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CHAPTER 15

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In its broadest terms, the contrast between tribe and civilization is between war and peace. In the social condition of Warre (Hobbes), force is a resort legitimately available to all men.

—MARSHALL D. SAHILNS, TRIBESMEN

As for the negative consequences of eliminating industrial society—well, you can’t eat your cake and have it too. To gain one thing you have to sacrifice another.

—THEODOR KACZYNIEWSKI, INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY AND ITS FUTURE

Why “tribes”? In the anthropological tradition, a tribe was a sociopolitically homogenous and autonomous group. Its members shared patterns of speech, basic cultural characteristics, and a territory. Today the term is universally used and universally undefined. Obviously, there is something in the word that appeals to the imagination: perhaps the idea that we can escape the atomized mass and reconstitute earlier, stronger ties between individuals. In order to understand the formation of online tribal identity, I use the concepts of “boundary” and “field” to analyze economic and political aspects of tribalism in anarcho-primitivist networks.

Neotribes in the Lifestyle Market

Tribalism’s popular resurgence can be traced back to the 1960s counter-culture, described by Theodore Roszak as youth’s reaction to a regime
of technocrats and experts. Gary Snyder called for groups of youths to organize tribally, to create a community of comradeship in personal relationships and responsibilities and to be at one with nature. In Australia, at the Aquarius Festival held at Nimbin in 1973, the tribe was the preferred social unit and symbol of precapitalism. There was undoubtedly an amount of na"Iveté in this countercultural embrace, as tribalism at Aquarius was associated with liberation from the kinds of social restrictions that form an essential part of tribal societies, such as hierarchies of status, inequality between gender and age groups, and taboos and tabus surrounding the natural functions of the body.

Today, as ever, a key aspect of any social formation is its ability to persist by retaining members. This hinges on individual motivation (the will to contribute), but also on the feeling of belonging, of associating to what is close to one's concerns. For Michel Maffesoli, the concept of historical center has exploded into a multiplicity of "subterranean centralities" that each have their own history and that share an ethos, a way of being together. These tribes may have goals, may have finality; but this is not essential; what is important is the energy expended on constituting the group as such. Furthermore, what matters is not so much belonging to a gang, a family, or a community as switching from one group to another. In contrast to the stability induced by classical tribalism, "neo-tribalism is characterized by fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal." In other words, within a particular tribe, there are many members who belong to a multitude of other tribes. Others have expanded Maffesoli's thesis: for Kevin Hetherington, the deregulation of the modern forms of solidarity and identity based on class, occupation, locality, and gender has led to a recomposition into "tribal" identities and forms of sociation. In Rob Shields's view, tribal identities serve to illustrate the temporal nature of collective identities in modern consumer society as individuals continually move between different sites of collective expression and "reconstruct" themselves accordingly. In this sense, identity is an experimental construct where individuals select lifestyles, which are in no way indicative of a specific class background.

What all these readings fail to convey is why these associations should be called "tribes." In fact, it could be argued that here "tribe" is simply a different way of saying "subculture," minus the "rigid lines of division over forms of sociation which may be more fleeting, and in many cases arbitrary, than the concept of subculture, with its connotations of coherence and solidarity, allows for." Hence these tribes' uncritical embrace of the dominant capitalist culture, a position consonant with David Chaney's assertion that a fully developed mass society liberates rather than oppresses individuals by offering avenues for individual expression through a range of commodities and resources that can be worked into particular lifestyles and strategies.

This selection of persons in the marketplace has been a mainstay of cultural studies orthodoxy since the 1970s—the celebration of "resistance" through consumption. Yet however artfully they have been collaged by consumer-bricolures, the choices have been prepackaged; and it is strange to think that the kinds of lives most consumers live, and the kinds of effects mass consumerism is having on the planet, do not feature in the equation.

The loose ties evolved so far would seem appropriate to describe online tribes, which appear at first to be transient gatherings of disembodied voices from around the world. I want to consider a different premise: that the tribal impulse originates with the affirmation of group boundaries, and that tribes are vehicles for radical thought. In Anthony Cohen's words, "boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished." In this view, there can be no inclusion and belonging without exclusion and differentiation. An extreme case of boundary-building is found in groups that unconditionally reject everything that is not themselves: anarcho-primitivists fit that description.

