

Reclaiming Freedom Through Prefigurative Politics

Kaitlin Kish, McGill University

Abstract

Freedom has long functioned as the ideological emblem of liberal Western countries, but its meaning has been contorted by neoliberalism and capitalism. The definition of freedom has become so narrow that, as Foucault said, it has long governed us through our own liberty (Deacon, 1998). Supposedly free individuals are required to adhere to norms of behaviour consistent with capitalist and market logic, within which, the individual is told they are free to succeed, placing their destiny into their own hands. Upon failing to succeed, the subsequent guilt becomes overwhelming as the individual forgets they're competing with everyone else's freedom within a rigged system.

This chapter uses complexity theory to further explore this rigidity of the current system. In doing so, I argue that the current golden age of individual liberty and freedom has functioned as a distraction so that the system could be increasingly controlled to move in one single direction that increasingly benefits certain people. Throughout this process, societies have lost their ability to function as a complex adaptive system – instead society is moving along a single trajectory that is either nearing the precipice of collapse or has already passed the threshold. Collapse of the system is inevitable, not least because of diminishing returns, but also because Western industrial capitalism has led to the normalization of order and structure in one of the most complex systems ever witnessed. This limits humanity's ability to establish a mutually enhancing relationship

between humans, non-human species, and the Earth as cultural and ontological adaptation in such a rigid and monoculturous system is difficult, if not impossible.

I begin with a brief overview of relevant complex systems concepts. I relate these systems to our current predicament of capitalist modernity. In doing so, I argue that liberal notions of freedom have become increasingly irrelevant to the reality of our socio-ecological emergency. Under the stress of declining access to cheap energy and oil, political and social systems will be forced to open to greater pluralism in thinking about how we live. While Quilley, in this collection, argues for a more libertarian approach to life within this reality, I argue that a systems-based approach to liberty and freedom inherently means allowing for self-organization in a system – localized anarchy. I explore how this relates to anarchist thinking to empower localized prefigurative politics. I finish the chapter with a discussion of women and motherhood as an example of self-organizing prefigurative politics.

A brief introduction to complexity and resilience

This chapter is founded on complex systems philosophy and approaches from the field of socio-ecological resilience (Gunderson and Holling, 2001; Berkes, Colding, and Folke, 2008; Berkes and Folke, 2000; Holling, 1973), which look to describe how multiple elements interact overtime. The specific frameworks of resilience and panarchy are used to understand the ways systems transform and how properties of a system change over time. The properties of complex systems especially relevant for this paper are emergence and tipping points. Emergence is when a system exhibits properties that would not occur when parts of the system existed separately

from one another. These properties only occur when the pieces of the system interact as a whole. A common example are groups of ants who spontaneously assemble themselves into tiny bridges to achieve a higher order need of the system. A tipping point is when the system passes a threshold and the system crumbles, such as the ant bridge becoming too long and collapsing due to instability. Once the collapse happens the system falls into a new state, or what systems theorists call a new 'basin of attraction'.

Tipping points, and system behaviour, are somewhat predictable in that they follow certain patterns. Socio-ecological scientists plot one overarching pattern by using the concept of 'panarchy'. Panarchy has two integral pieces to it: 1) the resilience framework and, 2) the adaptive cycle metaphor – I focus on the latter.

The adaptive cycle metaphor is characterised by a) a four-phase cycle, b) panarchy, and c) three distinct kinds of change. Holling and Gunderson argue that most socio-ecological systems follow a four-phase cycle:

1) exploitation (r); 2) conservation (K); 3) release (Ω); and 4) reorganization (α).

The first and second phases come from ecological theory in which “an ecosystem’s r phase is dominated by colonizing species tolerant of environmental variation and the K phase, by species adapted to modulate such variation” (Gotts, 2007, p2). The third phase, a rapid phase such as a forest fire or insect outbreak that frees nutrients from biomass, is sometimes referred to as ‘creative destruction’ because as the adaptive cycle moves into the release phase, power and resources that were once tightly consolidated within the dominant basin of attraction are freed

upland made available for use by other actors, including pre-existing alternatives (Holling & Gunderson, 2002, p45). It is within this space of creative destruction that prefigured political ideologies can coalesce around an alternative system state, deepening the alternative basin (Marx 1844; Schumpeter, 1942, 1947). In the fourth phase, “resilience and potential grow, connectedness falls, unpredictability peaks, and new systems entrants can establish themselves” (Gotts, 2007, p2).

