RESILIENCE VERSUS RESISTANCE:
AFFECTIVELY MODULATING CONTEMPORARY
DIAGRAMS OF SOCIAL RESILIENCE, SOCIAL
SUSTAINABILITY, AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

PETRA HROCH

[Narrator]: California is a strong brand: the
place of dreams, movie stars, and new
beginnings, with a heavenly climate. [At the
same time], the Golden State is running out
of money and so is the city of Los Angeles.
Public services are being cut, unemployment
is rising, and many people have lost their
homes in the economic crisis. But optimism
and belief in the power of America seem
unaffected. Who are the pioneers of the new
America-in-the-making, and how do they
see the future?

—Bregtje van der Haak, California
Dreaming (2010)

The above narration—together with a backdrop of images of beach-side stands
selling knick-knacks—sets the scene for Dutch filmmaker Bregtje van der
Haak’s 2010 documentary, California Dreaming. Shot in sunny Los Angeles
and Santa Barbara, the documentary explores some of the ways American
individuals, families, and organizations have been managing the ongoing
aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. As a European documentary filmmaker in
California, van der Haak becomes fascinated by the transcontinental difference
in approaches toward the fiscal crisis and its resulting issues. She is familiar
with what she describes as a “typical” European response to current social,
political, and economic problems: blaming the government as the source of the
problem and expecting the government to fix it (van der Haak 2010b).
Although she finds that Californians enduring the US financial meltdown are
suffering as much as their Europeans counterparts embroiled in the EU fiscal crisis, she remarks at the surprising difference in their responses to the crisis: "Americans are optimistic, not like Europeans, who are always complaining" (van der Haak 2010a).

In *California Dreaming*, van der Haak interviews Californians who have lost their homes and jobs as a result of the housing market crash. She also profiles those trying to reintegrate into society in the midst of the recession after having lost all or part of their lives to the state’s for-profit prison sector and the “three-strikes law”—a law that can result in life imprisonment for repeat non-serious and non-violent offenses. Most of the people interviewed, although they have first-hand evidence that there is something wrong with the system, do not, as van der Haak observes, hold the government responsible for faulty policies. Nor do they demand reforms. Rather, they tend to blame and be ashamed of themselves, maintain an unflinching faith in meritocracy, and reaffirm their positive, optimistic, and can-do attitude and belief in the American Dream. They resolve to “pull-up their bootstraps” and look to their own capacities, families, and communities for survival strategies and potential solutions.¹

So, although *California Dreaming* focuses on the potential benefits of optimism as a positive affect leading to resilience, it simultaneously complicates normative narratives and assumptions that optimism is necessarily desirable for social change (and conversely, that pessimism, or complaining is not). Indeed, the documentary title, *California Dreaming*, itself can be read as having a double valence of meaning: on the one hand, it reinforces the positive, optimistic nature of the California brand as the place of dreams and possibilities, and, on the other hand, it suggests that Californians who buy into this branded identity, this belief, are dreaming—that California’s optimistic citizens might in fact be inattentive to reality, engaging in delusional fantasies, or impeded in their ability to think critically.

In what follows, I offer a critique of the increasingly popular contemporary rhetoric of “social resilience,” “social sustainability,” and “social innovation.” My suggestion is that despite the apparent relevance, urgency, and innovative veneer of these concepts—concepts that have come to the fore in the face of cascading ecological and economic crises—they nonetheless operate on subjects and communities affectively, and perpetuate the very status quo policies, practices, and programs that have contributed to our moment of crisis in the first place. I begin with a description of some of the activities of the

