

Anthropocene

All Too Human

Friedrich Nietzsche once insisted that the surest sign of living was to forever be in danger.¹ Only now are we beginning to appreciate the political significance and consequences of this claim. As liberal regimes move beyond the security imperative so foundational to modern politics for over two centuries, along with the bounded sense of community this engendered, the dream of lasting security is being seconded by a catastrophic imaginary that promotes insecurity by design.² There is a long tradition of scholarly criticism of the concept of security as a political construct. Moving beyond the illusion of political neutrality, numerous authors have illustrated how security has been central to the technologies of subjectification through which liberal regimes have governed historically. But we are now in a new and distinctly different political era, defined by the emergence of a different kind of liberalism, less easy to recognize through the critical lenses of the past. As the belief in the possibility of security, once integral to the rise of the modern state and international system of states gives way to a new belief in the positivity of danger, new

technologies for rule and subjectification are appearing, themselves based upon a suspicion of security, but which are no less problematic in their guiding assumptions, rationales and implications. The very concept of security itself is being shod by liberalism as it embraces not simply forms of endangerment, but a new ideal of *resilience*. Resilience is currently propounded by liberal agencies and institutions as the fundamental property which peoples and individuals worldwide must possess in order to demonstrate their capacities to live with danger. This book is the first substantial study of the significance and implications of this shift within liberalism, whereby it has seemingly embraced the Nietzschean imperative to 'live dangerously'.

Our aim, especially, is to politicize this shift by interrogating its implications for political subjectivity. What kinds of subjects do demands for resilience produce? To what kind of work is the resilient subject tasked? And what forms of life does resilience authenticate and disqualify? Answering these questions requires us to confront the ways in which resilience is aimed explicitly at encouraging subjects to live by maxims which are insecure by design. Our critique of resilience thus begins from the premise that liberalism is aimed today not at solving or preventing the manifestation of dangers and threats to security, but at making us forego the very idea and possibility of security, through the embrace of the necessity of our exposure to dangers of all kinds as a means by which to live well.

It is a fact, of course, that the future of the human species is deeply uncertain. We know ourselves to be the biggest threat to our own existence. That the earth would positively flourish were human life to be removed from it is a realization we are now forced to confront. And yet the human, it seems, has never been more important and powerful. Humans are today recognized to profoundly shape their living environment, for better or worse, more than any other species. Scientists tell us that this is not simply tied to the emergence of a new-found political

sensibility or intellectual awakening. We are entering the *Anthropocene* – a distinct geological epoch that is defined by the scale of human activity. Etymologically conceived by the ecologist Eugene Stoermer, the Anthropocene was popularized by the Nobel Prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen. For Crutzen, it is undeniable that the human species is the principal source of impact on its own lived environment. As he explains in a co-authored article with Christian Schwagerl, ‘For millennia, humans have behaved as rebels against a superpower we call “Nature”. In the 20th century, however, new technologies, fossil fuels, and a fast-growing population resulted in a “Great Acceleration” of our own powers. Albeit clumsily, we are taking control of Nature’s realm, from climate to DNA.’³ Not only does this imply that ‘humans are becoming the dominant force for change on Earth’. It finally affirms the ‘long-held religious and philosophical idea’ of ‘humans as the masters of planet Earth’. Hence, as the human, natural and moral spheres merge, and indeed, forcefully collide, into a consolidating framework for understanding the human’s position in the world, new ethical sensibilities and modes of governance are critically sought.

The Anthropocene represents a significant departure from the homely comforts of the Holocene that was defined more by geological settlement. This is what some authors have termed the Holocene’s ‘stability domain’.⁴ As we move into the new epoch – what we may begin to define as the ‘destabilized realism of planetary endangerment’ – there is no going ‘back to safety’ as if that ever was the lived reality of yesteryear.⁵ Instability and insecurity are the new normal as we become increasingly attuned to living in complex and dynamic systems which offer no prospect of control. Our entire sense of what the ‘life-world system’ entails is invariably being transformed. As Slavoj Žižek writes:

For the first time in history, we, humans, collectively constitute ourselves and are aware of it, so that we are

responsible for ourselves: the mode of survivability depends upon the maturity of our collective reason. The scientists who talk about the Anthropocene, however, are saying something quite the contrary. They argue that because humans constitute a particular kind of species they can, in the process of dominating other species, acquire the status of a geological force. Humans, in other words, have become a natural condition, at least today.⁶

Although humans have long since reasoned themselves to be at the centre of the universe, never before have we assumed the role of the principle architect. This comes with a formidable burden. Since this foregrounds a political imaginary of threat to create a global sense of community out of the prospect of its own planetary endangerment, humanity is bound to a formative logic that is lethally supplemented by its potential ruination. Insecurity underwrites its very existence. This gives sure impetus to a new ‘responsibility of vulnerability’ which stakes the future survivability of the human species on the successes/failures of its political strategies. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s *Managing the Risks to Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation* (2012) report explains: ‘Climate extremes, exposure, and vulnerability are influenced by a wide range of factors, including anthropogenic climate change, natural climate variability, and socioeconomic development. Disaster risk management and adaptation to climate change focus on reducing exposure and vulnerability and increasing resilience to the potential adverse impacts of climate extremes, even though risks cannot fully be eliminated’.⁷ Becoming resilient, then, requires more than simply taking care of our individual precariousness. It is a planetary obligation as all forms of local instability become global cause for concern.

Vulnerability is defined as ‘the propensity or predisposition to be adversely affected’.⁸ This includes ‘the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influences their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist,

and recover from the adverse effects of physical events'. The notion of propensity is significant here, as it highlights a progressive (yet somewhat schizophrenic) orientation that looks *towards* the extreme ends of potential survivability. And the notion of predisposition is significant here as it suggests some *already existing* data (the guiding political presumptions) about the vulnerability of the subject. This brings together the uncertain with the certain as we encounter 'subject-centred events' in which (a) the event in all its catastrophic permutations cannot be known in advance and (b) assumptions about the subject's capacities to deal with the occurrence foster behavioural claims to empirical truth. Disaster management as such does not simply entail an ecological mode of thought, but an anthropology that, fully committed to anthropocentric reason, situates the vulnerable subject within a political drama of catastrophe which renders it the author of its own planetary endangerment. Echoing Žižek once again:

With the idea of humans as species, the universality of humankind falls back into the particularity of an animal species: phenomena like global warming make us aware that, with all the universality of our theoretical and practical activity, we are at a certain basic level just another living species on the planet Earth. Our survival depends on certain natural parameters which we automatically take for granted. The lesson of global warming is that the freedom of humankind was only possible against the background of stable natural parameters of life on earth . . . The limitations of our freedom that become palpable with global warming is the paradoxical outcome of the very exponential growth of our freedom and power, that is, of our growing ability to transform nature around us, up to and including destabilizing the very framework for life. 'Nature' thereby literally becomes a socio-historical category.⁹

While there are a number of ways to reduce vulnerabilities, including reduced exposure, transfer and sharing of risks,

preparation and transformation, resilience is key to this new ethics of responsibility defined as ‘the ability of a system and its component parts to anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from the effects of a potentially hazardous event in a timely and efficient manner, including through ensuring the preservation, restoration, or improvement of its essential basic structures and functions’.¹⁰ What is truly significant here is the effective blending of the terms resilience and resistance: ‘This shifting emphasis to risk reduction can be seen in the increasing importance placed on developing resistance to the potential impacts of physical events at various social or territorial scales, and in different temporal dimensions (such as those required for corrective or prospective risk management), and to increasing the resilience of affected communities. Resistance refers to the ability to avoid suffering significant adverse effects’.¹¹ So resistance is not a political claim that demands any form of affirmative thinking; it is a purely reactionary impulse premised upon some survivability instinct that deems the nature of the political itself to be already settled. As the subject is tasked to bounce back from the experience of catastrophe unscathed, what we encounter is a full-scale logistical enterprise wherein the human form is reduced to the barest levels of meaning. Not bare life as commonly understood in the Agambenesque sense, by which subjects are denied sovereign protection via their juridical inclusion.¹² More bare living in an organically connected sense, premised upon life’s wilful *exposure* to that which makes us vulnerable.

