Resilience contra Metamorphosis:

Imaginaries for liberal self-perpetuation

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Abstract: *This article aims to contribute to a growing debate on the subject of resilience. A Foucault-inspired approach is adopted to problematise the question 'what does it mean for life to be resilient?', aiming to unveil the rationalities at work within any conceptualisation of 'resilient life'. The article is an invitation to reconsider the impact of 'becoming resilient', and a call to evaluate the ontological and political repercussions of this notion. Resilience is identified as a subsumptive concept whose indeterminate potential to prescribe liberal structures, ways of life and forms of thought as both imminent and immanent is capable of exhausting all other alternative political imaginations. Resilience imports a fatal imaginary: to live is not to live but rather to not die. To understand this phenomenon, the discussion engages with resilience as a product of its political rationality. Neither a natural occurrence nor one of indeterminate proportions, the consequences and implications of resilience are explored in terms of their ontophilosophical repercussions. Resilience is understood as an assemblage of structures, practices, and understandings of what it means to be a human being, its ontological capacities expressed through apprehensions of what constitutes the resilient subject: body and being, and through a politics of exclusion: one determinately aimed at the volatility that characterises emergent being. Here two concepts emerge as central: being's capacity for change is identified as a 'metamorphic' capacity, one that allows for a condition of emergence and renewal; on the other hand resilience is identified as both a form of governance and, in its capacity to produce a life of its own and to mimic the processes of life itself, a form of biopower that we refer to as 'biomorphic'.*

Introduction

> *Metamorphosis:* A change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

> *Biomorphic*: Resembling or suggesting the forms of living organisms (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*).

What does it mean for resilience to be a proposition of biomorphic proportions? I borrow the term from the arts to signify a practice and philosophy that imitates the processes of life: that which is biomorphic displays or produces forms or patterns that resemble those of living organisms. If biopower was that which 'brought life and its mechanism into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent for the transformation of human life' (Foucault, 1976: 143), then 'biomorphic' power is biopower under the guise of nature: a politics of life as life is meant to be, not '*comme il faut*' (as it should) (Bourdieu, 1998), but '*comme il l'est*' (as it is). A claim that life 'should be', and is as should be, because human beings are intrinsically, inherently, and organically resilient; because to be resilient is the claim and condition of life as per nature. Everyone is capable of being resilient, "to recover fully from acute stressors, to carry on in the face of chronic difficulties: to regain one's balance after losing it" (Resilience Solutions Group, Arizona State U. "What Is Resilience?" 2013. 9 Aug. 2013 ‹http://resilience.asu.edu/what-is-resilience›). Resilience is a natural capacity, "it involves behaviours, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone" (Allen, 2007: 3). Even more so: we all *should* learn to exploit this capacity. To suggest resilience as biomorphic is to identify it at the level of ontology: an ontology of life as adaption that nonetheless remains an identitarian constant –living to not die, adapting so as not to change. Seemingly paradoxical, to identify resilience as 'biomorphic', to coin the term, is effectively to remove resilience from the sphere of biology and that of the natural: it is to denaturalise resilience and expose it as a form of governance and denounce it as biopolitical epidemic. The anatomy of resilience is that of a virus – inherently dependent on other living organisms to propagate its own life, it takes from other life to produce its own kind of life: a life of continual production, contingent on the cessation or reduction of the life that originarily hosts it. A life, if any, already at the edge of life.

It is similarly not without thought or intent that the virus analogy above, one dictated by a

profusely biological imaginary, is drawn here. If anything is characteristic to a virus it is its capacity for fast proliferation. The propagation of resilience is one not largely dissimilar in expanse, scope or effect. In his recent commentary, "Resisting Resilience", Mark Neocleous (2013) too reflected on the expanding nature of the concept of resilience within the social sciences, particularly in terms of its conceptualisation parallel to security: "whenever one hears the call 'security', one now also finds the demand of 'resilience'" (2013: 3). Drawing significantly from Julian Reid, Brad Evans and Melinda Cooper's work on the subject (see especially: Reid, 2012; Evans and Reid, 2013; Walker and Cooper, 2011), Mark Neocleous (2013) underlines a fundamental characteristic of resilience as practice: its capacity for subsumption cross-discipline. Resilience has indeed become something of a bridging concept, linking the spheres of the emotional and the political, and psychology to governance (see for instance: Pupavac, 2001; Norris, et al, 2008; Lebel, et al, 2006). It is also certainly one whose umbrella appears to have the ability to subsume virtually every other subject in the field. Transcending contexts in its reappraisal of fragility and what it means to be 'strong' –or for that matter vulnerable (Evans and Reid, 2013; 2014)– resilience speaks in tones of urgency and disaster, and resonates with emotional consequence. A concept with roots in ecology and environmental science,[1] but which over the last two decades has ramified into strata as varied as –to name a few: biology, psychology, anthropology, mathematics, economics, politics, disaster management, and philosophy, the idea of resilience has certainly come to flourish beyond the boundaries of any singular discipline. With the addition of the newly created Taylor and Francis *Resilience* journal, as Mark Neocleous (2013: 6) also notes, the subject will effectively have grown to involve "a consideration of almost every physical phenomenon on the planet: nothing less than a journal of all and everything that capital and the state might want and need". How could we even begin to think the genesis of one such subsumptive process?