---
¹ Unless otherwise noted, all references to van der Haak refer to her documentary film, *California Dreaming* (2010a).
Californians profiled in van der Haak’s *California Dreaming*. Their activities anecdotally illustrate some of the acceptable responses to crises that are available to today’s necessarily enterprising subjects. Next, I outline the problem of locating agency in the individual as a response to a systemic crisis—a crisis that itself placed responsibility upon individuals while simultaneously disempowering them (too-big-to-fail became not a descriptive but a performative statement). Finally, using Foucault’s work on the “self” as an enterprise (Foucault 2010; McNay 2009) and Deleuze’s work on the “dividual” (Deleuze 1992), I discuss the subject-system relation characteristic of contemporary “diagrams” of control (Deleuze 1992). My objective here is to emphasize the way in which affect is central to the modulation of today’s crisis-filled event and serves as a means of bolstering existing flows of power and/or forces of transformation. I critically connect this analysis of affect to today’s rhetoric of “resilience” and argue that although resilience-focused activities are characterized by an emphasis on production rather than consumption, and community participation rather than individual action, they nonetheless serve to perpetuate dominant neoliberal values such as entrepreneurialism, market-based decision making, and privatization. Finally, I sketch the criteria for what “resistance” might look like in a diagram of control in which social resilience is emerging as an imperative.

**Affectively Intensifying the Status Quo: A New America-in-the-Making**

In *California Dreaming*, some of the grassroots community initiatives created by and for the Californians van der Haak describes as “pioneers of the new America-in-the-making” include: (1) The New Beginnings Safe Parking Program, a program that points people who are living out of their cars to registered “safe” parking lots where they can spend the night without being disturbed, ticketed, or towed; (2) Homeboy Industries, a program that helps ex-gang members who have been recently released from prison to reintegrate into society by providing services such as laser removal of tattoos and gang markings, counselling, and job training; (3) The Jobs Club, a program that helps people without employment find work; (4) Fallen Fruit, an urban fruit-picking art project; and (5) a commune created by a group of thirty-somethings based on what architect/founder Laura Burkhalter calls “practical” rather than “ideological” principles, such as having people grow their own food and live communally.

Although the European and American financial crises have a variety of underlying causes, and although these causes are differently constructed in and through various media, whether people come to consider the source of the
problems and solutions to be individual or social points to an issue just as critical as what the root causes of these issues really are or how the roots of these issues are constructed in dominant narratives. How people construe an understanding of their own agency, how they internalize dominant affective norms, and how they imagine their relationship to these complex issues is intimately related to how they consider themselves as capable of acting or reacting. The stories of people managing the consequences of financial crises that van der Haak presents tell us about the ways different contemporary mappings of power—or neoliberal diagrams—modulate subjectivity in relation to social, economic, and ecological truths. These stories also reveal the need to account for affective economies when engaging in political and economic critiques. In other words, these stories highlight the importance of the modulation of affect as a key component of the modulation of power and its material effects.

The initiatives highlighted by van der Haak in *California Dreaming* reflect the kinds of citizen-led social programs popping up to fill social needs in cash-strapped cities and regions around the world. Although these efforts address a variety of problems and provide a range of services, they can be grouped into activities that are increasingly being referred to by business and design schools, local and regional governments, development agencies, and international governance institutions (such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund) as examples of “social resilience” (Meybeck et al. 2012; World Bank 2013a; Zhu 2012), “social sustainability” (Lipsky 2009; World Bank 2013b), or “social innovation” (OECD, LEED Program n.d.; World Bank 2011). Such activities, as I will argue here, reveal the catastrophic failure of—and, paradoxically, the re-emergence of faith in—what Foucault and Deleuze identify as the neoliberal, individualized/individualizing, enterprising subject as the locus of social, economic, ecological, and political agency.

