

UCL Development Planning Unit



Post COVID-19 Urban Futures webinar series - No. 1

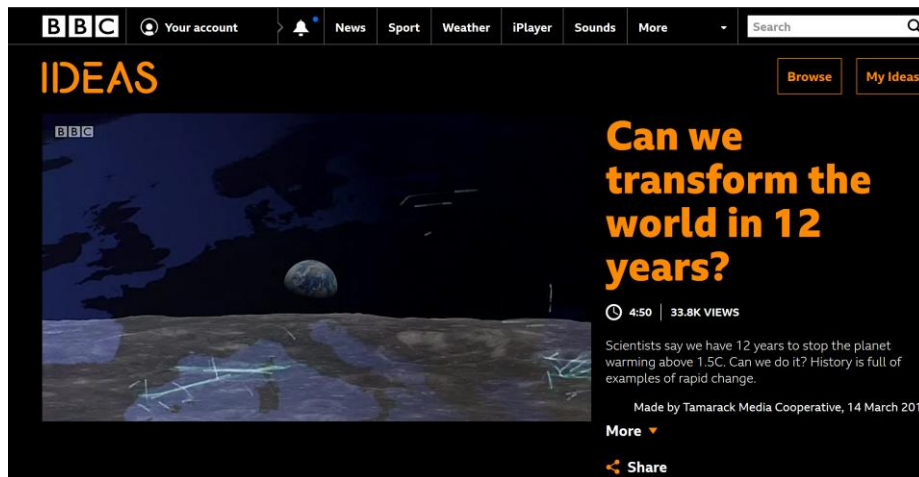
7.4.20

From crisis to radical change

Robert Biel

1

background:



<https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/can-we-transform-the-world-in-12-years/p073j3z5?playlist=sustainable-thinking>

the issue seemed to be, how to free ourselves from business as usual

2 A: SOME CONCEPTS

visioning

desired futures ... which also implies a theme of return:

... to indigenous perspectives

3



Joy Harjo



POETRY FOUNDATION

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A Map to the Next World

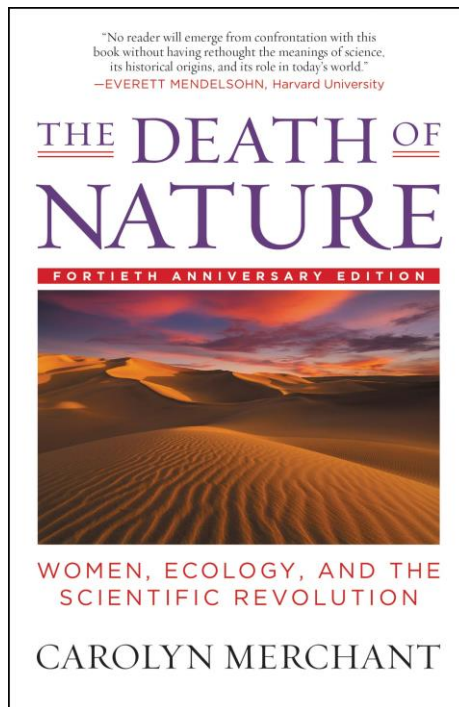
BY JOY HARJO

for Desiray Kierra Chee

In the last days of the fourth world I wished to make a map for
those who would climb through the hole in the sky.

My only tools were the desires of humans as they emerged
from the killing fields, from the bedrooms and the kitchens.

4 ... undoing (or reversing, unravelling etc...) the Death of Nature



a key issue in Political Ecology is exploring *intrinsic* links between the ecological and social

5 ... biophily



Erich Fromm (1900-1980)

biophilia means love of life

Fromm developed the idea in opposition to fascist-type nationalism, so it's kind of politico-social as a starting point, but by implication it's also ecological

... supplies a basis for unifying society and ecology in a progressive way

6 notion of *care*

for people, and for nature:



Marina Chang

7 the Death of Nature is partly about *trying to simplify systems so as to render them predictable, and therefore control them ... both in a technical and a political sense*

8

"Tip of the iceberg': is our destruction of nature responsible for Covid-19?