**Roots and Economy of the Online Primitivist Field**

While anarchists have traditionally critiqued the manifestations of hierarchical thinking and authoritarian social relations, anarcho-primitivists attack the assumptions behind that thinking. They reject technologically driven development, which they equate with individual oppression and environmental destruction. On the bioponocratic level, primitivists paint an apocalyptic portrait of species extinction, proliferating dead zones, the pervasive poisoning of air, water, and soil. In terms of individual autonomy, anarcho-primitivists argue that we live in a world where the accumulation of technical knowledge is astonishing, and yet we are probably much more lacking in technical know-how than our ancestors: technology can only be created and repaired by someone else. For Theodore Kaczynski (the so-called "Unabomber") the freedoms we have are those consistent with the system's ends, such as the economic freedom to consume, or press freedom to criticize inefficiency and corruption; however, individuals or groups are devoid of the true power to control
the life-and-death issues of existence—food, clothing, shelter, and defense. The solution? "With disenchantment comes a growing sense that something different is urgently needed." Anarcho-primitivists advocate a return to a tribal mode of living, based on small-scale sustainable communities of hunters and gatherers or permaculture-practicing farmers. The most radical primitivist author is John Zerzan, who asserts that "mounting evidence" indicates that before the Neolithic shift from a foraging or gatherer-hunter mode of existence to an agricultural lifestyle, most people had ample free time, considerable gender autonomy or equality, an ethos of egalitarianism and sharing, and no organized violence. Zerzan believes the root cause of the problem to be civilization, that is to say the domestication of plants, animals, and humans that led to patriarchy and the division of labor.

Field theory, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, sees society as differentiated into a number of semi-autonomous fields governed by their own "game rules," yet with parallel basic oppositions and general structures. Fields can be distinguished both according to the kinds of specific capital (capital is "heteronomous," external to the field, or "autonomous," unique to that field) that are valued in them, and by their degree of relative autonomy from each other and in particular from the dominant political and economic fields. Anarcho-primitivism is a highly autonomous political-cultural field of restricted production (oriented toward other producers), in contrast to fields of large-scale production (produced for general audiences). As in all marginal fields, the production and exchange of cultural artifacts represent the means for primitivist actors to engage in the generally felt rejection of dominant norms whilst also exhibiting their underground distinction from mainstream, or "common," culture. Valuable positions on the online primitivist field are attained through the establishment of freely accessible resources.

The dominant tribe on the primitivist online field is made of individuals and groups who have adapted offline magazines to the Web (Green Anarchy, Do or Die, Green Anabase), constituted online archives (Primitivism.com, Insurgent Desire), set up distribution hubs (Beating Hearts Press, Re-Pressed), or sites offering practical guidelines for "re-wilding" (Wildroots, Earth Skills, Abotech). Members of the LiveJournal community on primitivism, because they have little to contribute in the way of digital resources beyond their blog postings, consequently possess less primitivist cultural capital.

Primitivists share a self-image and a set of symbols that cannot be understood by outsiders. These constitute the boundary lines distinguishing members of the group from the rest of the world. Anarcho-primitivism has a variety of influences. First among these is the school of anthropology, which presents so-called "primitive" peoples in a positive light. The canonical text is Marshall Sahlins's "The Original Affluent Society," which holds that primitive people did not work hard, or continuously. Sahlins had previously challenged orthodox views of evolution, stating that technological advance leads to an increase in work and decrease in leisure. That life before civilization was not "brutish and short" is the primitivist dictum. For Bob Black, "by their lifeways the hunter-gatherers give the lie to the Hobbesian hoax."