The conflation of resistance and resilience signals the absence of any self-confidence in the liberal subject’s disposition towards the world. No longer positively assured, or for that matter unrepentant in its hegemonic (sometimes portrayed as universal) vision, everywhere it appears to be under siege. Resistance is, after all, a pedagogy of relative subjugation. Much of this undoubtedly owes to the exposed relations between liberalism and its violence, which highlighted the lethality of its attempts at imposing freedoms

elsewhere. What subjugates here, however, is no simple dialectical binary by which liberalism has been displaced by some greater hegemonic force. There has been no singular replacing of one system with another. Liberal societies instead are besieged by their own narcissistic impulses, which, having failed to realize the limits to their rule, has led them to a wilful abandonment of their foundational truths claims, such that their very own normative bases for rule are now riddled with self-doubt. We may argue that such universal claims to power were always a deceit, as economic rationalities continually trumped the order of the political. The imaginary has, however, radically transformed. Rather than openly declaring some vision of the future that overcomes the plagues of suffering engulfing the human species, what we encounter is a veritable landscape of projected images that is littered with corpses of our catastrophes to come.

Anthropocentric thought speaks to the emergence of global challenges. That is to say, it seeks to make sense of our radically interconnected life world system and the types of planetary threats this connectivity produces; threats which respect no geographical boundaries or disciplinary conceits. What marks a significant departure here is the debt now attributed to humanity as both a problem to itself as well as to the biosphere. The increasing political prominence given to global challenges has not only altered perceptions of national security. It is driving increased collaboration between the physical, natural and social sciences, such that previous distinctions between the natural and social worlds have been largely erased. Human life is no longer understood as distinct from any other life form. Neither can it think itself greater or lesser than the complex structuring of the universe most broadly conceived. Human problems are biospherical problems and vice versa. We only have to evidence the gradual merger between underdevelopment, security and the environment to evidence this shift towards full spectral thinking.¹³ No longer is poverty, for instance, seen to be locally dangerous

as it promises to exacerbate the causes of conflict. Environmental catastrophe has been added to the toxifying mix to heighten localized tensions, further decimate economies, which in turn may have unforeseen global impacts as they spill over sovereign divides. We have, then, all become part of an interconnected catastrophic topography of endangerment of which the likes of Carl Schmitt could have had no inkling, let alone credible foresight of or solution to.

There is a sophisticated life-politics at work here that disguises detailed assumptions about the *quality of lives*. Life, quantitatively speaking, has never been more human in terms of its number. At the time of the Christ event, the world population has been put at 200 million. Now there are some 6.1 billion of us by conservative estimates, with the expectation that this will grow towards a 'threshold peak' of some 9.2 billion by 2075.¹⁴ This represents an increase of over 50 per cent in the human stock. How this species chooses to live undoubtedly leaves a particular planetary footprint. Some time between 2008 and 2010, a profound historical moment occurred when more of us began living in urban locations, i.e. rapidly changing environments as opposed to rural environments. This represents a challenging shift in migratory flows that is projected to rise to 70 per cent by 2050. In 1800, only 3 per cent of the world's population lived in city spaces. That figure now tops 3 billion city dwellers. More than having a profound impact upon dominant modes of production, as the consumerist logic of markets triumphs over localized self-sufficiencies, it radically alters the dominant matrix for political rule as neat demarcations that once held over sovereign dominions give way to forms of networked power that are globally distributed and complex in design. This has a number of important implications. Most notably, how our sense of endangerment has been transformed as that which is deemed problematic mimics the system both as an extreme and yet internal manifestation of its prevailing rationalities.

This forces us to confront like never before the finitude of our existence. Central are concerns with 'liveable thresholds' and 'planetary boundaries'. It is widely accepted within the natural sciences that human societies must change course and steer away from critical tipping points in the Earth system that might lead to rapid and irreversible change.¹⁵ But what does the nature of this 'change' actually look like? It certainly doesn't imply the abandonment of liberal regimes of power. Neither does it entail bringing into question the rule of markets as a principal driver for human interactions and social affairs. Change means the adaptation of *certain* behaviours by *particular* populations so that the fundamental tenets of liberalism to survive in the face of rapid global change can go unquestioned. Much has been made of the need for the new emerging powers in global affairs to have a step-change in direction, and to try not to repeat the failures of the already enriched. Less is said about the ways in which catastrophic imaginaries author new forms of planetary stewardship which, ironically, tend to apply to native populations in resource-rich areas, who have contributed the least to environmental degradation. And yet, as planetary stewardship translates into the need for better neoliberal governance,¹⁶ particularly on account of the fact that the market is still seen to be the surest way to refashion personal behaviours, what many radicals deem to be the problem is repackaged as the only credible solution.

Boundaries and thresholds are crucial to the catastrophic imaginary of contemporary liberal rule. Or at least it is the open horizon of possibility that promises a boundary-shattering event which now defines. While a number of increasingly irrelevant scholars within the political academy still fail to question problems beyond the sovereign conceit – in spite of the fact that all liberal governments now insist that the problems they face cannot be seen outside of a global frame – certain thanks are owed to a number of embedded scholars who, tied to leading policy think-tanks, offer a more honest assessment of liberal power, along

with providing some remarkable aesthetical productions which are essential to the formation of resilient imaginaries.¹⁷ The Stockholm Centre for Resilience, for instance, argues that the boundary ‘refers to a specific point related to a global-scale environmental process beyond which humanity should not go’.¹⁸ Crucially, for the Centre, although they accept that ‘the position of the boundary is a normative judgement, informed by science but largely based on human perceptions of risk’, the fact remains that there are certain parameters to human survivability. In a joint article by 28 leading authors with wider organizational affiliations, the idea that the earth system radicalizes our understanding of ‘planetary boundaries’ is forcefully articulated.¹⁹ As the authors explain:

The planetary boundaries approach rests on three branches of scientific inquiry. The first addresses the scale of human action in relation to the capacity of the Earth to sustain it, a significant feature of the ecological economics research agenda, drawing on work on the essential role of the life-support environment for human well-being and biophysical constraints for the expansion of the economic subsystem. The second is the work on understanding essential Earth System processes, including human actions, brought together in the evolution of global change research toward Earth System science and in the development of sustainability science. The third is the framework of resilience and its links to complex dynamics and self-regulation of living systems, emphasizing multiple basins of attraction and thresholds effects.