Perhaps a good starting point would be to ask how resilience has been granted such an oppressive hold over our political imaginary. Although the resilience 'turn' perhaps does not stretch much farther back than the last two of decades, the answer to this recent discursive outburst on and around resilience takes us to old philosophical roots. It is precisely at this intersection between the

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[1] For a genealogy of resilience science and its origins in ecology, see: Walker and Cooper (2011).

practices and theory that inform resilience that this paper has sought to situate itself. By looking to recent work on the topic, this discussion is a proposition to further evaluate the ontological and political repercussions of resilience. It invites us to consider just what it means to become (a) 'resilient being'. In maintaining that its construction is neither passive nor organic, the discussion reproblematises resilience as governance technology and highlights its naturalisation within social and political discourses, the upsurge in which has certainly not been coincidental. Positing that resilience is neither 'natural' –ontologically predetermined or pre-given in human beings– nor indeterminate, the consequences of resilience are explored in terms of their ontological, philosophical and political implications.

Far from incidental, resilience emerges as a careful assemblage of structures, practices, and ontophilosophical understandings of human life and of what it means to exist as resilient being – an existence redefined and this time specified not by emergence but by adaption. As Jonathan Joseph (2013:38) notes, "despite its claims to be about the operation of systems, [resilience] is, in practice, closer to a form of governance," where liberal structures and ways of life are reproduced at the claim of imminent necessity and impending disaster. Resilience expresses itself ontologically through biological and philosophical apprehensions of what constitutes its subject: body and being, 'human' defined in terms of its biology, with its psychological predisposition to resilience. It founds itself on a philosophical appeal to a being that 'chooses' life over death, and permanence of its self over the reconciliation of its finitude. In its naturalisation resilience becomes a political force for exclusion, determinately aimed at the volatility that characterises emergent being as its other.

I posit that the way resilience is presented –as the ability to 'bounce back' from shock or trauma, to adapt to change and adversity, or recover from disaster undamaged– is counterintuitive: it represents neither an *adaption to* change nor is it repressive of change –it is contraindicative in that it does not adapt *to* change, it *adapts change.* Not only does it transform emergent life who, once determined by constant change, now finds itself instead specified by staticity, but also turns itself into another device, a sort of machinic assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) for managing uncertainty into a new categorical, a new universal of objectivity. In this it joins risk and other technologies and rationalities of governance in calculating and managing uncertain, potentially

dangerous, futures. Resilience transforms the life of volatility into a schematic; life turns in on itself and on its capacity for real change. We call this a 'metamorphic' capacity, and advance that resilience is incompatible with it. The biomorphosis of resilience is one that denies the subject of metamorphosis.

Resilience produces

Articulating the philosophical foundations of resilience therefore becomes largely a matter of ontologically situating it. What we find is that resilience is a learning process: resilience is *built*. Mark Neocleous (2013: 4) also notices this, pointing out that "resilience is something that needs nurturing or building". The implication here is a structural one; it tells us something about the kind of temporality that resilience works within, and it tells us something about its ontological relation to permanence, continuity, and above all finitude –that of the resilient subject, and perhaps more significantly that of its way of life. Resilience is the result of a constructive process that has a beginning but more importantly one that is intrinsically determined by an end. Resilience is a structure built to face the test of time: ontologically linear, resilience seeks to resist change because change here is equated with *the* end, not *an* end*.* Here *the end* is always pressing, always poignant and always already there.

The notion of *the end* becomes a particularly pregnant one in the resilience imaginary. Far from a suspension or cessation it expresses itself as determination. The determination of pressing finitude is ever too afraid to give in to silence: too preoccupied thinking itself, it continuously produces itself as noise – as presence manifest in discourses and institutions, subjects and practices. This sense of the end of times expresses itself discursively in the poignancy of terms like 'catastrophe' and 'disaster', ever so focal to resiliency discourses. The logic of resilience is not only structured around but in fact *starts* at the thought of disaster or catastrophe. To return to Mark Neocleous's (2013: 4) article: "Resilience is nothing if not an apprehension of the future, but a future imagined as disaster and then, more importantly, recovery from the disaster." What is significant here is that the thought of disaster is the departure point, an idea already in place and at work before any mention of resilience comes into being. The catastrophe is always already predisposed: resilient being learns to live with the

thought of impending disaster, at the cost of the particular ontological formations that this produces.

> To suffer no longer immediately invites compassion or an unconditional response on
> account of it being simply the ethical things to do. The catastrophes which now plague
> the liberal landscape are bereft or any radically deontological response on account of
> their very normalization. All that remains is for the subject to learn to take care of
> their own endangered destinies (Evans and Reid, 2014: 89).

