriculture developed and goods were produced at a mass scale. When societies started to treat production efficiency as a priority and the supreme value, they also began to subordinate their life to this purpose. This is why force was used and ecosystems were destroyed because arable land was needed to feed cities. Societies were divided into rural residents, who grew crops and raised farm animals, and city dwellers, who were public servants, merchants and soldiers. The need for food surplus to feed non-agricultural social classes forced food manufacturers to intensify production and acquire

¹⁵ *Anarcho-Primitivism Is Not Just Another Ideology: An Interview with John Zerzan* (this interview was conducted by M. Pavelka and took place in December 2015, during the Ekofilm festival in the city of Brno, the Czech Republic. The interview was transcribed and edited by R. Capes), 24 April 2016, <http://moretht.blogspot.com/2016/04/anarcho-primitivism-is-not-just-another.html> (accessed: 22.11.2018).

yet more arable land. This led to an increase in taxes. With time, capitalism developed to become the dominant form of the manifestation of civilization. It is marked by the rule of corporations, in which shareholders can make decision without taking any responsibility for them. Capitalism is a technologically advanced form of civilization. It makes use of increasingly large territories, thus reducing people's living space. In capitalism, most people spend from eight to twelve hours at work, dealing with pointless, tedious, rationed, and often physically and mentally harmful jobs in order to satisfy basic needs. Privileged people also have an inclination to intensive work, but they usually do it because they are addicted to goods and services¹⁶.

In *A Primitivist Primer* John Moore wrote: „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 slaves to the machine, the system of civilization itself. Only widespread refusal of this system and its various forms of control, revolt against power itself, can abolish civilization, and pose a radical alternative”¹⁷. Primitivists, including John Moore, did not formulate any detailed projects which would create a vision of future social relations. When asked about the future, they answered like anarchists, i.e. explaining that it was not their goal to take over power and to take control of the state or factories. What they really wanted was to transform the identity of man and change lifestyles and communication forms. They imagined the future as the community of free people, who cooperate with each other and with the spontaneous and wild biosphere based on ecology. It would not be primitive future in the stereotypical sense of this word. Thus, it would not be based on the idea of “the return to the cave” or “the return to the stone age”. Primitive culture includes hints for the future, but this future would be different from the previous forms of anarchy. When examining the issue of changes towards the future that are inspired by the primitive era, Moore even used an anarchist metaphor that “the new world must be created within the shell of the old”. He assumed that civilization will fall as the result of self-destruction or the activity of its opponents, or due to the combination of these two factors. However, a concrete alternative has to be prepared earlier in its place. Otherwise

¹⁶ *Against Mass Society...*, p. 1, 5.

¹⁷ J. Moore, *A Primitivist Primer...*

there would appear a void which could be filled by fascism or other totalitarian dictatorships¹⁸.

Primitivism defined in this way shows similarities to other currents of political thought. The first of them is anarchism. Anarchism is a trend in political thought for which freedom is a superior value¹⁹. It is freedom both from state coercion and from the constraints of other hierarchical organizations, e.g. corporations, financial institutions, churches and religions, the army and the school. It is also freedom to do things that individual people and social groups cannot do because of their position in the hierarchy of these organizations. Primitivism, also called anarcho-primitivism²⁰, calls for the liberation from the coercion of industrial organization and existence patterns established by technologies. While looking at the models of living determined by nature, however, primitivism does not offer any answer to the question about the dependence of people and social groups on nature and its laws. As far as anarchism is concerned, its acolytes still seek to bring forces of nature under control and become independent from it. This ambition is specific to the ideas of the precursors of communism. Anarchism stems from the same ideological core as communism and has the same attitude to nature, although it is significantly different from communism when it comes to the reasons for negating capitalism and to the visions of the future. When primitivism puts the idea of freedom (involving independence from the forces of nature) at the top of the hierarchy of values, it may be considered a current of anarchism. When, however, the values of primitivism are dominated by the ideas specific to anti-civilization and ecological move-

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ For more on anarchism see: P. Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible. A History of Anarchism*, Harper Perennial, London 2008; P. Malendowicz, *Ruch anarzystyczny w Europie wobec przemian globalizacyjnych przelomu XX i XXI wieku*, Warsaw 2013.