Anarcho-primitivism also lies at the confluence of several strands of radical thought, such as the anti-technological anarchism of Detroit's Fifth Estate journal, in which Fredy Perlman first wrote of the "song and dance of primitive communities," and David Watson extolled the virtues of preindustrial systems and tribal religions. A more mainstream type of anti-technological criticism, including Jacques Ellul, Langdon Winner, and Kirkpatrick Sale, also deserves a mention. Radical environmental groups like the Animal Liberation Front and Earth First! constitute an activist current. Inspired by Edward Abbey's popular tale of eco-sabotage and by the "deep ecology" of Arne Naess and of Bill Devall and George Sessions, Earth First! sees humanity as being "in the midst of an unprecedented, anthropogenic extinction crisis." Earth First! co-founder Dave Foreman advocates "bio-regionalism": by "rehabilitating a place, by dwelling in it, we become that place. We are of it. Our most fundamental duty is self-defense. We are the wilderness defending itself." Another strand is eco-feminism, which describes commoditization between the subordination of women, indigenous people, and nature in terms of their inferior positioning in Western thought and their common exploitation by the capitalist economy. A final influence is that of the Internationale Situationistes, a radical group that played an important role in the Paris May 1968 revolt. The Situationists' anti-authoritarian council communism has a continuing appeal for radicals due to the group's striking slogans, refusal to compromise, and millenarian conviction that the I. S. had formulated the most lucid critique of "spectacular" society (of the reified commodity as image).

When John Zerzan writes that "the essence of language is the symbol. Always a substitution. Always a paler re-presentation of what is at hand, what presents itself directly to us," he is echoing Guy Debord's opening lines to The Society of the Spectacle, "everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation." However, the Situationists are so
well known that the distinctive profits earned by referring to them have been depreciated; primitivists must therefore refer to much more obscure “ultraleft” Europeans, such as Jacques Camatte, for example.14

While all these strands of thought appear in anarcho-primitivist texts, they are not physically present in Web sites in the form of links to other sites. This points to an important difference from dominant Internet practice, resulting from online primitivists’ deep ambivalence about their use of the medium. On the one hand, by posting large quantities of free data, primitivists are active participants in the Internet’s decentralized “free economy.” This lack of organization or centralization in the setup of production and free provision of content has been described by Richard Barbrook as proof that the Internet represents “really existing anarcho-communism.”15 At the same time, primitivists do not participate in the Internet “link economy,” the attribution by and reception of links. Instead, primitivist Web sites exchange a “review capital” closely resembling that of the “zine” (underground magazine) world, where the value of publications is defined by mutual reviews.16

Kung Fighting! Warre as Palimpsest

There is no easier way of reinforcing boundaries and bonds than having an enemy.17 For James Boon, every discourse, like every culture, inclines toward what it is not: toward an implicit negation.18 Cohen writes that groups respond assertively to encroachment upon their boundaries because members find identities as individuals through occupancy of the group’s social space: “if outsiders trespass in that space, then occupants’ own sense of self is felt to be debased and defaced.”19 According to war historian Gérard Chaliand, the most violent conflicts are those against similar peoples, who occupy positions spatially close to the attackers, offering a narcissistic (though insufferably antagonistic) reflection of their own image.20 The most radical conflict is that of the Same against the Same, being only slightly more intense than that against the Other perceived as radically Other, as its essence is perceived as Other.

In the case of anarcho-primitivists, offline conflicts are based on difference, while online conflicts are based on similarity. There are different types of offline conflictuality, starting with “going feral,” a process that simultaneously indicates detachment from a state of domesticity, “the parent culture,” and identification with the natural environment.21 Another type of conflict is that which involves indigenous people, such

as the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, or OPM) in Indonesian Irian Jaya, as such groups are not only engaged in battles against the state, industrial expansionism, and corporate exploitation, but are “the only communities that have maintained a relatively harmonious relationship with the natural world.”22 The boundaries of the primitivist tribe are particularly expressed in letters of comments to magazines, which provide a narcissistic reflection of members’ beliefs in the opinions of others. Special prominence is given to letters from “prisoners of warre” against the state and corporations, who represent the embodiment of the struggle.23 A third type of offline conflict, which resembles earlier anarchist traditions of direct action in the Western world, thus involves eco-sabrage, animal liberation, and violent resistance to state authority.