As habitat and biodiversity loss increase globally, the coronavirus outbreak may be just the beginning of mass pandemics



▲ A dead monkey sold as bushmeat hangs outside a villager's house in north-east Gabon. Photograph: Christine Nesbitt/AP

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/18/tip-of-the-iceberg-is-our-destruction-of-nature-responsible-for-covid-19-aoe>

9 biophily could also mean being *in tune with life*

this opens us up to complex systems thinking ... restoring balances of nature

we learn from agroecology that if the system is sufficiently diverse, any pathogen or insect pest will be controlled by a spontaneous corrective feedback; when we disrupt this, is where it all begins to go wrong

10

Agroecology in an urban allotment



we're creating, within a defined area (250 m²), a miniature ecosystem with self-regulating properties



source: RB

11

biophily in this sense is likewise a principle for the design of built systems

.....

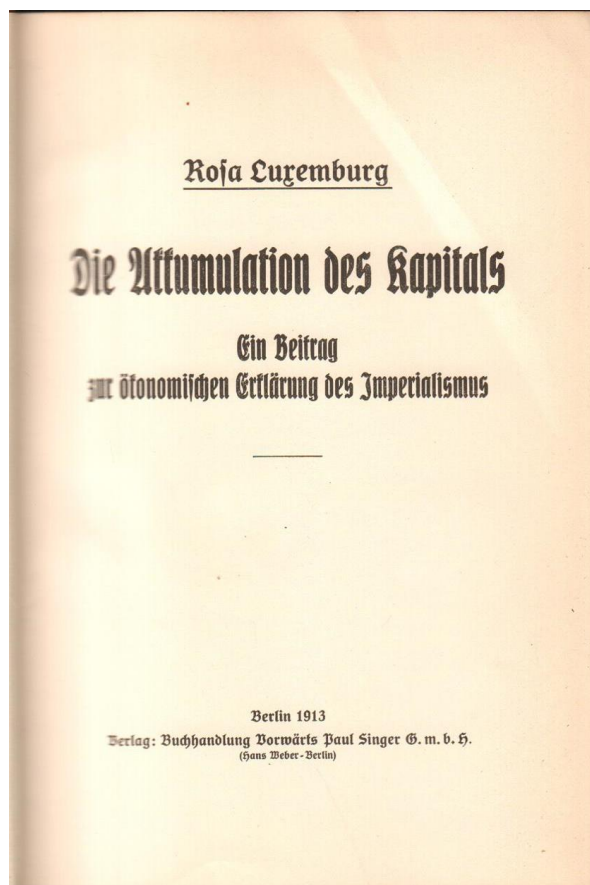
12

but in order to implement biophily, we need to overthrow the control structure

biopower (Foucault 1979 etc.)

13

imperialism: work of Rosa Luxemburg



capitalism accumulates by depleting a *milieu* (periphery, surrounding system, 'environment') ... which is both natural and social (*institutional*: the sphere of commons etc.)

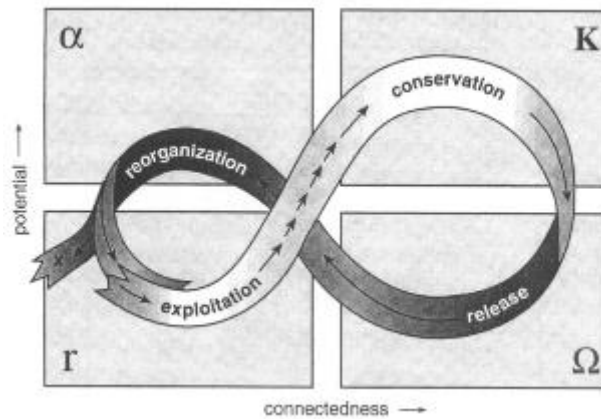
14 *we need to challenge biopower and imperialism, if we are to inaugurate a regime of care*

.....