The disaster imaginary of resilience holds precise political consequences. As Evans and Reid remark, priorities shift towards mere preservation and frames of possibility are specified, delimiting potential political alternatives. Quite importantly, disaster does not equate to finitude here. Disaster is an underlying condition of prevention, and one that much like risk, preparedness and other anticipatory technologies builds itself around imaginaries of dangerously uncertain futures (Collier and Lakoff, 2008; O'Malley, 2004; 2010). Different to probabilistic risk, preparedness discards the necessity of calculable futures and rather "involves the creation of routines and resources for coping with emergencies that are imaginable rather than precisely calculable" (O'Malley, 2010: 488). Resilience surpasses both in that, beyond claiming dominion over potential futures and imposing imaginaries of preparedness, it encompasses a disaster imaginary that enacts itself systematically and structurally, and which extends well into the personal subjectivity of its object of governance – the resilient subject. Disaster culture is a building of structures against alterity, a fixing of sediments capable of withstanding change –in essence, a prolongation of a life whose only achievement is to have postponed death thus far. An ethos of life as survival is formed for resilient populations.

Secondly, the crucial alignment here is the conflation of change with disaster: the end is always an apocalypse. It is this state of urgency that specifies resilience: "in a certain sense, the resilient subject thrives on danger. It lives in a condition of perpetual wakefulness to its reality" (Evans and Reid, 2013: 5). Within linearity ends are always a matter of cogency. Yet here we have a structure that is built to adapt to change insofar as it can continuously push it back: indeterminate deferral of the end. Resilience is permanence, rebounding shock after shock. Or perhaps this is not the case at all. 'Rebounding' implies an unchanged continuation of a state post-shock. Yet nothing remains

unchanged in the object of resilience after a shock. Just as the physical object in this analogy finds itself experiencing inevitable molecular change when rebounding, the conceptual object of resilience does not merely reflect off the information of the shock: it absorbs it, perhaps to then defer it elsewhere, but the energy of the original shock does not merely dissipate out of existence as the analogy would have it. When the shock rebounds, it is intrinsically different. Has it filtered through the device, the presumed preventive barrier of resilience? In this process resilience does not ward change off; rather, change is *absorbed*, repossessed. The axis of precession has changed. Resilience becomes the productive agent. As per physical law, information is never lost but remodelled or reshaped: resilience produces biomorphic power. As explained in the previous sections of this article, I coin this term in an attempt to understand and explain a phenomenon where governance imitates life in its productive capacity. Resilience imitates the dynamics of life to produce a change that replaces *change*: it produces its own kind of life. It produces ontology. This is life in constant adaption, reappropriated.

This, if anything, characterises the event of resilience: Being's metamorphic capacity gives way, instead, to a production similar in proportion and pattern to that of life; yet this production is one specified by preservation not renewal –a life defined effectively more by a "non-death" (Evans and Reid, 2013: 15) than by life itself. It is being's inherent volatility and its capacity to produce change – and to produce a self– that above all specifies it as emergent, and as living. When life becomes resilient it is resilience itself, and the liberal rationalities it serves, that produces being and specify its condition. In reappropriating this property so intrinsic to being, its capacity to produce ways of life and forms of change, resilience becomes biomorphic power.

Volatility and free radicals

This reappropriation signifies above all a reappraisal of how change is understood, both as experience and capacity for living organisms, and of what, within the reaches –or rather constraints– of our semiotic framework, constitutes change. Resilience replaces 'change' with '*adaptability*'. Change turns ability not necessity for living organisms. Here other variables are given precedence. Stability, to name one, becomes a key element in the process. Anthony Mancini and George Bonnano

(cited in Southwick, et al. 2011:194), for example, stress how "the term *recovery* connotes a trajectory in which normal functioning temporarily gives way to threshold or subthreshold psychopathology... By contrast, *resilience* reflects the ability to maintain a stable equilibrium." What this tells us is less about psychological recovery than it is about volatility, and its incompatibility with resilience. When the discourse around the subject of resilience effectively becomes a matter of stability and calculated trajectories, something rather clear is at work: volatility here is replaced with what is really an exercise in the prevention of chaos, an effort to manage uncertainty and to stabilise the free radicals of change and emergence. This is precisely what the Department of Homeland Security's website refers to as 'building a culture of preparedness'. The intention to propagate one such culture is far from concealed. In fact, it finds itself at the forefront of not only military strategy, but also of most social and political agendas.

> The state now assumes that one of its key tasks is to imagine the worst-case scenario, the coming catastrophe, the crisis-to-come, the looming attack, the emergency that could happen, might happen and probably will happen, all in order to be better prepared (Neocleous, 2013: 4).

It may appear as though what is being dealt with here regards prevention, much like any other anticipatory technology of governance. Yet what is inherently at stake here, and what differs from other anticipatory technologies, is that resilience concerns itself less with the prevention of disaster and more with the construction of a 'disaster culture' itself –namely, one that transforms our understandings of change and of the future into *crisis*: emergent being finds itself specified by a very different kind of urgency. This determination of crisis as urgency specifies the context for resilience. Evans and Reid similarly remark on this development in the advent of disaster management:

> Disaster management, of which much of social scientific work on climate change is a mere derivative of, makes the vulnerable subject the lead actor in the stories it tells as to the catastrophic destinies of human life while rendering that subject, paradoxically, the author of its own endangerment (Evans and Reid, 2013: 2).