The adaptive cycle is an element of ‘panarchy’, Figure 1, which refers “to the framework for conceptualizing coupled human-environment systems” (Gotts, 2007, p1).

Figure 1: The Adaptive Cycle

While the adaptive cycle has received criticism in its application to ecosystems (Janssen et al., 2006), it is a useful way to conceptualize how change can happen in complex systems over time, particularly in its contribution to the metaphor of the gravitational landscapes (Figure 2), which helps to conceptualize the process of transition . This metaphor has been applied over the past two decades to ecological systems in the sub-discipline of resilience studies (Walker and Salt, 2006).

Figure, 2: Basins of attraction over time with two different levels of resilience between system states

The gravitational landscapes metaphor focuses on three key concepts of a system: a) a system's resilience, b) a system's thresholds, and c) the 'basin of attraction' in which the system lies. Within this field of study, resilience refers to a system's ability to adjust, rebound, or avoid crossing a threshold. If a system passes a critical threshold, it falls into a new "basin of attraction," with its own distinct structure and patterns of feedback. The more difficult it is to pass the critical threshold, the more resilient the system.

Gunderson and Holling identify three types of change that happens within panarchies: 1) incremental, smooth, and fairly predictable changes between the r and K phases; 2) abrupt change from K onward, and 3) transformational learning among panarchical levels.

This chapter deals primarily with the second kind of change (2002). In dynamical systems theory, within this kind of change, there are always surprises which make prediction of a system's outcome nearly, if not entirely, impossible. It therefore seems futile that we might try and plan for resilience of a very complex system over a very long period with multiple possible paths for the system to take. This chapter thus doesn't argue for a particular outcome in a system. Instead, I argue that we need to allow for exploration of creative approaches to system design that allow for the natural complexity of systems to re-emerge pre and post transition.

Sociol-ecological complexity and the adaptive cycle: modern capitalism on the brink

Panarchy and the adaptive cycle work as a mental map for how systems can change over time, but do complex socio-ecological systems follow a panarchic process?

Human history seems to follow a pattern of rise and fall of great civilization, with collapse following a great climax in their triumph. As societies reach the peak of their scale and complexity, they require greater energy for their maintenance, to the point where they reach a point of declining marginal returns (Tainter, 1988). At that point, societies are in the K phase of the cycle. Then, new challenges emerge that require greater energy to solve and the society is too inflexible in its response to appropriate change, leading the society into the third phase of creative destruction. Global capitalist systems are certainly at the zenith of their complexity and seem to be showing a great inflexibility at changing to adapt to decreasing marginal returns and energy availability. For centuries, modern society has used cheap energy to develop greater and greater complexity and avoided collapses of sub systems, such as the financial system, by forestalling collapse. Boyd argues that this slight deviation from the adaptive system is due largely to the fact that human societies are led by their cultural models and beliefs systems – a unique characteristic of human systems. Thus, human systems may sometimes diverge from the regular flow of the panarchy cycle. “Through such processes as cognitive dissonance human groups can reject new knowledge and experiences that challenge fundamental beliefs. This holds the possibility that the required change in belief systems will significantly lag the start of the release period, possibly severely impacting the ability of human society to effectively respond to its new circumstances” (2016). Instead, energy availability will have to inevitably force change in the system.

Conversely, Gotts argues that large national and transnational global and political systems will be the primary determinants of large-scale social systems transformation from K onward (2007). While Holling assessed the, 1989 fall of the Berlin wall was indication of the global system entering the backloop Ω and α phases of an adaptive cycle, the subsequent economic growth suggests otherwise (Gotts, 2007). Such resilience of the capitalist system has made it seem impossible to track the planetary system to any convincing certainty on the adaptive cycle. However, Gotts says:

“Connectedness and certain kinds of potential are rising, and resilience is probably falling, suggesting that we are in a K phase. At the same time, continuing rapid innovation suggests an r phase, whereas the growing release of stored energy from fossil fuels, plus soil erosion, extinctions, and deforestation would seem to indicate Ω ... Whether through war, full-scale ecological collapse, or a technological and/or socio-political revolution, it seems certain, as Holling (2004) notes, that radical global change is coming in this century, but this is evident even without the panarchical perspective” (Gotts, 2007).