15 **B. PATHOLOGY OF BLOCKED TRANSITION**

any system requires the faculty to transform/restructure itself fundamentally at certain points, in order to escape stagnancy

the ecosystem is a model:

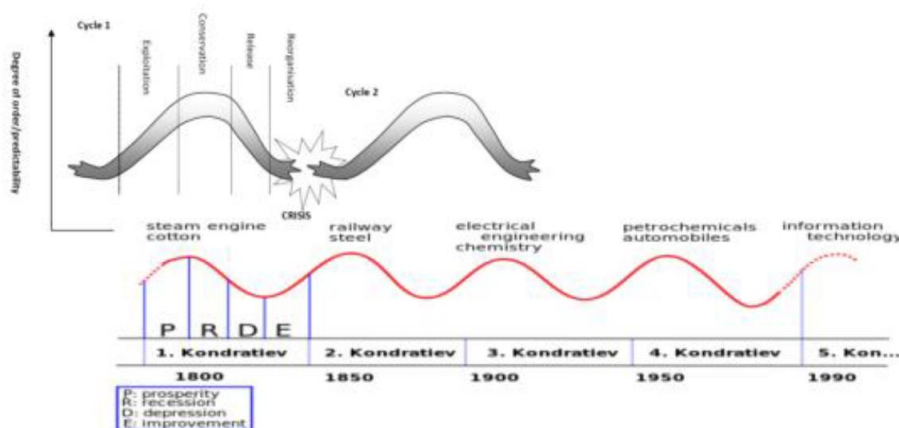


source: Holling 2001: 394

in the bottom left, there's a *rift* ... phase transition

16

during the epoch of imperialism, i.e. since about 1900, **the function of phase transition has been usurped by capitalism** (long cycles, regimes of accumulation, Kondratiev waves) ... a kind of evil parody of an ecology:



composite picture: RB

the rift can be seen a point of 'creative destruction'
(Schumpeter 1976 [1943])

BUT, ... the default setting for capitalism is always to grab the creative part for itself, and shove the destruction onto the masses!

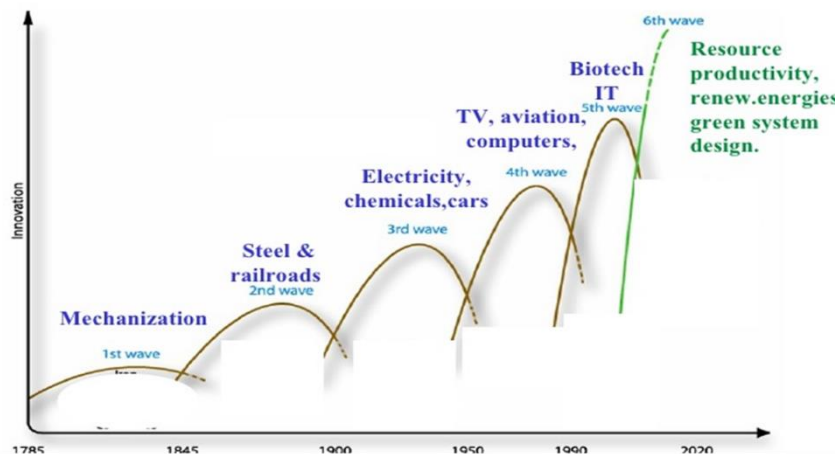
I would argue that the usurpation of phase transition by capitalism can be seen as an interesting application of the 'biopower' idea ...

17

there's an argument that **logically, the next wave would be green...**

The sixth big cycle ought to be “green”

(after Charlie Hargroves, Australia)



source: Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker's presentation at the LCM 2011 on <http://www.knowtheflow.com/2011/kuznets-and-kondratieff-or-tunneling-through-the-curve/>

c.f. work of Amory Lovins etc.