Change is herein re-imagined as something external to us: it is no longer an experience or property

organic to being, ontologically integral to the life of species-being. Instead, change acquires a causality and it becomes something that happens *to* us –effectively, something we failed to be prepared for. What is at work here is therefore a matter of activity not passivity, of production not repression, and it is itself a matter of change: resilience aims to *change* our understanding of change – or at any rate cement an already predominant one, which itself subscribes to a long-standing tradition of linear thought. The exercise that resilience engages in does not concern itself with repressing something that is there but rather with producing something else in its place: in this case, it produces looming disaster, and it produces adaptability.

> (Resilience) promotes adaptability so that life may go on living despite the fact that elements of it may be destroyed. It confronts all of us living beings, ranging from weeds to humans, with the apparent reality that managing our exposure to dangers is as much as we can hope for because danger is a necessity for our development (Evans and Reid, 2013: 2).

In much the same way labour does being for Levinas (2011: 160), resilience "removes being from change". Like labour, it "masters or suspends *sine die* the indeterminate future of the element. By taking hold of things, by treating being as a furnishing, transportable into a home, it disposes of the unforeseeable future in which being's ascendancy over us was portended; it reserves this future for itself" (Levinas (2011: 160). Thinking along lines of resilience unpacks an ontology that alters our understandings of change and of what it means to be a 'human being'; resilience supplies us with a re-imagined ontology of linear being.

The good, the weak, the strong

It is important to take a step back at this point to consider the semiosis of resilience. It is worth nothing that, as a concept, resilience comes to us already heavily loaded. As signifier, 'resilience' connotes immediate emotional resonance: we are resilient in the face of adversity[2]; we are resilient to harm – resilience is dichotomised, with harm or catastrophe as its negative counterpart and

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[2] See for instance: Rutter (1985) and Rolf et al. (1993).

resilience being the absence of harm, and poses as heroic act. The entire basis for the discursive resonance of 'resilience' comes charged with a morality of its own. It is no wonder, then, that Mark Neocleous (2013) notices the comfortable fit between the 'world's poor' and resilience. Call it Christian morality, call it Nietzsche's 'weak morality', resilience draws crucially from Western moral code: they may be poor, lacking or suffering, but they can learn to be resilient. What greater achievement than this, than to endure in the face of adversity? Harmless, vulnerable and resilient, the weak are indeed *the good*. As Evans and Reid (2013: 2) notice, "the underlying ontology of resilience, therefore, is actually vulnerability. To be able to become resilient, one must first accept that one is fundamentally vulnerable". The equation of goodness with resilience therefore becomes a recurrent theme around hardship: "State officials very quickly resort to the theme as a mechanism for undermining austerity actions" (Neocleous, 2013: 5). In Britain, the coalition government's dogmatic soundbite 'these are tough times', so frequently pronounced within austerity and public spending cuts discourses, disguises an attitude towards hardship that extricates itself from a sociological shift that altogether superposes resilience as, first, a virtue to be celebrated, and second, one that is inherently organic. Effectively, it presupposes an acceptance that "one is fundamentally vulnerable" (Evans and Reid, 2013: 2) inasmuch as one is, also, fundamentally capable of resilience. In other words, resilience is naturalised and valued along lines of moral worth. As Reid, citing the UNEP (2012: 69-70) remarks "indeed so convinced are they (proponents of neoliberalism) of the worth of such capabilities that they proclaim it to be a fundamental 'freedom'."

Note that earlier we wrote 'they (the weak) can *learn* to be resilient'. A fundamental feature of resilience that is being highlighted here is that resilience is, indeed, often posited as the object of training or education: you can learn to be resilient. Its capacity to be taught –or learnt– further exalts its moral value and 'goodness'. As a means to illustrate this, we could note how one volume on psychopathology (Rolf et al., 1993: 179) calls resilience "the positive side of the study of adaption in children at risk", and several studies within it not only identify resilience as either a virtue or at least a valuable quality to be fomented, but also assess the competence of children in conditions of stress and disadvantage in terms of family qualities associated with resilience. Some examples include studies such as: Pianta et al. (1990) "Maternal stress and children's development: prediction of

school outcomes and identification of protective factors" ; Masten et al., (1990) "Competence under stress: risk and protective factors"; (Baldwin et al. (1993) "Stress-resistant families and stress-resistant children"). Now not only do we have to consider resilience as innate, organically inherent to being, but also as a capacity that has a potential for inheritance. This capacity for resilience to be taught is also a virtue highlighted at the centre of effective military planning. As Pat O'Malley (2010: 490) notes,

> The aim is to have a 'master resiliency trainer' in every battalion in the US Army by 2010, and all 1.1 million US troops will be required to take 'intensive training in emotional resiliency' (New York Times, 28 August 2009, p. 18). The National Guard and the Reserve have also begun resiliency training (Army News Service, 200, p. 2). The Australian Defence Force, meanwhile, 'is working tirelessly in developing Resilience Training for our personnel deploying on operations within and outside of Australia . . . to better equip our people to lead and be able cope better in any situation' (Joint Health Command, 2009, p. 1).