²⁰ In *A Primitivist Primer*, John Moore wrote: „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. (...) 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”: J. Moore, *A Primitivist Primer...*

ments, primitivism remains a part of them. Yet, regardless of the fact whether primitivism is closer to anarchism or to ecological movements, it is still an inherent part of the pluralist anti-globalization movement.

Another trend in political thought which is ideologically close to primitivism is tribalism. It was created by another Brit, Richard Hunt (1933–2012), who was an editor of “Green Anarchist”, the journal that primitivist John Moore wrote for. According to Hunt, modern civilization is based on the conviction that labour determines people’s wealth. Meanwhile, it is natural resources that should be the main factor contributing to the quality of life. Labour only causes the transformation of natural resources. The world is divided into rulers and the ruled, which was necessitated by overpopulation. Metropolises (civilization centres) make profit from the exploitation of poor societies living in the peripheries. Hunt believes that such a civilization may be destroyed through disintegration. There are three ways in which the era of civilization can turn into the society of nature: firstly – revolution in the peripheries of the industrialized world, e.g. through wars of independence or suspending the supply of fuels and other raw materials to the civilization centre; secondly – by breaking political entities down into smaller parts (European Union, and then United Kingdom); thirdly – tax cuts and depriving states of their income. The return to tribal life would become possible if the size of population in the world decreased. Families would be the basis for the existence of tribal communities. State authority and the police would become redundant as small tribal communities, having the possibility of solving group problems on their own, would not need them any longer. Families and neighbourhoods would take over the functions of social welfare²¹. However, Hunt did not clearly answer the question whether the concept of the return to the tribal stage of human development is motivated by the need to become liberated from the constraints of the industrial and technological civilization or whether it is necessitated by ecological issues. What is more, tribalism is based on the belief that members of historical tribal communities are all equal, which makes it closer to anarchism and primitivism. This conviction, however, is not supported by facts. Richard Hunt’s ideas are quoted both by anarchists and nationalists, as well as by national anarchists.

²¹ *An Interview with Richard Hunt*, 18 September 2010 (first appeared in “The Crusader”, Issue 6), http://www.national-anarchist.net/2010/09/interview-with-richard-hunt_18.html (accessed: 02.01.2018).

Because of the retrospective character of primitivism, it is also close to Luddism. Primitivism is often referred to as the “extreme mutation” of Neo-Luddism²². It is a social thought and movement the members of which destroyed textile machinery as a form of quasi-insurrectionary²³ protest against changes in the manner of work, production and lifestyle at the beginning of the 19th century. It was the time when machines began to take jobs from people. Kirkpatrick Sale (1937) is a modern promoter of Neo-Luddism, who organized the Second Congress of Lud-dists in 1996. Just like Luddites protested against industrial machines, Neo-Luddites oppose new technologies. However, since Neo-Luddites are against modern technologies not only because they threaten people’s jobs, but also because of their inhuman character, some elements of their thinking may be deemed as close to primitivism.

Retrospection, understood as looking back, also makes agrarianism close to primitivism. Agrarianism is the apotheosis of rural life. It is an anti-urban, anti-consumerism movement the followers of which propose the return to living in rural communities and small towns. According to agrarians, small, decentralized and diverse systems are conducive to human development and to retaining the richness of nature. They believe that humankind will survive if people maintain community-based inter-personal relations, the mass production of material goods is reduced, our bonds with nature are restored and the expansion of consumer culture is opposed on a global scale²⁴. Primitivists, however, reject the idea of living in rural communities. A critical view of a settled way of life in the country was where their criticism of civilization began. Primitivists consider the development of rural forms of existence to be the beginning of civilization, thus, marking the beginning of the process of the hierarchization of societies, limiting people’s freedom and moving away from living in harmony with nature.

