

Resilience and the politics of multiplicity

Authors' response: 'Geography, Ontological Politics and the Resilient Future' Commentary Forum

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We start by thanking our interlocutors for engaging with our paper and really highlighting the value of exploring the multiplicity of resilience. Our audience has translated our work in productive and intriguing ways, and it is perhaps not surprising that in reading these, our aspirations and commitments appear to be diverse. Over the gestation of this paper it has morphed from what was initially a short commentary on Walker and Cooper's (2011) genealogy of resilience to what at times felt to us like a Sisyphean task of exploring where resilience appears, how it appears (as something found, made, or unfinished in Aranda et al.'s 2011 triptych), what it does, and what it forecloses. Grappling with the challenge of representing everything from ecology to security, business management to metal music, and psychology to religion, we kept returning to a fundamental point: it is not that these were simply different discourses about resilience. Rather they proffered different enactments of resilience (ontological as well as epistemological) with very different political stakes and implications across projects of designing, fostering, or managing.

Another primary goal in writing the paper was to move beyond the sometimes frustrating, polarised positions that for some mean that resilience is merely a meaningless moniker while others state that it is clearly a neoliberal instrument of terror and yet more see hope in resilience to deliver on all kinds of different political projects. The paper tries to grapple with this diverse field and highlight how enactments of resilience in different arenas pose ontological, epistemological and political multiplicity. In other words, resilience is thoroughly multiple. Yet there is a singularity that holds these resiliences together and this singularity is powerful (not least coalesced in the 'resilience thinking' Dwiartama identifies) and explains many of the polarised reactions we set out previously. While we use the concept of the post-political as a mode of singularity, we accept (with Anderson) that there are other ways of drawing that similarity (and we return to this later in our response). It is also clear from the commentaries on our paper that this multiplicity-singularity is something we should be grappling with, not least as it prompts us to ask different kinds of questions about resilience. For us, a closer engagement with resilience in practice provides an opportunity to engage with and in the kinds of politics, responsibilities, and so on that are vested in each deployment or site. Our paper did not provide a solution, a grand reunification or condemnation of resilience, but rather an approach towards engagement in the specificities of enactments of resilience multiple.

Materiality and Practice

One question we grappled with when constructing the paper was how to engage with the kinds of ontological politics that we thought were so central to the enactments of resilience while maintaining a diverse canvas of resilience in very different fields, which was precisely what we thought had been lacking from many previous interrogations. In other words we wished to take seriously the breadth of resilience but not simply call this breadth discourse or representation as that underplayed significant frictions (ontological, political and epistemic) between resiliences. Greenhough's commentary hones in on something we knew we would be unable to deliver in this wide-ranging paper, namely the kinds of ethnographic engagements with materialities, practices and the non-human that are so central to Mol's ontological politics. Yet we are delighted that other

commentaries particularly Bawaka Country and Fisher have been able to demonstrate the value of our approach by establishing the practices through which different resiliences are enacted and create friction, indeed the indigenous ontologies raise valuable lessons (as we will reflect later).

Our paper was not as empirically rich as it could have been; it would not have been possible in terms of time or word count to follow all of these different enactments in depth and detail, particularly into unfamiliar territory across disciplinary bounds (for example, neither of us is a health scholar or psychology scholar). Our file of cut material from the paper is weighty; indeed we keenly felt the pain of removing empirical material that set out to trace cybersecurity and music scenes (to name but two examples). We hope that what the paper offers in place of this empirical depth is a more programmatic view through which we wish to ask what might be gained from applying these kinds of questions to specific enactments or moments of articulation. What might a closer attention to the multiplicity of resilience lend debates and how might that steer us between more unambiguous stories (e.g. that resilience is all neoliberalism or that it is a taken-for-granted good) that Anderson agrees are lacking in so many ways?

An interesting problematic, then, arises from Greenhough's commentary and for which we don't have a fixed answer. We agree with Greenhough about the importance of engagement with practice in detail (and we recognise the irony and frustrating quality of a paper that calls for a consideration of practice and enactment, but which itself bops along across programmatic texts), but at the same time we wonder how one can (or whether one should?!) write a more programmatic statement that requires a wide view across diverse sites, where it would be quite difficult to follow through each in ethnographic detail? This may, as we have wondered ourselves, be a challenge for deploying actor network theory literature in this kind of topic-area. It misses the ethnographic insight that makes the literature so compelling compared to discourse analysis. We console ourselves, however, with a sense of the importance of thinking through/with resilience in this way, we really do wish to claim that ontological politics are at stake when resiliences are made. As we go on to discuss next, this leads on to a different way of engaging politically in the various sites of resilience.

Politics and Critique

The commentaries of Anderson and Paschen and Beilin push the paper in different directions through questions of political stakes and modes of critique. Anderson multiplies further still the political possibilities and impossibilities of resilience as a mode of governing events, which he suggests keeps open 'a barely coherent sense of the qualities that events have.' Anderson proposes a 'crisis mode of eventfulness' as perhaps a more fitting 'generality' of resilience than our post-political suggestion. We see points of connection between the post-political generality we suggest and a becoming-general of contemporary crisis modes attuned to events as Anderson suggests—both could perhaps be characterised as living with or normalising crisis without radical reversals or stabilisations. In either event what holds resiliences together is a governmental or managerial comportment toward what has been variously called crisis, turbulence, or precarious, emergent life. Whether or not this generality is precisely 'post-political' in the sense that Swyngedouw (2010) and others have outlined is certainly open for debate and we appreciate the suggestion of the 'diagram' as a useful tool for thinking through this relation between the singular and the general.