To return to austerity discourses, it is worth noting that claims concerning the correlation of hardship and happiness are not exclusive to discourses on hardship in the west. Happiness and hardship, we are reassured, are not mutually exclusive. "Hardship and happiness", notes a study (Camfield and McGregor, 2005: 190), thrive side by side in the developing world. The answer to this, it goes on to elaborate, is nothing other than resilience: "Their resilience amid what most people in the industrialized North would regard as extremely difficult conditions is remarkable" (Camfield and McGregor, 2005: 190). Not only does the comparison drawn here raise concern with us, there is also something distinctly demonstrative in the aim having been already specified, and the standard delineated, in terms of the 'most extreme scenario'. Happiness is now calculated pro-rata the furthest possible point of hardship tolerance. Sheila Martineau (1999: ii) similarly remarked this development in resilience research, noting how "in one shift, resilience slipped from an anomaly in the context of complex trauma to being claimed as the social norm of the dominant society. In another shift, the context of resiliency research slipped from traumatized to disadvantaged

populations".

Yet the happiness of resilience comes far from independently. It accompanies the propagation of an ethos of responsibility. The resilient subject becomes the master of its own fate: always in a state of alert and always ready to persist, the subject has a choice to be resilient and a choice to be happy; the will to relegate change is both choice and, in a world of consistent danger and threat, responsibility. The resilient subject is responsible for its own happiness and its own wellbeing, both of which no-one else is to answer for.

> When neoliberals preach the necessity of peoples becoming 'resilient' they are…arguing in effect for the entrepreneurial practices of subjectivity which Duffield calls 'self-reliance'. 'Resilient' peoples do not look to states to secure their wellbeing because they have been disciplined into believing in the necessity to secure it for themselves (Reid, 2012: 69).

As Jonathan Joseph (2013: 38) emphasises, "the recent enthusiasm for the concept of resilience across a range of policy literature is the consequence of its fit with neoliberal discourse". This close fit with neoliberal premises and rationalities is undeniably attributable for a good part of the success the concept of resilience has seen, particularly its widespread implementation in policy. As Joseph further remarks,

> Resilience supports the organisational structure of the advanced liberal societies through its assumptions about social relations, and it supports the idea of the neoliberal subject as autonomous and responsible. It helps embed that subject, particularly in relation to processes of governance (Joseph, 2013:40).

Not only is resilience a good logistical fit with the structures and institutions of liberal societies, it is also, as has already been exposed to a certain degree, a remarkably good fit with its rationalities, philosophical categories of thought, and modes of reasoning. "Resilient subjects…adapt to their enabling conditions via the embrace of neoliberalism and its attendant demands to thrive in times of radical uncertainty" (Evans and Reid, 2014: 68). 'What is happiness without hardship?' asks resiliency research. Yet when the question is asked, it is done in such a way that the very possibility

of unhappiness becomes an impossibility. Far from giving happiness meaning through unhappiness, resilience altogether forfeits the experience of unhappiness, or political dissatisfaction for that matter. Resilience and happiness training are at the nerve centre of the biopolitical effort to manage and ensure the continued productivity of its populations.

Resilience therefore becomes an incredibly effective technology in the management of productive populations, enabling the undisturbed continuation of a neoliberal regime that necessarily requires crises –economic crises with an emotional impact on its populations, themselves the lifeblood of its entire system– in order to function. To enable and sustain this management, its politics need necessarily be one of exclusion. It is inherently within this rationale that resilience rediscovers itself an object of biology, 'naturalised' on an entirely different level. Resilience becomes a force for exclusion –call it selection: resilience excludes volatility as fragility and ad eundem repudiates it. Where an inevitable vulnerability becomes the status quo, unpredictability, volatility, unanticipated change and emergence turn to weakness. The attempt to cultivate a culture of resilience through selection dominates, for example, Neocleous's human resources example:

> Good subjects will 'survive and thrive in any situation', they will 'achieve balance' across the several insecure and part-time jobs they have, 'overcome life's hurdles' such as facing retirement without a pension to speak of, and just 'bounce back' from whatever life throws, whether it be cuts to benefits, wage freezes or global economic meltdown (Neocleous, 2013: 5).

This, some form of 'selective hiring', effectively replaces evolutionary biology's selective breeding: the variation with the capacity to be resilient is given preference. Generation after generation, we can eliminate the ineffective varieties. The analogy we have drawn here proves useful in that it illustrates how it is that, within this logic, resilience has become the ultimate spin on 'strength': it is not the ability to change, but to become resilient to change, that makes for strength. Herein a paramount solution to move away from "fragility and its (negative) associations" and towards "resilience and its (positive) connotations" (Neocleous, 2013: 3), neatly engineered. Resilience becomes a solution to fragility, one that even the most fragile can learn.

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A 2008 OECD document on state-building, styled 'from fragility to resilience', defines the latter as 'the ability to cope with changes in capacity, effectiveness or legitimacy. These changes can be driven by shocks … or through long-term erosions (or increases) in capacity, effectiveness or legitimacy' (Neocleous, 2013: 3).