At the heart of the paradox I am describing is the fact that, while the neoliberal capitalist game has been revealed to be in crisis, this crisis has led to greater insistence that we ought to have intensified faith in the status quo and the same rules of play. As we know, the global financial crisis and its ongoing fallout have revealed that corporations and banks cannot be left to regulate themselves, that they cannot be entrusted to impose their own checks and balances, and that there is no such thing as a benevolent “invisible hand” of the market. Indeed, the demands for government-funded (i.e., taxpayer-funded) bank bailouts and quantitative easing (QE) programs have shown that even those CEOs and central bankers who profess faith in the free market do not believe in “allowing the market to decide” when it comes to its own survival. In
other words, even the invisible hand reaches out for a helping hand after it stretches too far, risks too much, crashes, and falls. In the United States, the “too-big-to-fail” banks that approved the risky (and often predatory) sub-prime loans were bailed out by citizens, while the citizens, teetering on the brink of losing their homes in the sub-prime mortgage crisis, were left bankrupt and homeless. This socialization of losses and the privatization of gains made plain that, as critics of globalized capitalism have long argued, the free market was never free to begin with (or at least, that “free” here has a contested meaning). As the bailouts revealed, there was one set of free market rules for the private sector (when the private sector fails, it is protected by the security of public funds) and another set of rules for the public (when private individuals fail, as the foreclosures revealed, they are left to fend for themselves and be “resilient” in the face of the ongoing market insecurities). The risks and liberties taken advantage of by the private sector were backstopped by the very social safety net the private sector so often targets for destruction via privatization. The paradoxes abound and yet the same hard-working, enterprising, individual subject who has been systematically disempowered by the mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism finds him/herself, as the crisis unfolds, with seemingly no alternative to having to intensify his/her actions as a hard-working, enterprising, individual in the face of social, political, economic, or environmental situations that are increasingly out of (his or her) control. Individual and social resilience as the imperative, appropriate response forecloses the alternative: resistance. Obligatory optimism marginalizes complaints and critiques, and an over-emphasis on individual responsibility obfuscates the need to hold responsible those who have the greatest power to make decisions to transform a given situation.

If, as Deleuze writes, “there is no diagram that does not also include, besides the points which it connects up, certain relatively free points, points of creativity, change and resistance” (Deleuze 1992, 44), how can analysis of these shifting—and indeed shifty—subjective-social diagrams of power help us identify expressions of resistance? Can we, or, how can we, make distinctions about which actions/reactions are acts of so-called resilience and which are acts of resistance? Moreover, what constitutes this difference? How can we find the pressure points that, if targeted, might transform a configuration of subjectivity designed to capitulate to what Foucault called power-over (potestas) into a site from which that subject has the capacity to express power-to (potentia)—a power to reshape not only itself but also the broader social and political field (Braidotti 1994; 2012)?

I am engaging here with intrastitial affective spaces as constitutive and constructive of power relations in order to analyze evolving neoliberal diagrams
and to remap new cartographies of power (Braidotti 2012) of what I call intensive resistances. More specifically, my main interest is to interrogate critically three contemporary imperatives that describe and prescribe the actions of contemporary neoliberal agents: the imperative of social resilience, social sustainability, and social innovation. I argue that resilience, sustainability, and innovation can be thought of as “schizoid” (Deleuze 1983; 1988) modes of expressing what Deleuze calls “the cliché” (Deleuze 2004, 57) as “the new” (Deleuze 1994, vii)—that is, that these are variously modulated expressions of the authority of the same masquerading as difference. The indirect effect of this short-circuiting is that any actual possibility of resistance qua social transformation is rendered imperceptible and un-actualizable. I am interested in connecting this tension to the work of Deleuze, who, though he takes a more posthumanist approach than Foucault in his analysis of power relations, also engages with precisely this dilemma: can, or, how can, the individual subject composed by the neoliberal diagram be the site from which that dividuated mode of subjectivity, as well as the broader neoliberal structure, be challenged? If, in Deleuze, the subject is always an assemblage of forces and flows, a material, mediated, and modulated entity, a singular multiplicity, what does it mean for that subject to transduce the always-already into something that is not-yet? And how does this transformation in turn exceed the individual subject and also shift the social and political diagram?