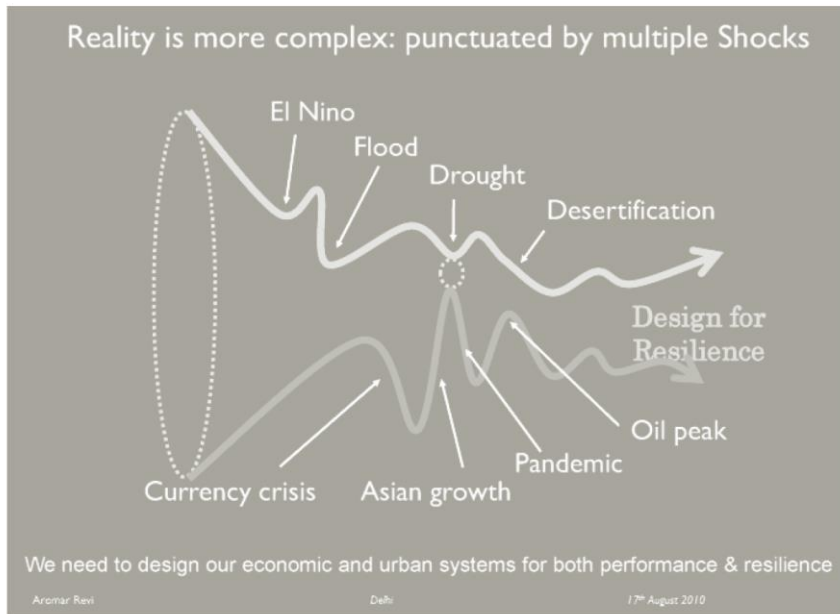
18 crisis of 2008

the system *did* experience a rift ... but, was there any creativity out of the destruction??

19 MIXED SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL CRISES

the first point to note is that 2008 initiated what will probably be a lasting feature, i.e. crises which are *both* socio-political and ecological, and marked by interaction between the two spheres (in this case, extreme weather led to food shortages, while parasitic finance capital went into land and food futures)

interesting discussion by Aromar Revi (Indian Institute for Human Settlements)



source: Revi 2010

I framed this in a slightly different way, but the two are complementary

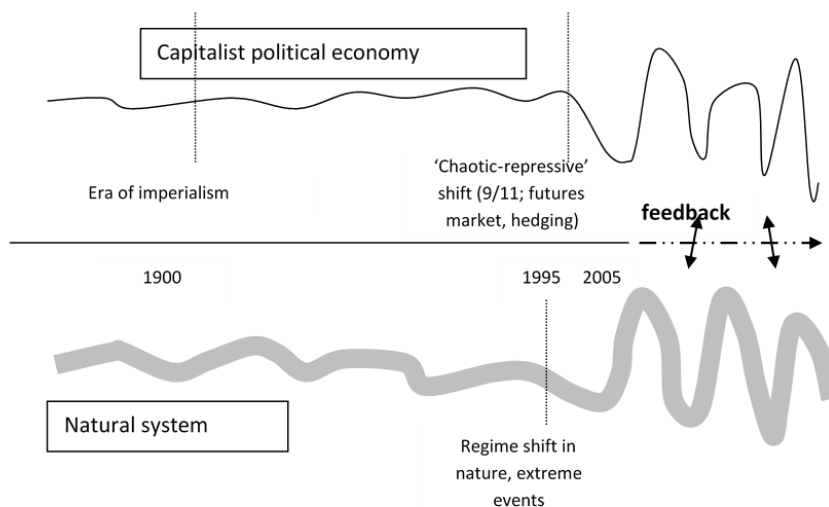


Figure 2: a representation of the interaction of two systems – socio-economic and natural – which at roughly the same time enter into a more chaotic or extreme behaviour

source: Biel 2015

20 2010-20, the lost decade ...

back to imperialism theory ...

two key features: 1. finance capital outweighs the productive economy; 2. it's always simpler to exploit the periphery, rather than carry out deep reform

this decade has been quite paradoxical:

21 on the one hand, green transition *has* been initiated in some spheres, notably energy...