What is significant here is how resilience becomes a buffer to 'cope' with change, the implication being that change is first, avoidable, and second, a necessarily detrimental experience. The scope for change is reduced to a degree where the only imaginable potentiality is that of a prolongation of the current state of things, of an indeterminately infinite now, and crucially, of a prolongation of the self with no capacity for regeneration. With inevitable crises to prepare for looming in the horizon, the potential for any will beyond self-preservation dissipates. Resilience becomes an alternative to resistance, forever forgetting that the very condition that characterises resistance is its will to produce change –and change requires, first and before any attempt for construction, a reconciliation with destruction and with finitude: finitude of the self, finitude of its history, epistemological finitude. With resilience we find ourselves trapped in what Evans and Reid (2013: 3) already identified as a nihilism: "what is nihilism, after all, if it is not a will to nothingness drawn from a willing reactive enslavement to forces deemed to be beyond our control as one merely lives out the catastrophic moment?". Life becomes purely reactionary.

The end of production

Resilience therefore becomes "a fundamental mechanism for policing the imagination" (Neocleous, 2013: 4). It is in this guise that resilience makes a turn for the subsumptive. As O'Malley (2010: 505) points out, "resilience emerges as a new technique better adapted to govern situations of radical uncertainty: to deal with possible events that have either not been predicted statistically or not thought to be sufficiently likely to warrant enacting or in other ways rehearsing". Resilience, in this respect more effective than risk as a technology of governance, claims its dominion over the imagined future, the previously open potentiality which can now be calculated as, precisely, incalculable. In the Department for International Development publication that Neocleous (2013)

also draws attention to – *Defining Disaster Resilience* (2011)– resilience becomes a topic that "stretches across the whole social and political fabric". Similarly, the United Nations's publication *Living with Risk: A Global Review of Disaster Reduction Initiatives* [(2004: 37]) calls for a policy of resilience encompassing "a consideration *of* almost every physical phenomenon on the planet.". Another study (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker, 2000) also comments on the ambiguity of the concept of resilience and its lack of theoretical solidity. We find no contradiction here but rather a reinstatement of the conceptual plasticity of resilience: it is in non-specificity and in this absence of particularity that the subsumptive objectivity of resilience comes into operation, enabling a very successful productive relationship with largely any subject that might be of interest to its politics.

With its ability to bridge the spaces between subjectivity and objectivity, resilience and its agenda penetrate the intimate life of the subject on an unparalleled scale: resilience becomes about *how* the subject lives, and concerns itself with managing its happiness. Happiness ceases to be a sensuous subjective and becomes instead another learning process: objective, calculable, regulable, manageable (Brooks and Goldstein, 2003; Bacon, et al., 2010; Cohn, et al., 2009; Baumgardner and Crothers, 2009). "Resilience is to become part of our happiness training" (Neocleous, 2013: 6). The domain of resilience even stretches to the literal classroom: In a 2007 psychology publication (Miller and Daniel), resilience is provided as the answer to dealing with 'vulnerable' pupils with low self-esteem. The success of happiness training, we are told, is down to its capacity to biologically alter being: "This happiness training not only changes the way you feel; it actually changes the way your brain functions" (BBC, 1996).

Happiness scores and self-help training and literature, such as Brooks and Goldstein's (2006) *The power of resilience: Achieving balance, confidence, and personal strength in your life* which O'Malley (2010) pays reference to, all pertain to the effort to subsume and universalise species-being (see for instance: Ungar, 2005), to classify into calculable potentialities of being, and as a consequence to obliterate differences; to digest constant change and emergence into the manageable, the subject into the object. In resilience we find not a philosophy that prepares us to embrace change, but one that, rather, disables our ability for change in the absolute –and more notably for *absolute change*– promoting instead the prolongation of a self: rigid, disaffected, objective and perpetual. It forfeits the

malleability of the emerging self for a plasticity of affect and of stabilised chain reactions. Counter nature it produces a self that can no longer produce itself. The unproductive self is denied of its metamorphic capacity to produce, and in terms of power it is flatlined: no output whatsoever. With resilience the ontological nature of the productive subject is altered in that it ceases to have the capacity to create ontology: the very property that specifies being as emergent. Emergence and resilience do not co-exist: in the mutually exclusive dichotomy that liberal governance draws, resilience exists only contra metamorphosis.

The unproductive self is a self without possibilities and with no potentialities. When being ceases to produce, it effectively ceases to *be*. The violence exerted here goes unremarked because it is expressed in patterns invisible to the eye: it is a violence that deploys itself in structures, in the *structuring* of reality and the shaping of ontophilosophical identities – it exerts itself as a modelling of being. The violence being effected here "does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action" (Levinas, 2011: 21).

The life and death of the political imagination

As Brad Evans and Julian Reid have already extensively argued, resilience "promotes adaptability so that life may go on living despite the fact that elements of our living systems may be destroyed" (2013: 9). If this is the case, then one such element is certainly the subject's political imagination. Resilience-building relies on the imposition of demarcations and the delimiting of lines of flight that cannot be taken or crossed, designating them impossibilities and utopias. Resilience operates on limits of thought: crossing out potentialities and narrating them as constants. As Evans and Reid also crucially emphasise:

> Rather than enabling the development of peoples and individuals so that they can aspire to secure themselves from whatever they find threatening and dangerous... the liberal discourse of resilience functions to convince people that the dream of lasting security is impossible (Evans and Reid, 2014: 68).