Whether the system rigidity is enforced by cultural beliefs or the powerful resilience of transnational economic systems, there is a great deal of indication that modern capitalist society is in the third phase of the panarchy cycle. And, accepting that global human systems are governed by principles of the adaptive cycle, means accepting that contraction and radical reorganization are healthy periods of system transition. This stands in very deep contrast to contemporary economics which accepts that growth is the only healthy characteristic of a system. The adaptive system metaphor stands in strong defiance to neo-classical traditions that

view the economy as self-regulating toward equilibrium. Instead, economies experience sudden shifts and periods of contraction, collapse, and reorganization.

When I refer to ‘collapse’ I am pointing toward the decline or reorganization of the current variety of capitalism and globalization toward a new political economy. There are many physical system indications (Rockstrom et al., 2007), as well as theoretical indications that we may be on the eve of such reorganization:

“The machinery of government, entrusted with the maintenance of the existing order, continues to function, but at every turn of its deteriorated gears it slips and stops. Its working becomes more and more difficult, and the dissatisfaction caused by its defects grows continuously. Every day gives rise to a new demand. “Reform this,” “Reform that,” is heard from all sides ... And yet all know that it is impossible to make things over, to remodel anything at all because everything is interrelated; everything would have to be remade at once; and how can society be remodelled when it is divided into two openly hostile camps” (Kropotkin, 2002, 36–37)?

Kropotkin goes on to ask how society can jumpstart a revolution. “The answer is easy” he says. “*Action*, the continuous action, ceaselessly renewed, of minorities brings about this transformation. Courage, devotion, the spirit of sacrifice, are as contagious as cowardice, submission, and panic” (2002, 38).

All forms of action are required; collective or individual, safe or daring, private or public for reorganization. Action is required to keep the spirit of revolution alive, “to propagate and find

expression for dissatisfaction, to excite hatred against exploiters, to ridicule the government and expose its weakness, and above all and always, by actual example, to awaken courage and fan the spirit of revolt” (Kropotkin, 2002, 39). One possible path for such action is through a wide adoption of prefigurative politics.

The Potential of Prefigurative Politics

Once the planetary system reaches, and passes, the critical threshold, there is a gradual or sudden breakdown of order. Ehrlich and Ehrlich argue that modern capitalist society is already in the process of a gradual breakdown, and thus the modern socio-economic system is now moving toward collapse and reorganization (2010). This is the peak moment for opportunity to implement change strategies for transformation – there is hope and potential beyond this “seemingly inevitable self-destruction brimming at the edge of too much complexity” (Erlic, 2016). This opportunity is taken up by what Kauffman calls “the adjacent possible” (1996). The adjacent possible “is a kind of shadow future, hovering on the edges of the present state of things, a map of all the ways in which the present can reinvent itself...[the adjacent possible] captures both the limits and the creative potential of change and innovation” (Smith, 2010). I explore the adjacent possible through one particularly inspiring, and easily accessible, area of opportunity: the theory of prefigurative politics. Prefigurative politics are those who establish alternative political or cultural systems that become opportunities for system transition. Multiple prefigurative political orientations, linked together by common goals, could come together as a strong alterative basin, as explored in Quilley’s chapter on Liberty in the Long Anthropocene.

Theories of prefigurative politics have their roots in social opposition to the disruptive forces of industrialization and bureaucratization in early, 20th-century Europe (Boggs, 1977; Leach, 2013). Between, 1918 and, 1920, Gramsci developed a theory of transition toward socialist democracy that identified factory councils in Italy as key elements of a radical political order that would take hold in the spaces opening up as a result of escalating crises in bourgeois society (Boggs, 1977). This conceptualization of the potential of prefigurative experiments to gain ground as crises accumulate in the dominant regime is now embedded within theories of socio-ecological systems transformation in resilience studies and social innovation (Westley et al., 2011; Beddoe et al., 2009). For social movements working toward radical change, prefigurative politics is a way to enact new patterns of social relations that can be imagined from within the current system, but that diverge too much from the mainstream to gain widespread traction under existing conditions (Breines, 1980).