The image is a screenshot of a news article from CNN. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the CNN logo, 'US', and several category links: 'Crime + Justice', 'Energy + Environment', 'Extreme Weather', and 'Space + Science'. On the right side of the bar, there is a 'LIVE TV' indicator. Below the navigation bar, the main headline reads 'Kentucky coal museum switching to solar power' in a large, bold, black font. Underneath the headline, it says 'By Alexandra Larkin, CNN' and 'Updated 1714 GMT (0114 HKT) April 6, 2017'. A photograph of solar panels is visible below the text. To the right of the photo, there is a small vertical text 'SEATTLE IMAGES' and a 'News & buzz' label. At the bottom of the screenshot, there is a URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/06/us/coal-museum-goes-solar-trnd/index.html>

22 *on the other hand, transition is blocked*

the flows of imperialism outweigh the flows of circular economies

society has become embedded in a situation where it predares upon itself, constantly squeezing value from the base and shifting it to finance capital

decarbonisation is in no way associated with social equity ... there may even be a negative correlation....



Energy Research & Social Science
Volume 56, October 2019, 101214



Renewable energy injustice: The socio-environmental implications of renewable energy consumption

Julius Alexander McGee ^a, Patrick Trent Greiner ^b

[Show more](#)

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2019.05.024> [Get rights and content](#)

Abstract

We explore how national income inequality moderates the relationship between renewable energy consumption and CO₂ emissions per capita for a sample of 175 nations from 1990 to 2014. We find that, independent of income inequality and other drivers of emissions, increases in renewable energy consumption reduce emissions. However, when national income inequality is considered, we find that as inequality increases renewable energy consumption is associated with a much larger decrease in emissions. We also find that when fossil fuel

McGee A. and Greiner P. 2019. Renewable energy injustice: The socio-environmental implications of renewable energy consumption. *Energy Research & Social Science*. Volume 56, October

somehow, the 'greening' and the social decay seem to form contradictory aspects of the same reality

23

notion of the Foundational Economy

in the European context, what is being destroyed (in the name of 'austerity') is precisely the sector which sustains life, i.e. the economy of care

consequently, during the lost decade, we've moved further away from biophilia, and biopower has got worse

24 surveillance of the most marginalised, particularly those with disabilities

You are here: [Home](#) / [Human Rights](#) / Police force admits agreement to share information about protesters with DWP



Police force admits agreement to share information about protesters with DWP

By John Pring on 25th July 2019
Category: Human Rights

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/police-force-admits-agreement-to-share-information-about-protesters-with-dwp/>

this realises one of the projects of Bentham, whose notion of the 'Panopticon' supplied an important image for Foucault's biopower idea

PANOPTICON;
OR
THE INSPECTION-HOUSE:
CONTAINING THE
IDEA OF A NEW PRINCIPLE OF CONSTRUCTION
APPLICABLE TO
ANY SORT OF ESTABLISHMENT, IN WHICH PERSONS OF
ANY DESCRIPTION ARE TO BE KEPT UNDER INSPECTION;
AND IN PARTICULAR TO
PENITENTIARY-HOUSES,
PRISONS, HOUSES OF INDUSTRY, WORK-HOUSES, POOR-HOUSES, LAZARETTOS, MANUFACTORIES, HOSPITALS, MAD-HOUSES, AND SCHOOLS:
WITH
A PLAN OF MANAGEMENT
ADAPTED TO THE PRINCIPLE.
IN A SERIES OF LETTERS,
WRITTEN IN THE YEAR 1787, FROM CRECHEFF IN WHITE
RUSSIA. TO A FRIEND IN ENGLAND
BY JEREMY BENTHAM,
OF LINCOLN'S INN, ESQUIRE.

source: <http://cartome.org/panopticon2.htm>

25 C. WHAT THE NEW SITUATION OFFERS

* a rift in the continuity of the system, which looked unlikely *has* now taken place



« Nous ne reviendrons pas à la normale, car la normale était le problème », Chili, décembre 2019. © Matias Segura

source: <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-marc-adolphe/blog/070420/imaginons-nous-au-jour-d-apres-quel-jour-d-apres>

the opportunity is presented for the destruction to give way to creativity of a new kind

26

*

a few months ago there was resistance to activists' call to declare an emergency ...



