

COMMUNITY

By John Zerzan

Com-mu-ni-ty n. 1. a body of people having the same interests. 2. [Ecol.] an aggregate of organisms with mutual relations. 3. a concept invoked to establish solidarity, often when the basis for such affiliation is absent or when the actual content of that affiliation contradicts the stated political goal of solidarity.

Community, by which one obviously means more than, say, neighborhood, is a very elusive term but a continuing touchstone of radical value. In fact, all manner of folks resort to it, from the pacifist encampments near nuclear test sites to "serve the people" leftists with their sacrifice-plus-manipulation approach to the proto-fascist Afrikaaner settlers. It is invoked for a variety of purposes or goals, but as a liberatory notion is a fiction. Everyone feels the absence of community, because human fellowship must struggle, to even remotely exist, against what "community" is in reality. The nuclear family, religion, nationality, work, school, property, the specialism of roles-some combination of these seems to comprise every surviving community since the imposition of civilization. So we are dealing with an illusion, and to argue that some qualitatively higher form of community is allowed to exist within civilization is to affirm civilization. Positivity furthers the lie that the authentically social can co-exist with domestication. In this regard, what really accompanies domination, as community, is at best middle-class, respect-the-system protest.

Fifth Estate, for example, undercuts its (partial) critique of civilization by upholding community and ties to it in its every other sentence. At times it seems that the occasional Hollywood film (e.g. Emerald Forest, Dances With Wolves) outdoes our anti-authoritarian journals in showing that a liberatory solidarity springs from non-civilization and its combat with the "community" of industrial modernity.

Jacques Camatte discussed capital's movement from the stage of formal domination to that of real domination. But there appear to be significant grounds from which to project the continuing erosion of support for existing community and a desire for genuine solidarity and freedom. As Fredy Perlman put it, near the end of his exceptional *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan!*: "What is known is

that Leviathan, the great artifice, single and world-embracing for the first time, in His-story, is decomposing...It is a good time for people to let go of its sanity, its masks and armors, and go mad, for they are already being ejected from its pretty polis."

The refusal of community might be termed a self defeating isolation but it appears preferable, healthier, than declaring our allegiance to the daily fabric of an increasingly self-destructive world. Magnified alienation is not a condition chosen by those who insist on the truly social over the falsely communal. It is present in any case, due to the content of community. Opposition to the estrangement of civilized, pacified existence should at least amount to naming that estrangement instead of celebrating it by calling it community.

The defense of community is a conservative gesture that faces away from the radical break required. Why defend that to which we are held hostage? In truth, there is no community. And only by abandoning what is passed off in its name can we move on to redeem a vision of communion and vibrant connectedness in a world that bears no resemblance to this one. Only a negative "community," based explicitly on contempt for the categories of existent community, is legitimate and appropriate to our aims.