We have seen the success of prefigurative politics in historical social movements where practitioners have created and/or embodied the ontologies and structures they envision for a transformed society “by structuring their own practice according to the principles they want to see govern the whole society” (Leach, 2013, p182). Most social movements in the, 20th and, 21st centuries such as those for women’s rights, the environment, peace, anti-globalization, anti-capitalism, economic equity, and Indigenous rights have included prefigurative elements (Day, 2005; della Porta et al., 2006; Graeber, 2009; Cornish et al., 2016). There are many examples of existing prefigurative groups such as anarchist groups Abalone Alliance (anti-nuclear), Clamshell Alliance (anti-war), Food Not Bombs, as well as organizations such as lending libraries and community gardens. These groups are trying out new ways of life. Sarah Pike does

not use the term “prefigurative” but references “what anthropologist David Graeber calls ‘living utopianism’” (Pike, 2017, p166), saying radical environmentalist gatherings “aim to be the lived utopians of everyday activist communities” (Pike, 2017, p166). In these groups, participants experience an alternative way of life in their preparation for the collapse of industrial civilization (Pike, 2017, p167). Bioregionalism, ecovillages, and the permaculture movement are further examples of prefigurative communities that embody relational worldviews and are characterized by embedded socio-ecological relationships (Lockyer & Veteto, 2013).

Breines argues that the crux of prefigurative politics lies in the substantial task for individuals to live the practice of their movement so that relationships and political forms of the desired society are already in action (1980). John Holloway argued that for those seeking to fundamentally transform society the solution is simple: “Refuse-and-create” (Holloway, 2010, p50)! The route to overthrowing capitalism, Holloway argues, “lies in the proliferation of small-scale rebellions against capitalist logic” (Young and Schwartz, 2012, p221) envisioned by “a multiplicity of interstitial movements” (Holloway, 2010, p11) all with the same unifying thread: to overcome the alienation characteristics of capitalist labour and replace it with work and activities that are fulfilling, voluntary and socially useful (p198).

While a lot of current literature on prefigurative politics focuses on how activists should build social movements (Chen, 2016; Epstein, 1991; Polletta, 1999,, 2002), the “original concept of prefigurative politics involves a politicization of everyday life” (Williams, 2017), so to capture the full spectrum of prefigurative politics we need to see changes in everyday life as radical acts of resistance – such as making, parenting, and being with family – which I return to at the end of

this chapter. In Karp's chapter in this issue, he explores the role of activists – prefigurative practitioners should be included in the definition of an activist.

Freedom from a complex systems perspective

One challenge facing prefigurative activists is the rigidity of highly resilient systems. The conservation stage of capitalist modernity has created strong interconnections across global subsystems; local production has been replaced by globally integrated systems, local banks have been replaced by national banks, locally produced food has been replaced by multinational food systems relying on cash crops, and local currencies and systems of trade have been homogenized (i.e. the Euro). This is a much more efficient system, “but much of its resilience has been the price of that efficiency” (Erlic, 2016). The global system has become intimately tied to, and thus dependent on, ecological and resource niches. Additionally, capitalist modernity's tendency toward cultural monocultures is “much less resilient to challenges” (Erlic, 2016). For example, a decline in the value of the Euro has enormous cascading impacts across the world. According to panarchy, while many would characterize the last few hundred years as highly liberated with freedom for individuals, we have been stuck in a conservation stage – characterized by high rigidity in the system overall through monocultures and replacement of local systems with larger global systems. The only reason individual agents have had a notion of freedom is due to the process of disembedding which allowed for greater spatial and temporal flexibility in life, which at the same time contributed to the overall rigidity of the system (disembedded and ‘free’ agents underpin the capitalist paradigm).

Thus, freedom of the individual feeds the rigidity of the overall system and the overall rigidity of the system necessitates more freely mobile individuals – it has created a strong feedback loop at the cost of the environment.

For example, one's freedom to consume further perpetuates the resilience of a capitalist system which in turn, ensures the individual is stuck in a consumer/worker role. And to keep this system within that state, we have impositions of order from top down. The Western political economy is constantly fighting against the natural chaos of the system to ensure individuals remain 'free' while decreasing the freedom from living outside of the system. Those who want to live outside of bureaucratic orders that prevent chaos, are often shunned such as homeschoolers, preppers, homesteaders, ultra-religious groups – because they threaten the strong resilience of the current economic system – our liberty and freedom to live the life we choose is limited by how much it adheres to the overall definition of a 'citizen' in society. Nations and corporations stand above the well-being of individual humans and nature for their own self-interest by imposing significant pressures of top-down control.