Accra, Ghana Sept. 2019. Image supplied by Gideon Commey, personal communication



.... now emergency is a fact of life: it's not a normal situation

27

* there is a recognition that the sectors which sustain life are the foundation of any socio-economic system

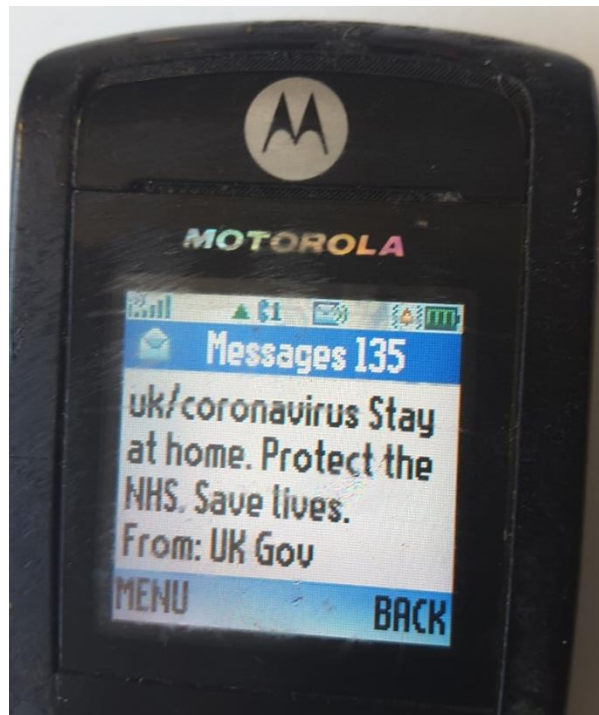


photo: RB



<https://twitter.com/i/status/1240954554553962496?cn=ZmxleGlibGVfcmVjc18y&refsrc=email>

28

*

please can we write off neo-liberalism

once and for all....



Two gilets jaunes protesters at a climate march in Paris on Saturday 16 March. On the left, the jacket reads: "End of the world, end of the month: same perpetrators same fight" (Photo: Natalie Sauer)

source: <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2019/03/20/ecologists-capitalists-gilets-jaunes-climate-justice/>

... as a basis to institute regime of care

29




it's accepted that there will have to be a massive stimulus package;

YaleEnvironment360 Published at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies [Explore](#) [Search](#) [About E360](#)

E360 DIGEST
MARCH 19, 2020

Coronavirus Stimulus Plans Are An Opportunity for Bold Climate Action, Expert Says

Governments and financial institutions should incorporate climate change action into their COVID-19 economic recovery plans, the head of the International Energy Agency (IEA), [Fatih Birol](#), told [Climate Home News](#). Stimulus packages, he argues, should focus on large-scale investments in things like clean energy, battery storage, and carbon capture-and-storage technologies.



Fatih Birol, the head of the International Energy Agency (IEA).

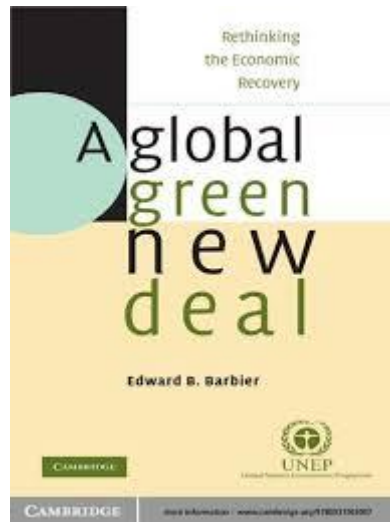
"I am talking with several governments and international financial institution leaders because they are all busy designing stimulus programs for the economy," Birol said in an interview. "We can use the current situation to step up our ambition to tackle climate change... This is a huge opportunity we cannot miss. Here the issue is not only the level of [stimulus] money, but the direction of the money."