With the death of its imagination, the death of the subject as subjective in the first place –intrinsically particular by virtue of, precisely, his imagination– inevitably ensues. It is precisely our subjective imagination that places the subject out of reach from the biopolitical agents that seek to govern being:

> The exercise of the imagination, which for all of us, is more or less incessant, removes us and puts us at a distance from the biological domain of biological needs and wants. Humans are dreamers and schemers by dint of their mere existence (Evans and Reid, 2013: 5).

It is in governing the political imagination of its subject that biopolitical governance finds, therefore, its Holy Grail. "In giving us over to life, [liberalism] gives us no ends to live for but the endless work on the self that contemporarily permeate our ways of living devoid of any meaning as such" (Evans and Reid, 2013: 5).

Resilience, as liberalism, therefore constantly strives to extend its hold not only over the biological life of the subject but also over the life of his imagination. Production ceases and better, different futures turn to unimaginable utopias. The utopia is deemed useless, a detrimental exercise best eradicated from the political imagination. Lines and limits of possibility are specified, the impossible circumscribed. All we are capable of as society is to preserve the good that we already possess from the impending crisis, the looming disaster: that which threatens liberal life as we know it. The renunciation of non-definitive certainties, securities –as well as security altogether– and political alternatives all come to form part of the initiation ritual of contemporary liberal society;

> To be resilient, the subject must disavow any belief in the possibility to secure itself from the insecure sediment of existence, accepting instead an understanding of life as a permanent process of continual adaptation to threats and dangers which appear outside its control (Evans and Reid, 2014: 68).

This experience of the death of utopia as exercise of the imagination has already been drawn attention to by Frederic Jameson (2004). Jameson's concerns are revisited in the context of resilience by Evans and Reid, namely noting:

> The weakening of any sense of history, along with the collapse of the political imaginary that refuses to envisage anything other than the bleak current state of political affairs. Utopia thus conceived has a distinct revolutionary capacity by allowing us to suspend normality for a moment, take 'mental liberties' (which are invariably particularistic and not universalistic), thereby transgressing the present and believing in possible futures to come (Evans and Reid, 2013: 14).

With the end of production and the death of the imagination comes an inevitable end to resistance. In building resilient subjects, resistance is transformed "to a purely reactionary impulse aimed at increasing the capacities of the subject to adapt to its dangers and simply reduce the degree to which it suffers" (Evans and Reid, 2013: 14). With danger as the inevitable condition of life, resistance has little choice but to relegate itself to the effort for preservation. This condition, specified solely by the effort for preservation, imports the abandonment of any political enterprises seeking to 'change the world' or question and challenge social structures that are not seemingly threatening on an immediately apparent level. Resilience therefore succeeds to define the life of both the subject and its imagination: it provides us with a renewed imaginary of what it means for life to *live*.

This exercise in limiting the imagination of the subject extends farther than the sphere of the immediately political. The unproductive self is so due to its inability to imagine itself in renewed scenarios and capacities –effectively, an inability to re-imagine itself. Fundamental to this ability for renewal is a reconciliation with ends and with the finitude of a present self. This is why, likewise, forgetting how to start anew begins with forgetting how to cease in the first place –or die, for that matter. Ends and beginnings exist at constant convergence, the potentiality of one never extending beyond a recognition of the other. In forgetting how to reconcile ourselves with ends, resilience destroys the capacity that emergent being has for this ontological re-imagining or renewal, a kind of metamorphosis of its self.

Metamorphosis as the change that conditions emergent life does not constitute a painless exercise. Change is all in all a dramatic experience, and certainly one not without its own violence. And it is precisely this, the trauma of change, the drama of regeneration and of emergence that

resilience so desperately seeks to circumvent, that constitutes the shock and exercise of life: a life not expressed in the flatlines of staticity, but in the reckoning of pain, the exercise of *in*security and first and foremost the tragedy of death –of ends– that gives life its meaning. This is why Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (2009) proves so successful in illustrating the experience of renewal. It presents metamorphosis to us precisely as an Iliad of change: change not merely physical but also ontological. *The Metamorphosis* is a work defined by the end of recognition –a reckoning of the beyond of potentiality, the non-definitive infinite of the self–, ego death and the reconciliation of one's own finitude, and immediately ensuing: the beginning of recognition, the creation or recreation of identity – life regenerated. It is the tragedy of death that fuels life, incorporate in the constant death of the self, of its identity, of the recreation of itself and its self; the inner theatre of change. In a kind of stasis of perpetual metamorphosis, life is always regenerating, because it is always becoming, and likewise it is always productive. Resilience as the evasion of danger robs life of the experience of death and the recognition of self-acquired through consciousness of, as Hegel (1977) might have argued, precisely the shock of death. Life undetermined, defined only by the quest for preservation, goes on indisposed, predisposed to nothingness - a nihilism if anything ever was. "It is impossible to live meaningfully without knowing how to die. Abandoning death forces us to give up the prospect of self-renewal" (Evans and Reid, 2013: 15).