Western society has come to normalize order, control, centralization, and discipline as a necessity for the modern world. This restricts systemic tendency towards self-organization and desire for self-control. According to complexity theory, the least energetic way, to generate order is by allowing for self-organization and emergent properties to take natural course without the need for outside control and structure. That is, to dismantle an overarching system that restricts

an individual's role within the system, and instead allowing for someone to do what might feel more naturally compelling and significant within their localized context.

From this view, liberal notions of freedom will become increasingly out of touch with social and natural reality and that under stress the cultural/political system will open to greater pluralism in thinking about liberty, including a rediscovery of and building upon of, 19th century anarchist thinking. Normalization needs to shift to empowerment of the needs of individual communities, and we certainly see this happening more often through group such as Maker communities, adoption of alternative health systems, intentional communities, Transition Towns, and others. We are starting to see many people coalescing around what makes sense for their local context in the face of future uncertainty.

Erlic argues that beneficial policies will be those that focus on diversity and forestalling economic and social concentration (2016). “A diversity of world-views would also be beneficial, and therefore a political system that provides space and support for divergent beliefs” (2016), which would allow for greater growth of prefigurative politics.

To do so, existing institutions do not need to be destroyed – as this would simply make room for new institutions. Rather, institutions become profane. Newman argues that we need to start to think and act as if this top-down power no longer exists, live the prefigurative life. This is not just freedom, it is the “self-determination of owners invested in themselves, and through themselves, in others” (2016). If reductionist legal and social systems have created a static

system reliant on institutions, it is nonadaptive in a time when it is increasingly important for it to be adaptive given unpredictable time. It seems contradictory that the road to greater ordered freedom is through fewer codified rules regarding our roles and responsibilities; but the nature of complexity is order through chaos as this creates room for the creativity of nature to produce localised rights, freedoms, and empathy as the local self-organizing system needs.

Such reorientations of thought can come from the most seemingly mundane areas of life. For example, in Western societies capital, labour, and product have come to be somewhat synonymous. Unlimited and efficient labour is required to produce the highest number of products to achieve the greatest margin of capital – this is common sense in Western capitalist economics. However, Marx declared capital and product to be different, suggesting that product and production must be seized by society. Not only are they different, but they no longer serve an appropriate function for the well-being of society and “...it becomes evident that the economic institutions which control production and exchange are far from giving to society the prosperity which they are supposed to guarantee; they produce precisely the opposite result” (Kropotkin, 2002, 36). Additionally, Tim Ingold incites the romanticism and spirit associated with making and producing: The draughtsman with her pencil, just like the carpenter with his saw, must feel where she is going, and must continually adjust her gestures so as to maintain alignment with a moving target. Moreover, as with the mountain path, the buzzard’s flight or the tree root, the drawn line does not connect predetermined points in sequence but ‘launches forth’ from its tip leaving a trail behind it” (Ingold, 2011, 99). There is a human-ness to production that has been stripped out to maintain a certain line of order in society. The maker movement and citizen

reclamation over production is one seemingly mundane prefigurative political action that encourages self-affirmation, creativity, spirit, and localized autonomy over self, life, and nature.

Resilience principles ask us to manage slow variables and feedbacks, to configure the system in different ways to make all variables in a system both independent and connected to provide different services. The only way to do this is by empowering the roles within different parts of the systems through radical liberation. The philosophical parallels between complexity and anarchism begin with this notion of self-organization as both emergent and better for the long-term resilience of a system. Embracing complexity inevitably leads one toward an acceptance of anarchy as current modes of liberty and freedom are upheld by incredible systems of hierarchical control (and a history of complex growth dynamics that have reaped significant damage on ecological systems). Now that hierarchical control is put under pressure and brought into question because of the precarious relationship of socio-ecological systems.

While anarchy is traditionally equated with ‘chaos’, and usually associated with disorder, it is self-organization from the bottom-up:

“Indeed, anarchy is the condition for a further search for principles and rules and it reveals, moreover, as the conditions to any possible life and organization to be. In other words, it is the autonomy, the freedom, the independence that allows for higher or better horizons, dynamics and structures. Anarchy, it appears, is the very seed and proper name for freedom, autonomy and cooperation” (Maldonado, 2016, 60).