<https://e360.yale.edu/digest/coronavirus-stimulus-plans-are-an-opportunity-for-bold-climate-action-expert-says>

this can tie in with existing debates around a Green New Deal

30

* the issue has always been one for international co-operation



Barbier 2010

in particular, we have to think internationally in order to resolve the exploitation of the periphery, which has always made the system reactionary

a new internationalist approach can open the pathway to a new cosmopolitanism, escaping the evil dichotomy between corporate globalisation and Right-wing nationalism

31



we suddenly *have* the thing which seemed unattainable, i.e. a drastic slashing of emissions and pollution

Forbes Billionaires Innovation Leadership Money Business Small Business Lifestyle Lists

EDITORS' PICK | 576,077 views | Mar 11, 2020, 12:00am EDT

Coronavirus Lockdown May Save More Lives By Preventing Pollution Than By Preventing Infection

 **Jeff McMahon** Senior Contributor ©
Green Tech
From Chicago, I write about climate change, green technology, energy.

f
t
in



<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffcmahon/2020/03/11/coronavirus-lockdown-may-save-more-lives-from-pollution-and-climate-than-from-virus/>

a spokesman from the World Meteorological Organisation, Lars Peter Riishojgaard, said **“You could see it as maybe science experiment: what happens if all of a sudden we turn the whole thing off? It will lead some people, and perhaps also some governments, to rethink.”** (quoted in Radio France internationale, 3.4.20 <http://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20200403-covid-19-biggest-drop-in-co2-emissions-since-wwii-but-little-impact-on-climate-change>)

from a project in Australia where the artist asked people self-isolating to display a placard in their window:



<https://www.businessinsider.com.au/coronavirus-portraits-capture-people-self-isolating-through-windows-2020-3>

... so the challenge is to see how much of this reduction in emissions/pollution we can embed permanently

32

* this has tremendous implications for built system design ...

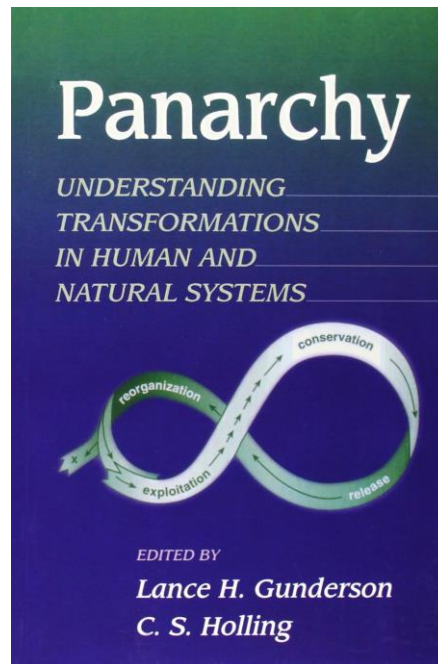
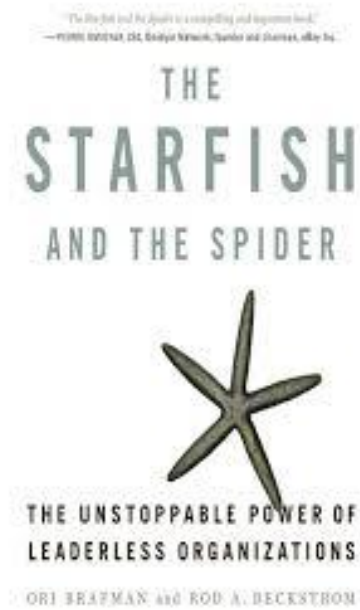


https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/26/life-after-coronavirus-pandemic-change-world?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

33

* resilience now becomes the central criterion of everything

... but this implies a new principle of organisation



34 the faculties needed for resilience can only be anchored in, and diffused throughout, society

...

so this provides an important focus for the link between social equity and environmental sustainability