Many of the responses to the problems of social sustainability in the context of a neoliberal governmentality classified under the overlapping terms of social resilience and social innovation are sustainable primarily in the sense that they reproduce, or sustain, dominant modes of existence—that is, they reproduce modes of so-called collective action by “dividualized” (Deleuze 1992) agents who, in expressing their supposed agency, reciprocally reinforce a realm in which collective responsibility is further individualized. This neoliberal diagram of power captures creative energies in service of the capitalist status quo. As I proceed, I want to draw out the double-edged meaning of social resilience (with its aim of resisting external change) and social innovation (with its aim to bring change about) in the context of social sustainability by analyzing the diagram of what these discourses seek to withstand (resilience), to create (innovation), and to maintain (sustainability). I ask: (1) How can critical analyses of this diagram of power help us to defragment, reformat, and recreate responsive and resistant cartographies? (2) Why is it vital that we understand resistance to neoliberal diagrams in intensive, matter-mediated-modulated, non-binary modes?
Self-Styling in the Shanty Town: Social Resilience, Social Sustainability, and Social Innovation

Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt. It is true that capitalism has retained as a constant the extreme poverty of three quarters of humanity, too poor for debt, too numerous for confinement: control will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers but with the explorations within shanty towns or ghettos.

—Gilles Deleuze (1992, 6–7)

To illustrate these ideas more concretely, I’d like to return to California, and revisit more specifically a few of the case studies upon which van der Haak focuses in her exploration of the popular response to the financial crisis. In the opening few scenes, van der Haak encounters L.A. firefighters collecting money for the fire department from cars stopped at an intersection. When asked why they’re in need of money, one of the firefighters describes the cutbacks to the fire department. Shocked by hearing this news of cutbacks to what she considers one of the most essential emergency services provided by a local government, van der Haak interviews Wendy Greuel, city controller (and mayoral candidate), who describes the depth of the debt problem including L.A. County’s half-billion dollar deficit, their non-existent emergency reserve fund, and the extent of the debt crisis beyond the city, the state, and the country as a whole. Upon describing the severity of the problem, she warns, as if anticipating what van der Haak might come to observe in her interaction with people living through the crisis, “we can be eternally optimistic, but if optimism is blinding you then this is a revolving-door problem.”

In the next scene, Roslyn Scheuerman, a social worker with the New Beginnings Safe Parking Program goes knocking “door-to-door” on the RV, bus, and car windows of people who have lost their homes to the banks—people whose former occupations include the self-described “former software engineer and CEO of a major .com” as well as “Dan Rather’s former editor.” Although she maintains a sunny disposition, the social worker admits that some of the people who have lost their jobs and are living out of their cars are “very depressed.” When van der Haak asks her, “Don’t you think the city government should be taking care of these people?” she responds by saying that she “[doesn’t] think it’s up to the government” because “the government doesn’t
have money.” Instead, she thinks that “it’s going to take more people being part of the solution” and doing some “creative thinking.”

The next series of scenes features interviews with a young family—a college-educated woman who lost her job as a hotel receptionist and a college-educated man who lost his job as an electrician, who are living out of an RV with their two young boys. These interviews reveal a similar reluctance to hold any level of government responsible for their loss of employment and the loss of their home. We see the family driving to a parking lot that is part of the Safe Parking Program as the young mother explains how shocked she is that in California, the seventh largest economy in the world, she sees so many people living in their cars or RVs. When asked whether she’s angry with somebody for ending up like this, she says she “can’t be mad at anybody” because the employers who let them go “were really nice.” And they “can’t really blame themselves” because, despite “[trying] their best,” they couldn’t manage to accumulate enough savings to continue to make ends meet after they lost their jobs. She observes that she sees class divisions widening—that the people without money are doing worse and becoming more desperate while the people with money are doing better—and also remarks that “the middle rung is gone.” Looking hesitantly at her partner, she cautiously ventures what he might perceive to be a radical remark when she says, “in history this is never good.” When van der Haak asks about her biggest fear, the young mother tearfully confides that she is afraid that her kids will be embarrassed about their family situation in front of other kids at school and ashamed of their parents if they’re still living “this way” when they are old enough to realize it. The young father responds to the question, and to her admission of fear, by saying, in contrast, that he “doesn’t look at life as fears” but rather as “challenges.” The next morning we see him riding his bike to The Jobs Club, a not-for-profit that teaches people who are out of work how to write resumes and provides Internet access for online job searches. He goes every day, despite the fact that, unlike the people to whom the service is targeted, he has a college degree, previous job experience, and job search skills.²