Localized systems without political rule could reduce socio-political instability and increase socio-ecological relationship especially in context where fighting for ‘land’ isn’t a thing anymore. By reducing significant bureaucratic overhead, we can also reduce energetic demands, produce local food systems, and reorient how individual in local communities relate to one another. This is certainly not something that could be put into practice in any large scale – I’m certain a large city would not function without top-down systems. This is a prefigurative possibility for those in a position to create change – municipalities willing to go a different direction or small communities interested in establishing local resilience. For example, in Prince Edward Island there is a thriving community of local food, limited reliance on imports, sharing, gifting, bartering, trading, and livelihood economics initially fuelled by economic instability (Kish, 2018). Without top-down control, the community began to self-organize in an anarchist fashion to meet the needs of the community. Kropotkin, taking a cue from Darwin, argued for networked societies based on mutual aid, compassion, trust, and solidarity as grounds for a truly free and humane society.

Women as strategic self-organizing prefigurative activists

One of the underlying ideas of this collection, is that humanity will be faced with difficult choices among an array of wicked dilemmas as we transition to a new kind of low-growth society. Many cherished institutions and ideologies that have arisen alongside growth economics and modernity may come into question as the system transitions into a new phase.

This reminds us that socially just politics and communities have an obligation to ‘remember’.

Remembering previous cycles is a part of the panarchy cycle – systems learn and by doing so are less likely to make similar mistakes. Paul Connerton argues that societies can remember social cues that made the world better such as social justice and empathy (1989). This relates to another principle of resilience – to encourage the continuation of learning in a system to know the full extent to which social progress and socio-ecological relationships. This view is in stark contrast to Quilley’s degrowth vision as an illiberal agenda (2012, this collection). However, by remembering and early adoption of prefigurative activist identities that are suitable for a post-capitalist system there is no reason that a society should revert to older ways of thinking based on lower complexity. Rather than seeing a post-capitalist society as a reversal of society, it can be viewed as an evolution of society in which the lessons we’ve learned can be remembered and brought forward, particularly through prefigurative politics.

One such ideology is feminism and women’s emancipation – in a world where the highly energetic services of childcare might not exist, how much room is there for women to really decide to play other roles in society? What does it mean to be a woman in a localized, anarchic, eco-centric, livelihood context?

The emancipation of the modern woman relies on a series of high-energy subsystems that allowed feminism to emerge such as the birth control pill, state funded childcare, education systems and removal of sexist barriers to work. Through these systems, feminism became inherently wedded with growth and increasing complexity. This happened, however, after a

systemic movement to suppress and control women in society – which means women as powerful and emancipated agents in society does not rely on these high-energy subsystems. Only women within the context of a world with strong patriarchal roots require such systems for emancipation. By reclaiming the power of the home, rather than getting meaning from the capitalist labour market, one can both combat unsustainable ecological institutions while redefining where power in a new anarchic system comes from. The home is a central ground for action, motivation and life – women should be proud to take ownership of it. A participant in field research regarding changing local economies conducted in Prince Edward Island, Canada said: "The most radical thing I've done is quit my job and become a stay at home mom. I removed myself from the competition, from seeking self-esteem from my boss, and freed myself from the need for money. And I was judged very harshly for that decision by my feminist friends".

One consequence of modernity is that individualism, cultural relativism, and secularisation (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1973; Grosby, 2013,) as explored in Quilley's second chapter of this volume, have undermined cohesive, culturally-sanctioned and shared "hero projects" (Giddens, 1990; Kish, Hawreliak, and Quilley, 2016). Identities and methods for developing self-esteem that were once clear have been made murky through the process of modernity, especially as consumption developed into the most common route for the development of self-esteem. For example, being a good mother is no longer simply about ensuring your child is loved and fed. Instead, mothers are bombarded with a host of expert information to help make the 'best' decisions regarding every decision they make and are constantly questioning their abilities – on top of growing cultural pressure to ensure every decision is the best for a child's mental and

social development with the least impact on the environment. This has led to higher instances of mothers feeling depressed, uncertain, and confused (Bailey, 1999; E. J. Lee, 2008). In a way, women are also strongly trapped in a rigidity trap. Modern western women have an immense responsibility to continue to succeed in their traditional domestic roles – these roles in many ways have become more difficult in the last, 20 years as mothering has become increasingly more involved. And while these domestic roles have become increasingly time and mentally consuming, women are also under immense pressure to demonstrate their emancipation through portrayal of a curated individual identity, succeeding in the workforce, and being highly educated.