Concluding Remarks

Resilience is training, a structure not to adapt *to* change, but to *adapt change*. The attempt to adopt a culture of 'adaption' is part of the broader exercise of denying change. Yet resilience goes much further than to simply repress the experience of emergence. As we have already exposed, resilience does not 'preserve' inasmuch as it *produces*: it creates discourses and forms ways of life. It communicates an understanding of being; it tells us something about who we are and how to live. Resilience is far from being merely an exercise in repression: it is productive power through and through.

Yet to think of the formations that resilience produces as indeterminate or of their effects as incidental occurrences would be to never escape the structurality of resilience in the first place. The

causality of resilience is far from aimless. This is constant change reappropriated in the name of neoliberalism's permanence: the shock, having to be transferred *somewhere*, is absorbed, deferred, referred and transposed elsewhere. Resilience therefore becomes "the concept that facilitates that connection (between state bureaucracy and political imagination): nothing less than the attempted colonization of the political imagination by the state" (Neocleous, 2013: 4). Resilience becomes a matter of managing uncertainty: preserving it on one level by disabling it on another. It "comes to form the basis of *subjectively* dealing with the uncertainty of contemporary capitalism as well as the insecurity of the national security state" (Neocleus, 2013: 5. Within the workings of neoliberalism, there is no doubt an acknowledgement of the necessity for flexibility and change as emergence –both characteristics incompatible with an ontology of resilience. Neoliberalism is nothing if not a reflection of the volatility and the constant changes that underpin the life of species-being. If anything, neoliberalism has this embracing of change and volatility to thank for its prosperity. Through resilience the gap between preserving the conditions for success and ensuring its own continuity is bridged: neoliberalism becomes a self-perpetuating machine. Judging from the explosion of 'resilience' over the last decade, a decade on which we will all subscribe to resilience training. What better scenario than this, one where year in and year out shocks in neoliberalism are both expected and absorbed.

With this regard in mind, there is something to be said about the fact that most new resilience material appears to be targeted at the younger generations (Baldwin et al., 1993; Luthar et al., 2000; MacConville and Rae, 2012; Miller and Daniel, 2007; Pianta et al., 1990; Ungar, 2005). Changes in forms of reasoning and formations of being necessarily take place at root – through education. That resilience training is aimed at the younger, more malleable, generation is perhaps an indication of the type and scope of impact said training hopes to accomplish. Like all educational and disciplinary practices, an education in resilience and happiness starts at a young age. Resilience training here manifests itself as teaching 'disadvantaged children' to conform to established norms; it rationalises itself as educational component, something thoroughly beneficial and an integral element in helping those children and teenagers faced with hardship or adversity. Yet resilience is a normalising device in itself. Like another replication of biological selection, some generations on we have permanently

altered patterns of conduct: we have taught ourselves 'happiness through resilience'.

As we have seen resilience is integral to the process of transforming our ontological understandings of change. Resilience does not arrive as a mere logical progression; its claim to recreate 'naturality', to be some form of derivation of its environmental counterpart or a similar observation of organic patterns and behaviours, is part of the attempt to naturalise resilience. Instead, we find the genealogy of resilience to be founded in an inherently linear western philosophical tradition, determined by ends and their equation with disaster, by a weak morality that correlates hardship with happiness and tolerance with goodness, and specified if anything by an adversity to volatility. We find that resilience is *naturalised* along different lines: in its imitation of biological selection, in its understanding of how to create particular forms of life. We identify resilience as a form of governance and as biopower, and call its capacity to recreate or imitate the processes of life a form of biomorphic power: the ability to imitate life in its productive capacity, to produce change and produce its own kind of life. When we say that resilience is counterintuitive, we refer to its delivery within discourse: as dealing merely with the capacity to bounce back after shock. We find this association particularly problematic. As we have demonstrated, nothing in resilience remains unchanged after shock. This definition eludes the object of resilience altogether: the intention is not to remain *un*changed but to transcend change, to absorb change – effectively, to adapt change.

Resilience produces: it produces practices and domains; it produces new appraisals of 'living' and of what it means to be a human being; it trains happiness and conquers the inaccessible terrains of emotional experience to render their subjectivity governable. Resilience reshapes our understandings of fragility, strength and re-sets the variables by which we determine competence and efficiency. It re-ontologises being as resilient. Its capacity for change and the embracing of alterity, the very condition that specifies being as emergent and that renders possible the re-imagining not only of its self and itself but of its political landscapes and horizons, this capacity for ontological metamorphosis comes to a halt under resilience –the continuity of its non-determinateness is interrupted. Resilience suspends the non-definitiveness of being into a linear positivity, the perpetuation of affirmative identitarian closure. Resilience is training and doctrine: a

proposition of universal proportions that aims to encompass everything and everyone. Subsuming objectification, resilience diverts change for everything except for the liberalism that originarily produces it.

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