The Safe Parking Program and the Jobs Club are examples of the kind of social services that help people to be “resilient” in the face of an economic crisis by mitigating the effects of homelessness and unemployment for those

---

² In a later scene in California Dreaming we see a job fair sponsored by the Bank of America. When asked about people’s reaction to this job fair in an interview, van der Haak remarked that “people did not find anything strange here. Nobody blamed the banks. Nobody blamed anyone but themselves” (2010b).
already in desperate situations. In the documentary’s second part, van der Haak chronicles some programs that express the kind of “creative thinking” to which the social worker refers—programs that might look like they are less about surviving resiliently after-the-fact but more about innovating pre-emptively to build resilience not only for past and present but also future crises. Fallen Fruit, a public fruit-picking project in L.A., is one such project. Part performance art project, part environmental activist endeavour, and part social service, Fallen Fruit was founded by artists David Burns, Austin Young, and Matias Viegener, who noticed the abundance of fruit growing on public property around the city; taking advantage of the lack of a law regarding picking fruit growing on public land or reachable from a public sidewalk, they began to map the public fruit trees and bushes in the city in 2004.

David Burns of the Fallen Fruit collective notes that since the financial crisis people have become more interested in experiences than in acquiring objects, and that there is a greater sense of connectedness. Indeed, he shows the properties of some neighbours who have planted extra vegetables on the public property just beyond their sidewalks for public consumption. Noting that one-third of the people in L.A. do not have work, and that he was himself a university instructor for sixteen years but the California public university system recently cut his position, he explains that the public fruit program helped him find new work and job security and, simultaneously, helps other people find food security by having increased access to free local produce, including a range of citrus such as lemons, tangerines, naval oranges, blood oranges, grapefruit, as well as dragon fruit, tomatillos, tomatoes, peaches, broccoli, and artichokes.

Programs such as Fallen Fruit have taken root in other cities, including New York, Boston (Boston Area Gleaners), Berkeley, Santa Clara, Oakland (Forage Oakland), Philadelphia (The Philadelphia Orchard Project), Portland (The Portland Fruit Tree Project and Urban Edibles), San Francisco (Guerrilla Grafters), Atlanta (Concrete Jungle), Vancouver (Vancouver Fruit Tree Project), Hamilton (Hamilton Fruit Tree Project), and Toronto (Not Far from the Tree) (Eaton 2009). Toronto’s Not Far From the Tree, for example, maps fruit trees that property owners have offered to have picked and organizes volunteers to pick the fruit, which is then distributed in thirds: one-third to fruit tree owners, one-third to fruit pickers, and one-third to neighbourhood food banks, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters. The grassroots experiment in environmental and social sustainability started by Laura Reinsborough in 2008 has grown into an organization that in 2010 had mapped 228 fruit-bearing trees and bushes and hand-picked almost twenty thousand pounds of fruit in downtown Toronto. Not Far From the Tree’s harvest includes fruits as diverse
as cherries, apricots, plums, grapes, elderberries, pears, and apples. The organization’s mandate, to “put Toronto’s fruit to good use by picking and sharing the bounty,” is one example of an emerging environmentally sustainable social innovation sprouting up in cities worldwide (Not Far From the Tree 2011).