Modern western women have an opportunity to develop a more radical understanding of self-ownership; finding the freedom they already have. Women have started to adhere to a societal ideal of what their freedom looks like. Instead of becoming freer, it's restricted a woman's decision to be content in life. If it were more socially acceptable for women to affirm themselves and their own indifference there might be more women happily choosing one major life project over another – mothering over working or working over mothering. In the case of Prince Edward Island, women were tapping into this ownership and choosing mothering over working with great satisfaction (Kish, 2019).

The modern western woman is restricted by the limitations prescribed to them in early capitalism and further weighed down by the supposed emancipation from those limitations. There are many in the world without these limitations on freedom. For instance, in the indigenous community of

Haida Gwaii, women are the matriarchs of their community. Even in indigenous communities that are not matriarchal indigenous women may be 'freer' than the modern western woman as their roles are both clear and respected (Lewish, 2019, personal communication). Karen Lewish, an indigenous woman in Southern Ontario, explained that as a woman her role in her society is very clear to her but the prescriptive role is not restricting because a) as it cultural roots, it's fulfilling as an obligation and b) if one doesn't want to adhere to the prescribed role there is a community to support them in finding what they feel as though they should be doing and what would be fulfilling to them. There is freedom in both the liberal sense of not having to adhere to a role, but a deeper freedom of contentment in the role that is prescribed.

Generally, modern western women don't have such clear and understood social norms, nor do they have a strong community to encourage exploration of one's need. Instead there is a broad cultural definition of a free emancipated woman. One possible way out of this, for those that may want to choose mothering over career, is to develop a radical prefigurative politic of the home – which I call a radical poli-oikos, where women radicalize the home as a ground for eco-feminist action. The grounding assumptions of a livelihood feminism would include a radical, life-giving, care-providing, self-sustaining politic.

Defining exactly what this radical polis-oikos looks like exactly is difficult as systems theory tell us it will be different depending on the context. The more prescriptive the definition of such a movement, the less useful it becomes. However, it might include an adoption of stronger family and community units, acceptance of lower income and therefor reduced consumption, valuation

of community volunteerism, establishment of intergenerational care for both elderly parents and younger children, cultivating place-bound identities through relationships, music, arts, and learning, homeschooling, and adoption of more minimalist parenting practices. This would be a transformation in the ideals of feminism – women adopting this radical politic in Prince Edward Island were judged harshly by other women for leaving their high-powered jobs to become full-time stay at home mothers (Kish, 2019).

If more widely adopted, a radical polis-oikos can help begin to carve out a new system where domestic feminism has a strong footing – where women have a strong sense of self, so that in a new system they don't lose their power if the subsystems upholding power (birth control, childcare) no longer exist. Instead, these women can re-occupy the home sphere and be primary definers of what the self-organized system looks like as they'd be the primary decision makers regarding education, food production/making, relationships, and community orientation. This is not to say that all woman should, or need, to do quit their jobs and adopt such a feminism. Instead, those who already do stay at home, are unfulfilled by 'bullshit jobs' (Graeber, 2018) or just want a simpler life should be heralded as activists going up against a strong system. The women in Prince Edward Island should feel proud and empowered to choose family over work, not judged, and by establishing a politic around it, they may see the power and importance of their actions. This approach to the rights of women would help broaden modern definitions of an empowered woman that would also contribute to a post-capitalist alternative system.

Moreover – framing motherhood, care, and feminized externalities as ground for a radical politic provides fodder for policy development around social services, universal basic income, and tax bracketing. Mothering is a strategic and smart grounds for developing an important prefigurative activist agenda to ensure the systemic patriarchy collapses alongside capitalism.

This kind of politic can only really happen in a society that allows for self-organization. However, allowing for self-organization and prefigurative politics will be mutually reinforcing. As communities change to make room for new identities for both women and men, more opportunities to do so would emerge. As more women take on an activist-mother role, society would begin to organize more around the needs of these women – education, food systems, and consumption patterns would change to meet the needs of these new roles. This does however mean, that a great deal of obligation falls onto the shoulders of women to be the instigators of change.