Such boundary setting directly relates the ideas of sustainability to the question of finitude. This is what the Stockholm Centre refers to as the ‘steering away from catastrophic thresholds’.²⁰ This question of finitude has become so entrenched that some have even wondered what the world would be like ‘without us’. As Alan Weisman popularized, ‘A generation ago, human’s eluded nuclear annihilation; with luck we’ll continue to dodge that and other mass

terrors. But now we often find ourselves asking whether inadvertently we've poisoned or parboiled the planet, ourselves included'.²¹ For Weisman, since what is particularly compelling about the possibility of human extinction is the *return to Eden* for the rest of the biosphere, we are compelled to seriously ponder whether or not life on earth would positively thrive in our absence. Whatever our impressions of Weisman's worst case scenario experiment (from the human perspective); it is revealing that the manuscript is seldom stocked under *fiction*. Weisman's futurology in fact encapsulates Anthropocentric concerns: Will we eventually become the source of our very own undoing? In other words, what Weisman maps out in the starkest of terms is the widespread realization that everything on this planet has a finite lifespan – the human race most certainly included.

We have, then, become the directors and leading actors in a tragic production that forces us to confront a fate worse than death, i.e. our collective suicide. This logically inverts Shakespeare's depiction of the world as stage. No longer do we give to ourselves a bit part. Neither can we separate the question of agency (worldly actor) from the performing environment (the stage). While the possibility of extinction remains a principal cause for concern, there is no ending to our strange and eventful history. Simply a partaking in a historical unfolding which offers no exit as a matter of political foreclosure! As a result, upon entering the Anthropocene, it is no longer possible, unless one wishes to be associated with the so-called 'climate deniers' (a term in itself whose moral absolutism leaves no room for anything outside of its catastrophism), to dispute the veracity of the claims that all natural disasters can be linked in one way or another to human activity. Every single natural disaster must be understood within an anthropocentric frame. Whether proven or not, each catastrophe connects to the existence of humans in the world, and the way this species has chosen to live continues to scar, minute by minute, its increasingly

exhausting support systems. This is no doubt prophesying – albeit masquerading under the aegis of indisputable scientific verification. The future as a terrain of catastrophe is a vision *we must all believe in*. A rising tide of a fate that is already, it seems, largely sealed, and through which we truly lament our very existence. The inertia is palpable, as doing our bit never seems to be enough. Take a ride on a pushbike, become a vegetarian, fatalistically rejoice in the volcanic eruptions that disrupt the flow of air traffic for the briefest of moments, all the while feel guilt for the violence we have already done to the Earth and it is now doing unto us in return. This is the level at which our political imaginaries now operate and find solace.

There is also much to be gleaned here from another genre no less informative to the history of our present – Greek Tragedy. Sophocles *Oedipus Rex*²² has classically dominated our understanding of politics, especially the structured, patriarchal and masculine forms of domination his embodiment allows us to think about as it extends into the forms of oppression manifest in the modern nation state. And yet, we have suggested, if there is an Oedipal Leviathan to speak of in contemporary times, it openly declares itself to be a false prophet, for the sovereign can no longer provide the security upon which its foundational truths came to rest. Without, then, a lead performer, what once appeared to be the undisputed figure for political embodiment has been displaced by the *Terror of Antigone* who embodies the vulnerability of our times. Such is the self-inflicted nature of the violence we are fated to endure as a result of the novel lethality our freedoms now depend upon. And such is the condition of the resilient subject, for in its attempt to deal with the question of finitude, it appeals to personal vulnerability as a matter of ontological fact and the collective as a form of unavoidable endangerment. Humanity as a whole therefore exhibits what we term a ‘lethal conditioning’ – a state of investiture that makes it incumbent upon the subject to embrace resilience

or be subjected to a fate which, left underexposed, will prove more devastating still.

The question of finitude is personally and intellectually daunting. How may we begin to come to terms with our own passing into the absolute unknown? None of this is incidental. In fact, it brings us back to the original problematic of philosophy as we confront what it means to die? How is it possible to learn to live with death? Cornel West offers a compelling explanation.²³ 'You know', West responds, 'Plato says philosophy's a meditation on and a preparation for death. By death what he means is not an event, but a death in life because there's no rebirth, there's no change, there's no transformation without death, and therefore the question becomes: How do you learn how to die?' To philosophize is the practice of learning to die whilst living. As West further explains, 'You can't talk about truth without talking about learning how to die because it's precisely by learning how to die, examining yourself and transforming your old self into a better self, that you actually live more intensely and critically and abundantly'. That is to say, it is only by 'learning how to die', by willing the 'messianic moment' (to borrow from Walter Benjamin) in which death is read more as a condition of affirmation, that it becomes possible to change the present condition and create a new self by 'turning your world upside down'.

Resilience cheats us of this affirmative task of learning how to die. It exposes life to lethal principles so that it may live a *non-death*. Our wounds now exist before us. There is an important caveat to be addressed here. Some may counter that our societies are actually bombarded with various spectacles of violence that actually speak directly to the problem of finitude. While this is partly true, such finite moments only headline in extremity. That is to say, we learn to mourn those deaths which reaffirm the dangerous threshold of existence. Think here of 9/11, tsunamis, catastrophic accidents, incurable virulent diseases and so on. Then compare to the daily plight of suffering

that is largely ignored or not considered newsworthy enough to draw our attentions. Indeed, as Zygmunt Bauman explains, while liberal societies have become fascinated with the spectacle of violence (especially as entertainment), for the most part, death as an experience for philosophical reflection has become a private affair hidden from the public gaze.²⁴ For instance, while headstones of the recently deceased seldom write of a person simply having died a 'natural death' (there is always something responsible), to think about the question of death as an ontological condition for subsequent re-birth is relegated to the world of religious superstition/pathology or some dangerous attempts to counter liberal reason with the violence of self-immolation. Any rigorous critique of resilience must therefore deal with the conflict between the lethality of freedom and the philosophical question of death, for it is here we may expose deeply embedded ontological and metaphysical claims about what it means to live a meaningful life beyond the biophysical.

Sublime Habitus

To suggest that the human and natural worlds are now strategically indifferent represents a remarkable shift in our thinking. Since antiquity we have been made aware of the power of nature. From Pompeii, tales of a submerged city of Atlantis, to the Plagues of Egypt, it was always accepted that life could be annihilated by the natural world of which it was part. The devastation wrought on Lisbon during the three disasters of 1755, however, forced a significant rupture in our attitudes to the catastrophic. Whereas previous catastrophic events were associated with some Godly vengeance and fury, as the devastation wrought upon the population of this great European city appeared horrifyingly arbitrary, it was no longer possible to believe in some punishing or retributive divinity. This was simply 'nature at work'. Although this event forced a significant

separation in our understanding of evil as we began to philosophize differently between heavenly and earthly variants,²⁵ it also proposed a profound transformation of our understanding of social habitus. If nature was a problem to human existence, the natural world needed to be tamed at all costs. Hence, following Lisbon, it was thought politically and philosophically astute to think that humans had a role to play in matters of security. Urbanization from that moment became the prominent vision for Utopia, as the force of nature demanded a foundational response.