If anarcho-primitivists were to engage in similar acts of resistance, sabotage, or terrorism online, they would be faced with the problematic notion of having to master the technological tools of “hacktivism” so as to conduct (for example) Web site defacements, or computer virus infestations, or Distributed Denial of Service attacks (whereby a targeted Web site is inundated with browser "hits," causing it to crash). They would have to become primitivist hackers, taking the contradiction to dizzying heights. The technophobia that makes online primitivists poor linkers also makes them poor attackers outside their tribe, because in this field conflict takes the form of textual exchanges, and online primitivists do not wish to converse with the state and corporations. This means that the erection of boundaries occurs solely within the tribe, rendering online primitivist practice the precise opposite of Sahlins’s characterization of "peacemaking [as] the wisdom of tribal institutions," because "in a situation of Warre, where every man is empowered to proceed against every man, peacemaking cannot be an occasional intertribal event. It becomes a continuous process, going on within society itself."24 This state of affairs is possible, of course, because the conflicts occurring on the online primitivist field are symbolic fights involving no loss of life, limb, or libery.

In the words of Victor Turner, fields are "an ensemble of relationships between actors antagonistically oriented to the same prizes or values."25 Since to exist in a field is to differ, a dialectic of distinction ensures the constant production of change as new actors enter and attempt to make their mark on the field.26 Moreover, cultural fields are characterized by "more or less overt struggles over the definition of the legitimate principles of the division of the field."27 Following a mechanism of inversion, value in the online primitivist field derives from that which is furthest
from what the field, in fact, produces (words on screens). In other words, action is endowed with the greatest prestige in this virtual environment; hence, the maximum legitimacy awarded to prisoner-authors such as Kaczynski or jailed activists Rob "Los Ricanos" Thaxton and Jeff "Free" Laer and their *Heartbeat* magazine. Tribes also compete to determine what the stakes of the competition are. In a sense, the players are attempting to answer the question "What is anarchism?" This struggle is a replay of the nineteenth-century opposition between a minority of "individualistic" anarchists such as Max Stirner and their "social" counterparts. The traditionally dominant variants of social anarchism such as anarcho-communism and anarcho-syndicalism are discounted by primitivists on the grounds that their reliance on organization and control renders them inherently authoritarian:

This pamphlet is yet another pathetic attempt to dust off the same old tired crap of anarcho-syndicalism (complete with its fetishization of technology, industry, progress, organization and the working class) and once again quote a bunch of dead Euro-dudes in order to demonstrate that the only anarchism that will be tolerated is one that Bakunin or Kropotkin would approve of.48

Cornelius Castoriadis suggests that it was Marx who introduced into the workers' movement the centrality of technique, of production, of the economy.49 Indeed, Engels famously wrote about the necessity of authority in industrial production, transport, and above all during a revolution, which he defined as "certainly the most authoritarian thing there is [. . .] the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon.50 So when John Zerzan of *Green Anarchy* took part in an online debate with Michael Albert of *Z Magazine*, he did not enter into a discussion of the finer points of Albert's "participatory economics" (as Albert did of primitivism). After Albert challenged the central primitivist notion that divisions of labor or talent necessarily lead to hierarchies of power and influence, Zerzan's reply was curt: "No matter how you slice it, 'paleo' or otherwise, people won't go into the factories, mines, smelters, warehouses, etc. for unavoidably toxic, miserable toil, unless they are forced. [. . .] Your leftist blueprint cannot be realized, in my opinion, without coercion. As an anarchist, I'm not interested."51

The central dividing axis of the contemporary ultraleft and anarchist fields is the question of what is being opposed. Among this close-knit group of enemies, theoretical and ideological clashes hinge upon whether society is defined as "modern" (dispensing with traditions in the name of progress), "industrial" (filling an artificial world with technical objects, abolishing nature and humanity), "capitalist" (subsuming everything to the commodity), or "spectacular" (negating true life). Primitivists reject all forms of conventional progressive or radical politics because they decry them as embracing the Enlightenment-born ideology of progress and techno-scientific reason. This puts them at odds with a prominent voice on the anarchist field, that of Murray Bookchin. In *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971), Bookchin had argued that anarchism represented the application of ecological ideas to society, based on empowering individuals and communities, decentralizing power, and increasing diversity: "Just as the ecologist seeks to expand the range of the eco-system and promote free interplay between species, so the anarchist seeks to expand the range of social experiments and remove all fetters to its development."52 In 1987 Bookchin published a pamphlet criticizing deep ecology's nativism, asserting that there were "barely disguised racists, survivalists, macho Daniel Boones, and outright social reactionaries" employing the term ecology to express their views.53 He also described the deep ecologist solution of reducing the world's population as an act of "ecological chauvinism" reminiscent of Hitler.54