John Moore attempted to explain what primitivism (anarcho-primitivism) really is in relation to other ideologies. He said: „Ideologies such as Marxism, socialism, classical anarchism and feminism oppose

²² J. Tomaszewicz, *Przemoc w ruchu ekologicznym: od obywatelskiego nieposłuszeństwa do terroryzmu (przypadek Earth Liberation Front)*, „Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2004, no. 1, p. 192.

²³ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Pantheon Books, New York 1964.

²⁴ R. Okrasa, *Miasto zabija. Wprowadzenie do ruralizmu – wiejskiej ekologii*, „Dziki Życie” 1998, no. 10/52, <http://dzikiezycie.pl/archiwum/1998/pazdziernik-1998/miasto-zabija-wprowadzenie-do-ruralizmu-wiejskiej-ekologii> (accessed: 22.11.2018).

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”²⁵. These words were formulated from the ideological rather than scientific perspective. They reflect the views of one of the founders of primitivists, with whom one can agree only when it comes to the issue of the radical nature of primitivist thought. This radicalism is a way of thinking based on retrospection, i.e. on the myth of perfect past. It is a quality which links primitivism with tribalism, agrarianism and Luddism. They all criticize the present reality, but the content of this criticism is what makes them different. They have different visions and detailed concepts of the future.

It should be added that primitivists, at least some of them, also shared the criticism of civilization that abovementioned Ted Kaczynski expressed. When asked about any similarities between his views with Unabomber’s ideas, John Zerzan answered that, having read his manifesto (*Industrial Society and Its Future* published in “The New York Times” and “The Washington Post” in 1995 – author’s note), he realized that Kaczynski represented the same way of thinking. However, he did not approve of terrorist activity. Zerzan believed that human life is sacred. He added, though, that Unabomber’s targets were people at the top of the system which kills and dehumanizes²⁶. Kaczynski himself negated primitivist thought, claiming that all primitive communities fed on some kind of animal food, none of them was vegan, there was no gender equality in most of them, the majority (if not all) of them treated animals in a cruel way, the estimated working time in hunter-gatherer societies resulted from a wrong definition of work (the realistic time is 40 hours a week or more), most communities used violence and there was rivalry, which often assumed violent forms, some communities protected nature, but others devastated it through excessive hunting or careless use of fire²⁷.

²⁵ J. Moore, *A Primitivist Primer...*

²⁶ “O lotti o stai zitto. Non pi tempo di lamentele”. *Intervista a John Zerzan ispiratore del nuovo anarchismo*, http://www.ecn.org/contropotere/primitivismo/intervista_a_Zerzan.htm (accessed: 21.11.2018).

²⁷ *Mity prymitywizmu. Wywiad z Tedem Kaczynskim*, transl. S. Jan (from: “Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed”, no. 61), „Inny Świat” 2009, no. 1 (28), p. 47.

Ted Kaczynski's criticism of primitivism makes us ask a question whether it is utopian thought. Utopia is a "good place" and a "place which does not exist"²⁸. In colloquial speech, utopia is associated with a chimera and fantasy, but something which was once a chimera may become reality in the future, which the history of social thought shows. Utopia may be associated with perfection, paradise on earth, and utopian thinking is the way of thinking which forms the systematic vision of the future. Utopia may also be analyzed as an experiment or an alternative²⁹. That is why it will be more useful to explain what utopian thinking is. According to Konrad Hennig, it is marked by inability to accept reality and the disapproval of the limitations imposed by reality. It involves striving for freedom by liberating oneself from circumstances; it does not ignore facts and does not succumb to stereotypes, but is based on hostility towards social reality and the attempt to recreate social order³⁰. This interpretation of utopian thinking is in line with the concept of one of the founders of the sociology of knowledge, Karl Mannheim, who believed that utopian awareness does not coincide with the surrounding reality and which, when it turns to action, will blow up the order of existence prevailing in a given time³¹. Therefore, when we formulate model answers to the problems of reality in our minds, we form abstract beings, and the end of this human way of thinking about the future is where utopia is placed³².