During this period another major philosophical rupture occurred, which, although appearing separate at the time, now appears significantly imbricated as we witness its effective dissolution. In his study of aesthetics, Immanuel Kant set out to provide meaningful distinctions between the beautiful and the sublime. While Kant amongst others had already written on the sublime prior to Lisbon, these events forced him to elevate the concept in his corpus to offer deeply moral and philosophical purchase. This was essential if we were to come to terms with the enormity of an event that seemed to defy intelligibility. Importantly, for Kant, whilst the sublime doesn't need to be frightening per se, the awesome power it promises demands a certain account of terror. What is more, as he explained in *The Critique of Judgment*, in which the idea of the sublime is afforded mathematical and dynamic qualities, the concept evidences a formlessness that is infinitely possible and boundless. If beauty, in other words, is a reflection of the aesthetic qualities of formed objects, the sublime exhibits a certain non-locatable quality that registers the name on account of its power to destroy fixed references. Hence, for Walter Benjamin, the Kantian sublime and its attempts to philosophically comprehend the magnitude of devastating events such as the Lisbon earthquake and tsunami, introduced the study of catastrophic phenomena that paved the way for the field of seismology.²⁶

Kant's neat separation has evaporated as the beautiful and the sublime have merged to the effacement of clear

lines of distinction. To be resilient is to insist upon the necessity of vigilance in relation with one's surrounding. This effectively creates micro-vigilantes of all of us as we are tasked to police our locales in a manner which complements the outsourcing logic of neoliberal governance. Such care for the self evidences a collapse of the private into the public, the militaristic into the civic, and the inanimate into the animate, as insecurities are amplified by multiple anxieties of the everyday. What is more, since discourses on resilience encourage us to fear what we produce and consume as danger is endemically conceived, epiphenomenal endangerment is a thing of the past. Endangerment now comes from a perverse combination of elements that make up our life-world systems. There is a tragic paradox at work here. The greater our productive achievements, the more the potential for destruction is amplified. Resilience then teaches us to live in a terrifying yet normal state of affairs that suspends us in petrified awe. It blurs the beautiful with the sublime such that every aesthetic moment reveals a potential for something potent to emerge from the objective surroundings. Upon disfiguring the formations of society, the inanimate thus resonates on the affective scale as something that must be seen to be altogether terrifying, thereby viscerally turning what was once simply urbane into the profane. So we become enlightened by the realization of our infinite endangerment.

A notable casualty of this is the utopian ideal. The idea of Utopia has often been tied to modes of representation as the future becomes an open site for projected fantasies of worlds yet realized. Although it has never been a static concept, overshadowed in many periods by more compelling dystopian supplements that seemed to be more in keeping with our profound suspicions about ourselves, the fact that we no longer even entertain the prospect of some utopian ideal is reflective of the politics of our times. As Fredric Jameson has written 'the waning of the utopian idea is a fundamental historical and political symptom, which deserves diagnosis in its own right – if not some

new and more effective therapy'.²⁷ Central to Jameson's concerns has been 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 to believe in possible futures to come. Despite our concerns with the totalizing metaphysics of utopianism in historical practice, Jameson does offer a compelling diagnosis of the catastrophic imaginary of contemporary liberal rule:

[T]he notion of the market as an untrammelled natural growth has returned with a vengeance into political thinking, while Left ecology desperately tries to assess the possibilities of a productive collaboration between political agency and the earth . . . Ecology seems to count ever more feebly on its power – unless it be in the form of the apocalyptic and of catastrophe, global warming or the development of new viruses . . . The science-fictional figure for such change is the situation in which a prisoner, or some potential rescue victim, is warned that salvation will be possible only at the price of allowing the entire personality – the past and its memories, all the multiple influences and events that have combined to form this current personality in the present – to be wiped away without a trace: a consciousness alone remains, after this operation, but by what effort of the reason or imagination can it still be called 'the same' consciousness? The fear with which this prospect immediately fills us is then to all intents and purposes the same as the fear of death.²⁸

Post-utopianism takes on a number of distinct features in which idealized lifestyles are no longer presented as a common good but a matter of *exclusivity*. If there is any resonance to idealism, it is not premised on 'inclusion' but the need to be able to 'opt out' of the social landscape.

Not only do we evidence this in the various newspaper supplements which offer temporary refuge from the maddening crowds within some idyllic and depopulated retreat (which in themselves, as we have come to learn, are also vulnerable in their exposure to the elements); the marked separation of gated lives have increasingly become the new norm for human habitation as the logic of risk calls forth the creation of local protectorates. Gated communities offer a particularly telling insight into the politics of resilience. Borrowing from Foucault, we may argue that the gated community is in fact a novel expression of a security apparatus that seeks to *distribute* risk throughout a networked system. The gated individual outsources the need to be resilient to elements throughout the gated commune, ranging from barbed fences, physical walls, surveillance technologies, disaster-proofed architectures and insurance premiums to armed guards patrolling the parameters. This is a far cry from Thomas More's vision of Utopia as a site of human togetherness and shared access to resources. Indeed, once we broach the problem of gated life biopolitically, the method of containment (whether included or excluded) which begins with the human subject, it soon becomes apparent how resilience is tied to a neoliberal ideology that clouds racial, cultural and gendered discriminations by the smokescreen of objective risk assessments. And yet, as we shall later discover, the tragic irony of resilience is that it renders problematic precisely those populations which are 'at risk' in order to permit their veritable containment and separation from those for whom resilience is seldom entertained.

Once the built environment becomes part of political deliberations, infrastructure becomes 'critical' to the understanding of living systems. The idea of Critical Infrastructure is now central to discourses and practices of securitization, especially in global cities. As Martin Coward has written, 'One might (thus) say that a reciprocal dynamic of urban securitisation is underway in which the security agenda is urbanised and urbanity is – insofar as it induces

insecurity and vulnerability – securitised'.²⁹ While it is well established that the urban setting has always been vulnerable to a strategic attack (most horrifyingly in the cases of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which put into question urbanism like never before), the idea that the violence must be tested *before* the event (such that its conditions of possible decay and its notable weaknesses must be imagined and acted upon in advance) is a novel departure that points to the onset of pre-emptive governance more generally. 'As a consequence', Coward explains, 'cities are securitised in response to actual or imagined threats that are perceived to derive from such forms of war and the distinctive way they exploit or endanger the urban fabric'. Crucially, for Stephen Graham, this temporal shift in our understanding of urban performance, which looks directly towards the future of cityscapes before attacks upon their material fabric has come about, inaugurates a new material sensibility that is 'disrupted by design'.³⁰

Architects in the United States have been at the forefront of re-thinking urban design. *The National Plan for Research and Development in Support of Critical Infrastructure Protection* (2004) set the scene, suggesting it was important to conceive of physical systems that 'must become reliable, autonomic (self-repairing and self-sustaining), resilient, and survivable in order to continue to operate in diminished capacity rather than failing in crisis conditions'.³¹ Infrastructure was therefore to be imbued with a particular agency that literally breathes life into what was once deemed inanimate. This demands a more holistic assessment that merges the human, the built environment, and the virtual to the otherwise natural and unregulated Critical Infrastructures which are 'not just buildings and structures' but 'include people and physical and cyber systems that work together in processes that are highly interdependent'.³² In this regard, 'the defence of critical infrastructure is not about the mundane protection of human beings from the risk of violent death at the hands of other human beings, but about a more profound defence

of the combined physical and technological infrastructures which liberal regimes have come to understand as necessary for their vitality and security in recent years'.³³ The security, however, remains a deceit that conceals the most insecure of rationalities. Since the built environment is indistinguishable from catastrophic potentiality, instead of promising to make us safe, we have learned that all our castles are made from sand. Our understanding of the biopolitical is invariably transformed as we move from the attempts to secure populations to the embrace of contingency and all its pathological iterations:

Taking its analytic cue from complexity science and ecology rather than statistics and demography, a neoliberal biopolitics is more concerned to promote life that is resilient, able to exist on the edge of survivability, and adapted to uncertainty and surprise; a life that has abandoned trying to know the future and its associated prudentialism. Instead of providing a modernist *freedom from* the social pathologies of everyday life through, for example, normative regimes of inter-generational social insurance, resilience is more attuned to a neoliberal ethos allowing a *freedom to* embrace contingency as the essence of foresight and enterprise . . . Resilience speaks to capitalism's constant transgression of limits, its inability to leave anything alone for long and the permanent revolution it effects in social and institutional life. Life is speciated according to the usefulness, irrelevance or threat it represents for the infrastructural and biospheric systems necessary for capitalism's widening cycles of reproduction, consumption and accumulation.³⁴

A Fallible Existence

Political events such as 9/11 and 7/7, along with natural disasters more commonly, suggest that catastrophe has no consideration for subjectivity. Whether the victim is rich or poor, Western or non-Western, religious or not, threats

which define the twenty-first-century security terrain offer no refuge whatsoever for the status of the subject. When everything is the source of endangerment, everyone is endangered. We may reason this to be an inevitable outcome of the liberal disavowal of anything external to its inclusive political imaginary. As the politics of the exception, i.e. something that points not only to juridical excessiveness but also to all radical anteriority, is condemned as a *de facto* point of principle, so it transpires that nothing is exempt – without exception. In other words, since liberal rule cannot entertain anything exceptional (juridical or otherwise), it necessarily follows that the anterior appears to be more than a novel curiosity. That which remains unknown must become known or else we remain slaves to chance. Here we encounter both an irresolvable dilemma and the real condition of possibility. Since knowledge upon this terrain actually appears altogether fleeting, the principle of the unknown must remain infinitely inaccessible. To abandon the dream of final security implies giving up on the dream of perfect knowledge. While liberal communities are therefore insecure by design, epistemologically they are premised upon the realization of imperfect knowledge. Indeed, liberal systems of rule depend upon such imperfections in order to justify continuous engagement to permit continual re-entry into the manipulation of the souls of the living.

Imperfect knowledge is the starting point for resilient strategies which are far from universal in application. Vulnerability is not a universal experience. Neither do our coping mechanisms conform to some timeless laws of nature. Both are highly contingent in terms of the experiencing subject as it appears in space and time. This is strategically embraced. Indeed, since imperfect knowledge is deemed integral to the understanding of infinite endangerment, it conditions the possibility for a system of rule which produces insecurity by design. While imperfection is presented here as a universal character trait – nobody is perfect the Kantian inspired liberal often recites – it remains

the case that some are deemed to be more imperfect in knowledge than others on account of their lesser liberal dispositions. Such an essay is the political move made by resilient discourses and practices *before* the technical solutions are mobilized. Meaningfulness of life is qualified along various progressive/regressive schematics such that questions of vulnerability can be presented as verifiable scientific truths. The more progressively endowed, the less vulnerability the imperfect subject experiences. The less vulnerability, the less there is a need to think and act resiliently as the subject is already progressively countering. Not only is this logic a particular mask of mastery for liberal power as it encourages a technical framing of the problem in order to screen political complicity. Without any appreciation of process of biopolitical authentication that gives sure moral testimony to a life that is well lived, the problem of resilience is absolved of any political ascriptions as technocratic solutions come to the fore.

Collective Amnesia

Postmodernism is often poorly understood. It does not refer to a particular moment in time that allows us to map out a temporal shift from a *pre* to *post facto* of modernity. Neither does it refer to modes of production wherein the term gains material purchase through the shift from industrialization to immaterial forms of labour and outputs. Postmodernism is a way of thinking and relating to the world. It has no temporality as such. Neither does it have a distinct materiality as such. Bringing into question prevailing dogmas, reified assumptions, along with uncompromising holistic claims to truth, it is unashamedly concerned with opening up the fields of possibility by revealing what is already there. There is, however, an important caveat that must be addressed here. While we may argue that postmodernism has been aligned with the creation of new concepts – ‘the event of thinking’, there is

nothing to suggest that what is offered will not be dangerous or appropriated such that what appears to be affirmative subsequently ends up turning towards more reactive and suffocating means. Indeed, moving beyond postmodernist dogmatism, which can be as equally stifling as political realism and liberalist alternatives, there is nothing whatsoever to suggest that our allegiance must be given to a concept or idea simply because its stakes offer to strike against a particular meta-narrative.

Deleuze was fully aware of the potential for well-intentioned concepts to be maliciously appropriated by imperial forces. Nietzsche, in particular, he believed, was subjected to these misadventures more than any other. For Deleuze, the misappropriation of Nietzsche's concepts extended well beyond the crude falsifications of 'those abusive relatives that figure in the procession of cursed thinkers'.³⁵ More maliciously, they suffered from the 'bad readings or displacements' which were derived from 'arbitrary selections' of his works. Never in the history of thought has there been such a fallacious assassination of the messenger.

Nietzsche for his part was fully aware of his own untimeliness. 'I know my fate', he once famously stated.³⁶ Deleuze's work in equal measure has been subjected to the same arbitrary selections and utilized to rationalize the most abhorrent acts of violence. It has already been noted how a number of his concepts have been used to help theorize the catastrophic imaginary of twenty-first-century forms of security governance. Intentionally or not, the problems Deleuze raised are being directly associated with a security dilemma like no other before witnessed on earth. Despite this, however, we are yet to truly realize the political significance of their works. If we have heeded their messages to have become 'post-modern' along with the disavowal of structures and limits, this hasn't been done with any degree of confidence. That is why, for Peter Sloterdijk, Nietzsche remains the prophet of the human yet to come.³⁷

One of the more preposterous and dangerous postmodernist interventions is the demand for a politics of forgetting. We are no doubt aware that truths about the past can be manipulated to colonize the present. To suggest, however, that we can simply forget some life-changing event is absurd. How may we even begin to think about eradicating from memory the violence of Hiroshima or 9/11? Any such suggestions are not only neurologically questionable; they are ethically compromised as they take us into the most pernicious abstraction. If the past troubles, it is because the multiplicity of experience is glossed over, not the experience itself. Indeed, as we shall explain, what remains fundamental to the art of living an affirmative life is the ability to have a distinct confidence in truth. Such an exercise positively embraces what Foucault termed the history of our present. It pays meticulous attention to the historical moment so that the contested nature of experience can be excavated from the ashes of catastrophe that otherwise impose singular reasoning. Not only does conducting any history of the present prove altogether impossible once forgetting is entertained. More contemporaneously, it plays directly into the logic of neoliberal rule in which future-orientated strategies of resilience depend upon forms of collective amnesia.