From another angle, Paschen and Beilin find the paper's political convictions too implicit and call for more concrete and impassioned claims for social and environmental justice. It is true that in taking on such a broad range of resiliences the paper, at times, avoids explicit normative statements. This

was not done to sidestep questions of social and environmental justice, but to try to identify where such questions can be most productively asked amongst resilience efforts, across their multiplicity. Sitings and interventions were offered as two fault lines, points where resiliences might be most productively interrogated on questions of responsibility, security, and care. What we see is that resilience does not really rewrite political scripts or ideological struggles. As Paschen and Beilin rightly emphasise the key questions, as ever, centre upon wildly divergent visions and claims of responsibility amongst individual and collective bodies. We sought to offer these two cuts as resources for interrogating precisely these visions and claims.

On this note, Anderson finds the paper to 'invest a hope in demonstrating ontological multiplicity' and pushes us to consider whether this means that critique changes in ways we have hinted at but not fully explored (beyond a kind of harmonious pluralism or 'the endless demonstration of the omnipotence of the beast' following Rancière). Without setting out to make a statement of critique itself, there is an affinity between our intent with this paper and Anderson's explorations of critique as 'imminent evaluation' and 'affirmative practice' in the sense of "offering resources...so that some realities might appear as matters of concern and might flourish." That resilience acts (altering relations) and that particular deployments of resilience can become resilient in themselves, as Dwiartama notes, are key sites for critical scholarship. Our critical purpose was not to say that resilience is necessarily or always bad or good, nor to celebrate its 'diversity', nor still to identify how it essentially or inescapably aligns with 'the beasts' of neoliberalism, capitalism, individualism, and so on. The hope that we did invest in the critique was to offer resources for interrogating the difference that resiliences might or might not make in the world, with how they might align with beasts or not, with the matters of concern that might appear across resilience multiple. The approach and design of the paper, placing many (truncated) resiliences side-by-side risking frustrating omissions, was undertaken with this hope squarely in mind.

Multiple enough?

Across the very different tenor and conclusions of the commentaries, and their different relationships to resilience, we were struck by the ways in which perhaps our paper was not multiple enough. For example, commentaries from Bawaka Country and Fisher framed their responses from the position of or in reference to indigenous ontologies, something we did not raise in the paper. Fisher's examples of resilience projects show 'ontological controversies and inconsistencies' at the meeting points of 'modern' and 'indigenous' ontologies. The New Zealand government's 'Resilience to Nature's Challenges' project sought to 'accommodate' Māori knowledge in research that sees resilience as hazard risk management, engineering, and loss mitigation ('resilience to nature'), and Fisher shows how this encounters controversy in relation to indigenous ontologies. Her discussion highlights the entanglements and interferences that emerge 'when worlds collide' across very different ontologies of environment and existence. Bawaka Country draws on Donna Haraway to frame their discussion of ontological politics, contrasting indigenous knowledge to 'the 'god-trick' of Western knowledge' or: 'the power-laden processes through which the particular socio-cultural and economic configurations of Western knowledge become invisible. Being a knowledge of no place, Western knowledge becomes a knowledge of all places.'

To us, these interventions highlight the fact that most of our paper's examples fit more neatly within the former category of management ontologies in North American and European contexts and provoked reflection on the position from which we interrogate resilience and the ways it is commonly mobilized and critiqued in Anglo academic inquiry from particular perspectives. We were

struck that Bawaka Country's more-than-human ontography of place did not use the word resilience in their commentary (except in reference to our paper). We do not know if this was intentional or not, but it made us think about what it would mean for us to then relate this ontography to 'resilience' or label it as such and what violence such an application might enact. Even within managerialism, Buzz Holling, a central early advocate of resilience, worried about its potential violence when co-opted for example for nuclear experimentation (Schricket 2014). Bawaka Country further drives home that what is at stake is not just comparing or arranging different views or epistemologies of resilience, but the political event of invoking 'resilience' in the first place pushes and pulls events in quite different directions (see Goldman et al. 2015 for how 'drought' is enacted without necessarily calling it as such across 'indigenous' and 'scientific' ontologies). With our eclectic approach we ran the risk of missing the depth of the place and practices of resiliences and the depth of ontological politics as demonstrated in the Bawaka ontography (and as Greenhough finds lacking in our paper); in this sense we ran the risk of doing what Bawaka Country critiques—of taking a gods-eye above the situated, rooted, and particular. However, our hope was that by skimming across disparate resilience articulations, we might bring the politics and power-laden assumptions of something taken-for-granted as 'resilience' to the fore.

To conclude, we were struck by the resonance of Anderson's notion of critique and the Bawaka Country ontography in response to a paper on the multiplicity of resilience. Anderson quotes Foucault's dream of affirmative critique, of a project for critique: "I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgments but signs of existence..." Bawaka Country uses similar language to show attendance to different ontologies in ways that might avoid the violence of 'gods trick' ways of knowing: '*Napaki* [non-indigenous] may see the *lirrwi* [charcoal, embedded in deep layers of soil], may challenge themselves to realize its significance, to listen to the calls of Country, attend to the wind and the new season and the messages they bring, to assemble and recognise their more-than-human kin.' The statements, though framed differently as a mode of critique and a mode of critical existence, dovetail upon capacities to listen, watch, light, assemble and multiply in more-than-human ways. We cannot claim this as our own language or a vision that we set out with, but by drawing out connections, highlighting frictions, and changing our 'intellectual reflexes' (Mol, 2002: 184), we might shape our worlds through specific sites and struggles rather than be for, because of, or against resilience general.

References

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