If we assume that primitivism is a utopian way of thinking, a dilemma arises: What category of utopia does primitivism belong to? In accordance with the classification of utopias made by Polish sociologist Jerzy Szacki, escapist utopias include those which involve dreaming of a better world and do not entail any imperative to fight for the new world. They harshly condemn the present time, but people do not fight it and escape into dreams. Escapist utopians say what good is, but never explain how to achieve it. They say what evil is, but do not explain how to replace it with good. Heroic utopians, in turn, are dreams combined with a call to action. Action may involve a revolution or escaping from the world to a monastery or a group of friends. In such utopias, people are not just

²⁸ J. Szacki, *Spotkania z utopią*, Warsaw 2000, p. 11–12.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 16–37.

³⁰ K. Hennig, *Myslenie utopijne jako nowożytny gnostycyzm*, [in:] T. Sieczkowski, D. Misztal (ed.), *Festiwal filozofii*, part 1: *Utopia – wczoraj i dziś*, Toruń 2010, p. 43–44.

³¹ P. Żuk, *O pożytkach z utopii w życiu publicznym i naukach społecznych*, [in:] P. Żuk (ed.), *Spotkania z utopią w XXI wieku*, Warsaw 2008, p. 50–51.

³² Ł. Zweifel, *Utopia. Idealna odpowiedź na nieidealną rzeczywistość*, Kraków 2008, p. 5.

passive dreamers, but they become physically involved³³. Thus, what is primitivism like? It explains what the reality should be like, explaining what is good and what is wrong, but does not provide any guidelines as to how to move from the technological reality to the reality based on principles existing in primitive communities. This does not mean, however, that such a utopia or utopians do not act. The very publication of books and press articles about what is wrong today and about what we should aim at is action. The promotion of primitivism in interviews with John Zerzan or John Moore is such action, after all. However, this action is done by only a few people, dissenters fascinated in dissimilarity between primitivist ideas and dominant ways of thinking about the world. Such a utopia is active in itself. With its ideas, it blows up the existing order, slowly changes, reforms and adjusts the dominant narration, and, consequently, may lead to serious changes of the system.

What is a mistake made by the authors of primitivist concepts is a failure to act effectively when it comes to the complete and direct accomplishment of goals at the contemporary stage of civilization development. Primitivism should not be perceived as a ready project and a complete vision. Its opponents criticize it as a finished concept, while it is actually not such. It is only an inspiration which may be seen as a contribution to processes modifying globalization processes. By revealing the mechanisms of technology, defined in terms of dehumanized and external power over man, by disclosing aberrations in the vectors of human development, pointing out the defects of non-ecological economy and detecting mistakes in modern interpretations of democracy, we create a new perspective of the criticism of the present day and form new paths leading to the future.

RÉSUMÉ

Primitivism is a marginal current of political thought. It is based on the concept of the return to the era of primitive past. However, primitivists view this concept as an inspiration rather than a closed vision of the future. The founders and followers of primitivism address problems which are ignored by scholars and politicians, and show that there are other, alternative ways of thinking about the future. Primitivism is a utopian thought, but this does not mean that it cannot be an inspiring source of new ideas concerning the reform of modern civilization in the ecological and

³³ J. Szacki, *Spotkania z utopią...*, p. 56–57.

axiological aspect. The main creators of modern primitivism are John Zerzan from the United States and John Moore from the United Kingdom. Primitivism shows ideological similarities to other trends of political thought which are in the peripheries of the modern sets of political ideas. They include: anarchism, tribalism, Luddism and agrarianism.

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