A few years later, Bookchin launched an attack against what he called "lifestyle anarchists."55 Contrasting the personalistic commitment to individual autonomy of "lifestyleers" with his collectivist commitment to social freedom, Bookchin directed some of his most abrasive comments onto primitivists, describing their "eclectic glorification of prehistory" as "absurd balderdash"56 and ridiculing Zerzan's "reductionist and simplistic" notion that self-domestication through language, ritual, and art inspired the subsequent taming of plants and animals that followed.57 This generated a flurry of angry anarcho-primitivist responses, notably from the *Fifth Estate* 's David Watson.58 Bob Black joined the fray, in the process revealing why, in his opinion, the definition of the legitimate principles of the division of the field had assumed such importance for anarchists after the fall of the Berlin Wall: "[The] anarchists are at a turning point. For the first time in history, they are the only revolutionary current."59 Bookchin responded to these critics with a new essay where he disparaged Watson for serving up "all the puerile rubbish about aboriginal lifeways of the 1960s,"60 and concluded his piece by dismissing Black's "irresponsible, juvenile bravado."61 Bob Black shot back with a rant where he derided Bookchin's "reiteration of the
bourgeois Hobbesian myth of the lives of pre-urban anarchic foragers as solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short, in dramatic contrast to the life of Murray Bookchin: nasty, brutish, and long.”6 In addition, since Bookchin had based his criticism of the primitive affluence thesis on a book by anthropologist Edwin Wilmsen which affirmed that the !Kung Bushmen—contrary to primitivist orthodoxy—lived miserable lives, Black lost no time in attempting to demolish Wilmsen’s credentials in yet another essay.64

This polemical back-and-forth took a more concentrated form during the exchange between Ken Knabb, the main translator of Situationist texts in the United States, and John Filise, creator of the Primitivist.com archive. Knabb’s essay on revolutionary politics, Public Secrets, included a critique of anarcho-primitivism from an ultraleft perspective, affirming that primitivism offers no practical means of achieving its goals in a libertarian manner because a mere revolution could never be enough to satisfy the “eternal ontological rebelliousness” of primitivists.65 This section of Knabb’s text was posted by John Filise on the “Anarchy Board” discussion list together with Filise’s point-by-point comments and refutations. Knabb then reappropriated this cut-up and added his comments to the mix, posting the result on his Bureau of Public Secrets Web site.66 Not to be outdone, Filise then copied this new version, added yet another layer of commentary—commenting on Knabb’s reactions to his earlier comments about the original text—and posted it on his Primitivism site, under his own signature.67 The combination of text editing and digital networking technologies thus facilitates a synchronous presentation of that most diachronic form of intellectual exchange, the literary dogfight, in which authors can seize their opponents’ text, modify it by changing the font characteristics or by adding breaks, and insert their own thoughts, in a potentially never-ending conflictual palimpsest.

Weapons on the Field of Battle

When discussing their situation in the field of anarchism, anarcho-primitivists are wont to describe themselves as both an irresistible force and as victims of the extraordinary malignity of their detractors. As new entrants in the anarchist field, they adopt heretical or subversive strategies.68 They attempt to partially revolutionize the field by claiming to be returning to the origins, the essence, the truth of the game, against the trivialization and degradation into which it has since drifted: “The main opposition [during Zerzan’s speaking tour] came from anarcho-leftists […] I didn’t hear anything new in their protestations, except, in their defensiveness, evidence that they are losing and know it.”69 Anarcho-primitivism has itself been challenged by even more recent entrants on the anarchist field, known as “insurrectionary anarchists.” The stakes in this struggle are the definition of “green anarchism,” or “post-left anarchism.” This aggressive debate with fellow-travelers has assumed a ritualized dimension, as when a Green Anarchy reviewer refers in passing to this “notable conflict […] the perpetual insurrectionary/primitivist debate.”70 In one instance, the insurrectionary journal Killing King Atau (KKA) published a somewhat unfavorable estimation of primitivism, in which it was asserted that the “idealization of nature [is] derived from an extreme pessimism towards the possibility of any fundamental change in our society.”71 This criticism was indirectly met by a counterattack in the pages of Green Anarchy, in which John Zerzan, in the course of an unfavorable review of another insurrectionary journal, Willful Disobedience, asserted that insurrectionary anarchism was “a trendy, but possibly hollow movement.”72 Zerzan’s criticism was posted to the Anti-politics message board, where it generated the following exchange:

Kevin Tucker [Coalition Against Civilization/Species Traitor]: Since the publication of KKA I have seen a lot more division among g9-ists [green anarchists] Some bullshit contention involved, a kind of camps, for lack of a better wordage. […] SashaK [Killing King Atau]: We marked out some differences between us and pr … you can hardly call that an attack … it’s pretty mild to my reading. By interpreting this as an “attack” you leave no room to discuss our differences, almost a “you’re with us or against us.” […] Wolf Landstreicher [Willful Disobedience]: To think of criticisms and the drawing of distinctions as attacks … creation of sects and camps … indicates that one’s ideas are becoming rigid, a kind of doctrine to be accepted or rejected rather than ideas to be used, questioned, tested.73

These three accusations represent a crescendo of anarchistic negativity. First, sowing division, weakening the tribe; second, forcing others to take sides—in other words, authoritarianism; third, adopting a preconceived ideal against which the world (and one’s own life) is measured—an “archetypally ideological,”74 rather than critical, stance.
A widespread means of enforcing boundaries and of reasserting norms is to disparage an opponent’s views by using a derogatory term such as “leftist,” “authoritarian,” or “trendy.” This last term is used by antiprimativists such as Bookchin, who reviles “today’s fashionable technophobia,” and Knabb, who asserts that he conducted a brief debunking of “trendy technophobia.” It is also leveled at the rival insurrectionary tribe by primativist elder Zerzan (“the trendy and possibly hollow movement”). Accusations of “trendiness,” aiming to discredit new entrants, are classic expressions of conservation strategies, showing that primativists can switch between antagonistic roles on the field, depending on their positions and on that of their adversaries.

Ritualistic arguments over earlier examples of ideal social organization are also used as weapons. As previously noted, anarcho-primativists base their claims on anthropologies of hunter-gatherers. Their “leftist” enemies hark back to examples of popular uprisings such as the organization of society by anarchists during the Spanish Civil War, “probably the single richest example of the potentials of autonomous popular creativity.” Yet frequent references to history and anthropology present primativists with a problem: how to refer to “experts” without appearing to embrace a conventional system of hierarchical knowledge. In the conflict against Bookchin, Bob Black seemed to be simultaneously mocking his opponent’s stuffy academicism (Bookchin, wrote Black, is a “self-important, pompous ass”) and reproaching his lack of scientific rigor: “Unlike in [another book] Bookchin this time provides a source for his claim that …” In the sequence in which Bookchin places it, the Parker Bend quotation—unreferenced—looks like a summons to freak out (emphasis added). This ambivalent relationship to high culture and scientific standards is typical of underground culture in general and of anarchists in particular, who want to be perceived as authoritative, without appearing authoritarian.

The Last Electronic Tribe?