Resilience has a distinct relationship to the historical as it invokes memories of past traumas. The historical record, however, is only concerned here with the singular truth of an event as some shared experience of suffering and eventual resurrection. Out of this narrative comes an explanation of events as something inherently violent such that the precariousness and vulnerability of human existence is reaffirmed, along with the need to instigate a new angle of vision in which the particular historical rupture serves to condition the possibility for more generalizable rule. Here, then, previous forms of human tragedy find strategic alignment as the need to make us all aware of the sheer contingency of living inscribes a base level imperative as a matter of biophysical survivability and a

metaphysical imperative as a matter of community under siege. The past therefore impresses upon the present to provide a moral reasoning to future governmental activities as carried out in the name of a collective, which is defined on account of its radical endangerment. Politically qualified life begins with the tragedy of its existence – the topos of the encounter – which stems from the arbitrary and inescapable violence of the world. The only response in such a predicament is to be better conditioned through some form of exposure to the fact that living is thoroughly dangerous. As Juliette Kayyem, policy adviser on homeland security to the Obama administration and Harvard academic puts it, what we choose to remember should be guided by ‘less anger’ (especially about distribution of finite resources which ordinarily makes us more secure through entitlement) and more through a ‘quiet acceptance’ of our insecurities:

One day it will be acceptable, politically and publicly, to argue that while homeland security is about ensuring that fewer bad things happen, the real test is that when they inevitably do, they aren’t as bad as they would have been absent the effort. Only our public and political response to another major terrorist attack will test whether there is room for both ideologies to thrive in a nation that was, any way you look at it, *built to be vulnerable*.³⁸

But what remnants actually pass over into the present as collective memory? For sure, we don’t encounter in this space of recollection the contested nature of the historical event. Neither do we often encounter any personal testimony that brings into question the truth about the shared sense of suffering and grief. We only have to look here to Thomas Hoepker’s photo of people in Brooklyn relaxing against the backdrop of the violence of September 11 to evidence this point. While this image was eventually published on the fifth anniversary of 9/11, as Hoepker stated, its initial publication was held back

due to its 'ambiguous and confusing' composition. It was too sensitive to deal with politically. Moving beyond any judgemental posturing towards the individuals or for that matter sweeping generalizations about cultural insensitivities of an entire nation that somehow appears emotionally bankrupt, Hoepker's photograph represents the contested reality of the historical moment in its most unstaged and raw form. Like the falling man before, it unsettles the preferred aesthetic dialectic of initial tragedy and civic heroism. Instead, it depicts a perfectly normal state of affairs that was permitted by a certain *distancing* from the action. Indeed, as the composition emphasizes, proximity alone offers no such guarantees as to some shared sense of vulnerability or experience. All events are experienced differently. Many were far more deeply traumatized viewing the unfolding of events thousands of miles away than the subjects in Hoepker's frame.

And yet, it remains the case that since resilience offers a reflection on societies that is altogether unproblematic, many assumptions about society and its relationship to catastrophic events are purged of their complex memories. It has already been noted that resilience became the defining motif of the tenth anniversary of 9/11. From art exhibitions to magazine covers, it became the rhetorical device to indicate how the United States survived in the face of adversity. It also pointed to a new political moment in which the trauma of the event shifted from discourses of retribution to a more sombre evaluation of the fragility of life. This was not presented as something to be despaired. Optimism was to be found precisely in the ability to emerge from the ashes of the catastrophic more appreciative of what it meant to live a finite existence. To be optimistic meant having a more intimate appreciation of the lethality of 9/11, for only then could the trauma of the day be turned around to positively re-enforce the moral surety of the liberal will to rule and the ways of life the system produces. President Barack Obama's commemorative speech at Ground Zero spoke volumes in this regard:

These past ten years tell a story of resilience. The Pentagon is repaired, and filled with patriots working in common purpose. Shanksville is the scene of friendships forged between residents of that town, and families who lost loved ones there. New York remains a vibrant capital of the arts and industry, fashion and commerce. Where the World Trade Center once stood, the sun glistens off a new tower that reaches toward the sky. Our people still work in skyscrapers. Our stadiums are filled with fans, and our parks full of children playing ball. Our airports hum with travel, and our buses and subways take millions where they need to go. Families sit down to Sunday dinner, and students prepare for school. This land pulses with the optimism of those who set out for distant shores, and the courage of those who died for human freedom.³⁹

Obama's understanding is that the past only offers a certain amount of guidance. One thing the future does promise, he expects, is another catastrophe in some yet to be deciphered guise. While the past therefore remains imperfect as it was impossible to predict with absolute certainty what came to pass, the future in equal measure remains purely contingent. As finite beings with finite qualities in a world of infinite possibility, we are, then, it seems, somewhat incapable of 'handling the truth'. Indeed, it seems that liberal politicians no longer reason truth to be 'out there' as if to be captured and settled once and for all. Abandoning the search for fixed essences, truth has become what we make it, as we fashion our lives and produce the meaning of our freedoms and liberties as consumable products like any other. There is an important caveat to address here. The liberal fashioning of the truth as conceived in terms of its emergence in the face of vulnerability is not a courage to speak truth *to* power so that we think differently about the political. It is an allegiance to the truth *of* power, such that we maintain some allegiance to the truth about the value of political subjects already conceived. In this regard, commonality exists between the knowledge of the resilient subject and that of

speculative philosophy. Rather than seeking a definitive political rupture with the present, the political subject is tasked to show *fidelity* to the truth – as witnessed in the living out of emerging events – which conforms to some nomologically reducible logic of worlds. What is wagered, in other words, is the truth-event of the vulnerable subject, whose very claim to truth arises during the catastrophic moment as a sort of hyper-negative and posthumous told you so:

For a truth to affirm its newness, there must be a *supplement*. This supplement is committed to chance. It is unpredictable, incalculable. It is beyond what is. I call it an event. A truth thus appears, in its newness, because an eventual supplement interrupts repetition . . . An event is linked to the notion of the *undecidable*. Take this statement: ‘The event belongs to the situation.’ If it is possible to decide, using the rules of established knowledge, whether this statement is true or false, then the so-called event is not an event. Its occurrence would be calculable within the situation. Nothing would permit us to say: here begins a truth. On the basis of the undecidability of an event’s belonging to a situation a *wager* has to be made. This is why a truth begins with an *axiom of truth*. It begins with a groundless decision – the decision to say that the event has taken place.⁴⁰

There is no truth, then, other than the truth of the emergent will to know the conditions of our vulnerability. The past is of no relevance here other than as a contingent moment in time whose passage leaves no contemporary truthfulness from the perspective of the newly emergent truth-event. But what is actually being wagered here? It is not the incalculability of the situation. Neither is it the question of belonging to the situation in all its complexity. It is the ability to excavate something of a pure and unquestionable truth that renders the undecidable decidable, the rupture normalized, the uncertain certain, so that it becomes possible to recover a political truth out of the

catastrophic break. To suggest that there are no established rules, then, is the precise point. Vulnerability and insecurity make all claims to established order altogether redundant for there is no truth other than that which has just come to pass and soon to be forgotten. Collective amnesia thus becomes a default setting for a system of rule that is less about secure principles than it is about axiomatic propositions which, although fleeting, provide the most unquestionable assumptions about the subject's ontological status (vulnerability), its epistemic reasoning (radical uncertainty), and its purely contingent centre of gravity (catastrophic events).

Whose Survivability?

