

The green anarchy machine

JOHN ZERZAN is a leading light among the growing cohort of primitivists

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LEFT TO his own ways, John Zerzan would bring down almost every edifice of civilisation as we know it. Don't get him wrong. As a philosopher, his pet worry is one of the most basic ones facing us: how to sustain life on the very limited resources of this planet. But it's his solution that stuns us, city-slickers who use the term 'civilised' as a compliment.

On the face of it, his way out is simple, almost obvious. Zerzan says that the only time humans were at peace on this planet was when they were hunter-gatherers, before the domestication of animals.

So, in over three decades of research and writing, Zerzan has chipped away at the pedestal of civilisation. He has challenged, among other things, the centrality of time and the need for fine arts. And in a world increasingly frustrated by the excesses of modern life, Zerzan and his group of thinker-gatherers are being heard and heeded more.

Today, a whole ecology of thoughts is drafted to the primitivist cause. The line-up extends from sociologist Georg Simmel, who foresaw the alienation of city life, to metal band

Fall Out Boy, whose primeval scream is wrapped around the words: "Just beat it." (Zerzan, who plays their music on his radio show, dismisses it as "underwater music".)

Truth be told, Zerzan couldn't have helped it. In the early part of his 65 years on this crowded planet, he was inevitably at the right places at the right time. He grew up among hippies in the 60s on the west coast of the US. He studied political science at

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Stanford, dodged draft, and then dropped out of his PhD at the University of Southern California. Ask the man and he claims: "I graduated from Haight Ashbury in 1966."

Then began a long stint at a workers' union. But the utterly

subversive Zerzan came to feel that even a union is "a form of reification". He went his way and had to often sell his blood plasma "so that one didn't have to work for a living".

Over his life, Zerzan has unsubscribed from many such groups. He has come to hate the traditional left and rants against the US ("not the people, but the nation state"). He would rather think without the shadow of any ism. And in that lonely corner, he's all that more dangerous.

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