Conclusion

Kropotkin argued that “there are periods in the life of human society when revolution becomes an imperative necessity...” (2002, 35). We can see this happening when “new ideas germinate everywhere, seeking to force their way into the light” and forcefully “opposed by the inertia of those whose interest it is to maintain the old order” (ibid). In these moments the need for reorganization and a revitalization of life becomes apparent as the “code of established morality...no longer seems sufficient” (ibid). Thus, the time for reorganization may approach and the strength of the anarchist is their emphasis on self-affirmation, self-organization, and

empowerment of the both the individual and the community within which the individual is situated. Self-affirmed individuals in a community where their role matters, may have less of a difficult time with their limited relative freedom, but may be happier than the individual who is free to do whatever they want.

Regardless of orientation and connectedness in the system post-collapse, the system will always find ways to adapt and survive to surprise generators. Catastrophes are regular occurrences as the system experiences discontinuity that radically undermines the trajectory of the system (such as ecological collapse). The science of complexity challenges us to think differently about how systems move and orient themselves – and how we might begin to define new forms of freedom steeped in self-organization and learning lessons from what society remembers.

Works Cited

- Breines, Wini., 1980. "Community and Organization: The New Left and Michels' 'Iron Law.'" *Social Problems*, 27 (4): 419–29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/800170>.
- Brown, Peter., 2012. "Ethics for Economics in the Anthropocene." *Teilhard Studies* 65 (1–28).
- Brown, Peter G., and Peter Timmerman, eds., 2015. *Ecological Economics for the Anthropocene: An Emerging Paradigm*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Connerton, Paul., 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Deacon, Roger., 1998. "Strategies of Governance Michel Foucault on Power." *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 92: 113–48.
- Erlic, Martin. Nov., 26,, 2016. "What is the Adjacent Possible?" *Medium.com*. Accessed Aug. 18., 2019: <https://medium.com/@SeloSlav/what-is-the-adjacent-possible-17680e4d1198>
- Gotts, Nicholas., 2007. "Resilience, Panarchy, and World-Systems Analysis." *Ecology and Society* 12 (1). <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-02017-120124>.
- Holloway, John., 2010. *Crack Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.

- Ingold, Tim., 2011. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Keane, John., 2016. "Whither Anarchy: Perspectives on Anarchism and Liberty." *The Conversation.*, 2016. <http://theconversation.com/whither-anarchy-perspectives-on-anarchism-and-liberty-59979>.
- Kish, Kaitlin., 2018. "Ecological Economic Development Goals: Bringing the Social Sphere Back into Ecological Economic Imagination." *UW Space, Dissertations*, 1.
- Kropotkin, Peter., 2002. *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings.*, 2002 edition. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications.
- Mahon, Rianne, and Fiona Robinson., 2011. *Feminist Ethics and Social Policy: Towards a New Global Political Economy of Care*. UBC Press.
- Maldonado, Carlos., 2016. "Anarchy and Complexity." *Emergence: Complexity and Organization* 18 (1): 52–73.
- Marx, Karl. 1844. *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*. 1st edition. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books.
- Newman, Saul., 2016. "Whither Anarchy: Ownness as a Form of Freedom." *The Conversation.*, 2016. <http://theconversation.com/whither-anarchy-ownness-as-a-form-of-freedom-60777>.
- Quilley, Stephen., 2013. "De-Growth Is Not a Liberal Agenda: Relocalisation and the Limits to Low Energy Cosmopolitanism." *Environmental Values*, 22 (2):, 261–85.
- Schumpeter, Joseph A., 1942. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. 1 edition. London; New York: Routledge.
- ., 1947. "The Creative Response in Economic History." *The Journal of Economic History* 7 (02): 149–59. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050700054279>.
- Smith, Eddie. (2010). *The adjacent possible*. Practically Efficient blog: https://www.edge.org/conversation/stuart_a_kauffman-the-adjacent-possible
- Walker, B. H, and David Salt., 2006. *Resilience Thinking Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Westley, Frances, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Patton., 2007. *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed*. Reprint edition. Toronto: Vintage Canada.
- Williams, Stacy J., 2017. "Personal Prefigurative Politics: Cooking Up an Ideal Society in the Woman's Temperance and Woman's Suffrage Movements, 1870–1920." *The Sociological Quarterly* 58 (1): 72–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2016.1246894>.
- Young, Kevin, and Michael Schwartz., 2012. "Can Prefigurative Politics Prevail? The Implications for Movement Strategy in John Holloway's *Crack Capitalism*." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 12 (2):, 220–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X12443533>.