Objections to primativism are too numerous to list here. To pick an obvious example, in a world where six billion people have to be fed, there can be no viable alternatives to agriculture. This does not signify, however, that current “agribusiness” practices need be supported. At the same time, the primativist outrage at the state of the planet brings into sharp focus the social dislocation and environmental destruction caused by industrialization. In this chapter, I have attempted to assess the usefulness of the anthropological concept of “tribe” within the context of field theory as applied to the Internet. The membership of the “neo-tribes” posited by Mauss and others is nonsensical: actors adopt personas (masks) and organize themselves in space. They constitute unstable and affectual resource hubs. In contrast, members of the radical tribe examined in this chapter base their interactions on ethics rather than aesthetics, and share a common belief system rather than a common feeling. Online primativists, though networked, are welded to a stable identity, which develops over time in a series of ritualized offerings and conflicts. In part this stems from the nature of the Internet, which favors the progressive accumulation of textual and visual traces of presence over more immediate and embodied modes of communication and interaction; but it also derives from the stated aim of these groups, which is clearly historical: to extract themselves from the social compact. Similarly, offline, if primativists adopt visual markers of their identity, these are not necessarily the kind that can be easily purchased and rapidly discarded, as in this primativist account of urban existence: “We were all intentionally broke & jobless, some of us even tattooing our faces to lessen the probability of future employment.”

I have used the term “tribe” to characterize types of Internet social aggregation that are sites for the centrifugal generation of stateless conflictuality. This is, perhaps, what defines online “tribes,” as opposed to online “communities.” At the same time, radical tribes are but one example of what Manuel Castells calls “project identities”—social movements aiming to transform the dominant structures of society. Interestingly, when Kaczynski in his manifesto listed “rebels against the system,” he wedged “radical environmentalists” between “Nazis” and “militiamen.” In fact, the anarcho-primativist field occupies a position structurally equivalent to that of other marginal fields, such as that of the far-right groups, who also search for a virtual community to compensate for a lack of critical mass in their own town or country. As Castells notes, the network structure of the Internet reproduces exactly the autonomous, spontaneous networking of militia groups, “without boundaries, and without a definite plan, but sharing a purpose, a feeling, and most of all, an enemy.”

This is, of course, highly paradoxical, since if the primativist vision were to be realized, there would be no more electronic communication and organization. This is why they are “the last electronic tribe.” The irony of fierce opponents of industrialism and technology communicating via technological networks is not lost on online anarcho-primativists.
A range of rationalizing discursive strategies have appeared, such as the following justifications for electronic communication by a group of primitivists. John Connor complained that it was "disappearing that the orthodox try to preserve their partial critique by asking the impossible of anti-tech critics, demanding they personally live free of technology when technological society exercises control over them by denying them the means to do so." Jonathan Sylk was less ambiguous: "The point is not to run away from society and civilization—but to destroy it." 97

The relationship of the online primitivist field to the dominant field of economic and political power is an admittedly extreme illustration of a central question for contemporary discourse: how has the integration of nominally radical tribes into electronic networks affected their potential for resistance? Primitivists would reply that Das Kapital was sold in bookstores and that Kaczynski used the post office to send his bombs and manifestos; the ends justify the means. The difference is that technological networks such as the Internet operate both as the dominant ideology of our time as well as popular vectors of resistance to domination. In this sense, the description of the Internet as an "anarchocommunist" utopia reinforces the notion that a communique exists in the here and now—thus providing a great service to state and corporate promoters of the network society, as it is impossible to access free or pirated data without purchasing the requisite hardware and network connection. While it is unclear to what extent electronic networking affects the autonomy of the offline primitivist field, it is hard to see how establishing primitivist Web sites (despite the best efforts of members of the tribe to limit their connectivity and accumulation of link capital) can fail to reinforce existing hierarchies of information and power, which are today based on access to dominant networks. Moreover, the example of online primitivism may be worth pondering for other radicals, as the decrease in the physical and psychological costs of engaging in intercommune warfare (to such an extent that war remains subservient to all other intent, becoming an out-of-control force) do not necessarily augur well for the capacity of online anarchist tribes to effect change.

Notes


34. Jacques Camatte, This World We Must Leave and Other Essays (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1999).


44. Suhims, Tribesmen, p. 8.


54. Ibid., p. 76.


56. Ibid., p. 37.

57. Ibid., p. 42.


61. Ibid., p. 244.


65. Ken Knapp, Public Secrets (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1997); quotation on p. 11.


75. Bookchin, "Whatist Anarchism?" p. 5.
77. Zerzan, "More Radical Than Thou?" p. 21.
78. Knabb, Public Secrets, p. 60.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
84. Kaczynski, Industrial Society, "Thesis 161."
86. Castells, Power of Identity, 294.