The question of survivability has always been central to biopolitical concerns. How might we live beyond the contemporary limits of our existence? – a question often posed by bio-strategic conscious agencies of governance. If biopolitics is therefore a key term of art for describing the progressive operations of power which, seeking to strategically battle with the forces that threaten our finite existence, renders the modern periodic as such, resilience is a term of art for biopolitical intervention that takes the infinitely possible to become the strategic point of entry for the conceptualization of threats to biospheric life broadly conceived. Strategies of resilience, in other words, are less about highlighting local claims to knowledge or autonomous capabilities to deal with problems on their own terms; instead, they evidence how liberal power is confronting the realities of its self-imposed foreclosure such that it requires new reasons to govern life despite the irresolvability of its ambitions. As liberalism now faces the reality of its finitude, haunted in fact by the very logic of infinite potentiality that its contemporary biophilosophy of life equally promotes, the turn to resilience becomes inevitable. This brings us to a pivotal moment in

the history of liberalism as universal aspirations are all but abandoned, along with any natural claims to promote all life as a self-endowed subject with inalienable rights. With the outside displaced by a radically interconnected terrain of endemic crises, survivability truly is the name of the political game.

Resilience, however, is more than a call to increase our vigilance and preparedness against impending attacks. It encourages actors to learn from catastrophes so that societies can become more responsive to a fate which is worse and still simmering on the horizon. It promotes adaptability so that life may go on living despite the fact that elements of our living systems may be irreparably destroyed. And it creates shared knowledge that will continually reshape the forms of communities and affirm those core values which are deemed absolutely 'vital' to our ways of living. With this in mind, it is perhaps no accident that the concept of resilience emanates from ecology. Such thinking foregrounds 'buffer capacities' of living systems; their ability to 'absorb perturbations' or the 'magnitude of disturbance that can be absorbed before a living system changes its structure by changing the variables and processes that control behaviour'.⁴¹ Living systems are said by ecologists to develop not on account of their ability to secure themselves prophylactically from threats, but through their adaptation to them. They evolve in spite of and because of systemic shocks that register from the minor to the catastrophic. Exposure to threats is a constitutive process in the development of living systems, and thus the problem for them is never simply how to secure themselves but how to adapt to them. Such capacities for adaptation to threats are precisely what ecologists argue determines the 'resilience' of any living system.

Melinda Cooper and Jeremy Walker have provided an important contribution to our understanding of the genealogies of resilience. Drawing upon the number of ways complexity thinking has been shaped, they have exposed the intricate connections between ecological and

economical modes of thinking. As they suggest, 'Since the nineties, global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Bank for International Settlements, have increasingly incorporated strategies of 'resilience' into their logistics of crisis management, financial (de)regulation and development economics'.⁴² Much of this applicability is owed to the intellectual contributions of the great Austrian economic theorist Friedrich Von Hayek who understood that shocks to economic systems were caused by factors beyond our control, hence our thinking about such systems required systems of governance that were premised upon insecure foundations. Hence, while ecology promises to universalize and moralize resilient strategies through the creation of all inclusive catastrophic imaginaries, it is also intuitively in keeping with neoliberalism and its systems of rule:

[A]s institutions begin to recognize the looming socio-economic effects of climate change, we have seen a rapid uptake of the adaptive model of resource-management offered by resilience science. This has occurred in tandem with calls for the 'securitization of the biosphere': the privatisation and trading of the flow of 'ecosystem services' maintained by intact ecosystems, in recognition that rainforests and watersheds are critical 'natural infrastructure assets' that must be priced in financial markets in order that corporations can 'capture the value' of biodiversity conservation. In this way, neoliberal environmentalism addresses the depletion of ecosystems as a global security problem, the only solution to which is the securitisation and financialisation of the biosphere'.⁴³

Resilience from this perspective is not simply a call to ignite some base level human instinct for survival, even though, as we shall discover, the reduction of life to this base level is a natural outcome. It is an ideological project that is informed by political and economic rationalities which offer very particular accounts of life as an ontological problem, i.e. a problem which emanates from the

potentiality of life as ontologically conceived, along with the types of epistemic communities which scientifically verify the need to become resilient as a *fait accompli*. Resilience, in other words, is a key strategy in the creation of contemporary regimes of power that hallmark vast inequalities in all human classifications. Little wonder that resilience is most concerned with those deemed most vulnerable. For it is precisely the securitization of the most at risk which politically threatens the security and comforts of those who are sufficiently protected and excluded from the all too real effects of risk-based societies. The following introduction from a joint report on 'The Roots of Resilience' co-sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank and the World Resources Institute speaks volumes on the political implications:

Resilience is the capacity to adapt and to thrive in the face of challenge. This report contends that when the poor successfully (and sustainably) scale-up ecosystem-based enterprises, their resilience can increase in three dimensions. They can become more economically resilient – better able to face economic risks. They – and their communities – can become more socially resilient – better able to work together for mutual benefit. And the ecosystems they live in can become more biologically resilient – more productive and stable'.⁴⁴

This invariably bring us to sustainable development, which started out by preaching that the economic development of societies must be regulated so that it contributes not just to the security of states and their human populations, but also so that it increases the resilience of all living systems. This shifted the object of concern from that of human life to that of the biosphere, incorporating every known species, as well as habitats of all kinds, vulnerable to the destructions wrought by economic development. Life, not economy, it said, must provide the rationalities according to which peoples are entitled to increase their

prosperity. The emergence of such a doctrine had significant implications for the ways in which not only the problem but also the very nature of security was conceived in developmental circles. Once the referent object of development became the life of the biosphere rather than simply states and their human populations, so the account of security to which development is allied was required to transform. Security, with its connotations of state and governmental reason, territoriality, military capacities, economic prosperity, human resources and population assets became less fashionable and gradually gave way to the new concept and value of 'resilience'. Resilience is a useful concept, the proponents of sustainable development argued, precisely because it is not a capacity of states, nor merely of human populations and their various political, social and economic practices, but a capacity of life itself.

Since resilience emerged within the doctrine of sustainable development as a way of positing a different kind of policy problematic from those formulated in the security doctrines of neoliberal states and their more conventional development agencies, it would privilege the life of the biosphere in all its dimensions over and against the human focus that shaped the 'development-security nexus'. If one aspect of the subordination of rationalities of economy to rationalities of life in developmental discourse has been the shift from doctrines of economic development to sustainable development, a correlate shift has also been that from security to resilience. Development thus understood was less about closing the life-chance divide between the rich and the impoverished than it was about localized strategies for self-help. We teach how to fish in spite of the polluted waters. As Mark Duffield writes, 'development is not a modernising strategy for economic catch-up. It is more a means of improving the resilience of self-reliant life through new forms of social organisation'.⁴⁵ With the moral case for intervention taken as given, sustainable development sought to 'contain the circulatory effects on non-insured surplus life by putting the onus on potential migrants to

adjust their expectations while improving their resilience and self-reliance *in situ*'.⁴⁶ Resilience, then, politically emerges as part of a containment strategy for dealing with the globally impoverished in the environment, it was declared, of their natural belonging.

By the time of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg – a summit that is widely recognized as the coming of age party of ‘sustainable development’ – the importance of resilience as a political strategy was cemented. A major report prepared on behalf of the Environmental Advisory Council to the Swedish Government as input to the process of the World Summit described how resilience is a property associated not just with the diversity ‘of species’, but also ‘of human opportunity’, and especially ‘of economic options – that maintain and encourage both adaptation and learning’ among human populations.⁴⁷ In an adroit reformulation of the problematic, neoliberal economic development, in which the function of markets as generators of economic diversity is basic, became itself a core constituent of the resilience which sustainable development had to be aimed at increasing. Thus was it that, post-Johannesburg, the correlation of sustainable development with resilience started to produce explicitly neoliberal prescriptions for institutional reform and a peculiar shift that abandoned any sense of egalitarianism yet wrapping itself more fully in humanitarian dressage. ‘Ecological ignorance’ began to be conceptualized as a threat, not just to the resilience of the biosphere, but to humanity. Resilience began to be conceived not simply as an inherent property of the biosphere, in need of protection from the economic development of humanity, but a property within human populations that now needed promoting through the increase of their ‘economic options’. Remarkably, then, the biosphere itself began to be conceived not as an extra-economic domain, distinct from and vulnerable to the economic practices of human populations, but an economy of ‘services’ which ‘humanity receives’.⁴⁸ The environment, in other

words, starts to become properly bio-politicized and bio-capitalized as a moral source for human welfare and setting the conditions for emancipation.

There is a double and correlated shift at work here in the elaboration of the sustainable development–resilience nexus post-Johannesburg. In one move, ‘resilience’ has shifted from being a property of the biosphere to being a property of humanity, while in a second move ‘service’ has shifted from being an element of economy to being a capacity of the biosphere. Crucified on the cross that this double shift carves are ‘the poor’. For they are the segment of population of which resilience is now demanded and simultaneously the population said to threaten the degradation of ‘ecosystem services’. Increasing the ‘resiliency’ of the poor has become a defining goal, for example, of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the years post-Johannesburg.⁴⁹ Alleviating threats to the biosphere requires improving the resilience of the poor, especially, because it is precisely the poor that are most ‘ecologically ignorant’ and thus most prone to using ‘ecosystem services’ in non-sustainable ways. Thus ensuring the resilience of the biosphere requires making the poor into more resilient kinds of subjects, and making the poor into more resilient subjects requires relieving them of their ecological ignorance. The means to that removal is assumed to reside in building neoliberal frameworks of economy, governance and subjectivity. Developing the resilience of the poor is said to require, for example, a social context of ‘flexible and open institutions and multi-level governance systems’.⁵⁰ ‘The absence of markets and price signals’ in ecological services is a major threat to resilience, UNEP argues, because it means that ‘changes in their conditions have gone unnoticed’.⁵¹

Property rights regimes prove particularly telling here as they have to be extended to incorporate ecosystem services so that markets can function in them.⁵² ‘Markets’, it is argued, ‘have proven to be among the most resilient institutions, being able to recover quickly and to function

in the absence of government'.⁵³ When and where the market fails to recover, development policies for increasing resilience have to be aimed at 'ensuring access to markets'.⁵⁴ Ensuring the resilience of the poor also requires the building of neoliberal systems of governance which will monitor their use of ecological services to ensure they are sustainably managed.⁵⁵ In order to be the agents of their own change, the poor have to be subjectivized so that they are 'able to make sustainable management decisions that respect natural resources and enable the achievement of a sustainable income stream'.⁵⁶ 'Over-harvesting, over-use, misuse or excessive conversion of ecosystems into human or artificial systems damages the regulation service which in turn reduces the flow of the provisioning service provided by ecosystems'.⁵⁷ Within 'the poor' itself, women are the principal target population. 'I will transform my lifestyle in the way I farm and think' has become the mantra that poor women farmers in the Caribbean region are demanded, for example, to repeat like Orwellian farm animals in order to receive European Union funding.⁵⁸ So not only does resilience have a relationship to poverty. It reveals both cultural and gendered concerns that work to divide life into various taxonomical groupings of distinct vulnerability, thereby permitting strategic engagement with lives which are qualified as scientifically divisible.

The double shift identified above is integral, we will argue, to the strategy by which neoliberalism has absorbed the critique of sustainable development and naturalized profound differences in the qualities of lives by appropriating the terms of vulnerability. Whereas resilience was originally conceived by proponents of sustainable development as a property that distinguishes the extra-economic 'life-support systems' which humans require to live well, it has become reconceived post-Johannesburg as a property which humanity intrinsically possesses, is capable of developing further, and which it can never have too much of. As a property of human populations it is dependent, moreover, on their interpellation within markets, their diversity

as economic subjects, and their subjection to systems of governance, able to ensure that they continue to use natural resources in sustainable ways. A doctrine, which started out as a critique of neoliberal policy prescriptions for development, ends up legitimating a neoliberal model of development based upon the constitution of markets and the interpellation of subjects within markets. The resilient subject is therefore the surest embodiment of neoliberal thinking as it conforms to its guiding principles without questioning the political stakes of vulnerability. In doing so, what revolutionary impetus may exist is countered by a sophisticated form of lethality that the subject is tasked to bring onto themselves. It is for these reasons, we shall conclude, resilience must be understood nihilistically. Nihilism is not only a debasement of the self. It encourages the subject to accept a political will to nothingness. By actively encouraging a self-inflicting lethal exposure, it turns political ambitions into a neutralizing embrace.

Notes

1 Anthropocene

- 1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998).
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- 5 See Manuel De Landa, *1000 Years of Non-Linear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).
- 6 Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2011), p. 331.
- 7 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 3.
- 8 IPCC, *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters*, p. 32.
- 9 Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, pp. 332, 333.

- 10 IPCC, *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters*, p. 33.
- 11 IPCC, *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters*, p. 38.
- 12 See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power & Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 13 Brad Evans and Mark Duffield, 'Bio-Spheric Security: How the Merger between Development, Security and the Environment [Desenex] is Retrenching Fortress Europe'. In P. Burgess and S. Gutwirth (eds) *A Threat Against Europe? Security, Migration and Integration* (Brussels: VUB Press, 2011).
- 14 <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/longrange2/WorldPop2300final.pdf>
- 15 Rockström et al., 'Planetary Boundaries', pp. 461, 472.
- 16 The British Government's *Stern Review* is an excellent example of this. Nicholas Stern, *The Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 17 For excellent examples of Anthropocentric aesthetics (particularly the section on thresholds and boundaries), see <http://www.anthropocene.info/en/home>
- 18 <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/publications/artiklar/howdefiningplanetaryboundariescanttransformourapproachtogrowth.5.1e6281dd1341fd2212c80001738.html>
- 19 Rockström et al., 'Planetary Boundaries'.
- 20 <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/publications/artiklar/steeringawayfromcatastrophictresholdsplanetaryboundariesforhumansurvival.5.fb3ee2f125e9da349a80002141.html>
- 21 Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us* (New York: Picador, 2007), p. 4.
- 22 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
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- 26 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 2 Part 2 – 1931–34* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 538.

- 27 Fredric Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia', *New Left Review* 25, January–February (2004).
- 28 Fredric Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia'. Online at: <http://newleftreview.org/II/25/fredric-jameson-the-politics-of-utopia>
- 29 Martin Coward, 'Network-Centric Violence, Critical Infrastructure and the Urbanisation of Security', *Security Dialogue* 40(4–5) (2009), 399–418.
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- 31 Department of Homeland Security, *The National Plan for Research and Development in Support of Critical Infrastructure Protection* (2004), p. xi. Available at http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/ST_2004_NCIP_RD_PlanFINALApr05.pdf
- 32 Department of Homeland Security, *The National Plan for Research and Development in Support of Critical Infrastructure Protection*, p. 2.
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