In a discussion paper presented at a design philosophy workshop at the Parsons New School for Design, leading theorist of design for social innovation Ezio Manzini, together with Virginia Tassarini, listed a range of initiatives similar to Not Far From the Tree that they consider examples of social innovation, defined broadly as “new ideas that work in meeting social goals” (Mulgan 2007, 9). Many of these actions may also be described as examples of social resilience or social sustainability and include initiatives such as:

- groups of families sharing services to reduce economic and environmental costs, while also improving neighbourhoods; new forms of social interchange and mutual help (such as time banks); systems of mobility that present alternatives to the use of individual cars (from car-sharing and car pooling to the rediscovery of bicycles); the development of productive activities based on local resources and skills that are linked into wider global networks (e.g., certain products of a specific place, or the fair and direct trade networks between producers and consumers established around the globe). The lists could continue, touching on every area of daily life and emerging all over the world. (Manzini and Tassarini 2012, 1)

Although I do not want to suggest that such practices of social innovation are all the same, nor that they are necessarily problematic in either their analyses of critical issues or their efforts to address them, I do want to suggest that these initiatives may unwittingly recreate the issues they seek to address. Are they indeed innovative, sustainable, or resilient while continuing to operate within the current dominant paradigm, or do they contribute to changing the broader social and economic structures that led to the need for their intervention? What broader systemic problems might these examples of social resilience, sustainability, and innovation inadvertently help to sustain? And despite—or perhaps even because of their existence—what broader diagrams of power are not resisted or transformed at all? In other words, when Manzini and Tassarini highlight that a main feature of “creative communities” and “the promising initiatives they generate” is that “they have grown out of problems posed by contemporary life,” we must ask whether the “sustainable solutions” they generate are sustainable in that they are merely adaptive to the new normal,
functioning as a temporary “patch,” as a downloading onto citizens the responsibility for problems that exist at scales beyond their scope, or whether they also call into question the root mechanisms that give rise to the creation of these problems (2012, 4). It seems to me that there is a fine line between sustainable social innovation as an adaptive behaviour that, in a sense, enables a system to continue to break down by putting temporary patches on inevitable, long-term, systemic problems and sustainable social innovation that questions, challenges, and resists the kinds of social, political, and economic changes that contribute to systemic breakdown in the first instance.

Moreover, despite Manzini and Tassarini’s claim that one of the characteristics of social innovation initiatives is that “citizens, associations, enterprises and local governments that conceive and set up new solutions” do so “by choice,” it is imperative to ask (and difficult to discern) what constitutes choice in many of the situations in which people find themselves today (2012, 4). As we see in many of van der Haak’s interviews with creative citizens, associations, and enterprises in *California Dreaming*, it is questionable whether people—whether they are engaging in activities focused on “survival” or “innovation”—have any significant choice at all (that is, choice powerful enough to significantly change their situation). Rather, despite the fact that we live a neoliberal diagram that perpetuates the myth that people are individual free agents that choose their failures and successes, when individuals find themselves in a situation in which they have no choice, it is framed, first of all, as the fault of the individual (or the culmination of poor previous choices), and, second, it is presented to the individual as just another fork in the road where choices must be made. In other words, even when faced with no real choices, the individual is expected to play into the pretense of choice and agency by, for instance, “choosing” to have a positive attitude, trying (even if in vain) to do something about the situation. This so-called choice, then, exists within a context in which individuals’ choices are sharply delimited. So strong is the imperative to be enterprising that no matter the real lack of choices, options, powers, and capacities, it is incumbent upon a good subject to participate in the fiction of actively making choices within what is in fact a diagrammatic blockade of agency. An individual is effectively expected to express freedom and agency within a context in which he/she has no access to power. Even if there is nothing that can be done to improve the situation, at the very least it is incumbent upon individuals to “stay positive,” remain “optimistic,” and continue to smile as they continue to strive. A person who pursues the alternative route—whether by admitting defeat, refusing to participate, complaining, or criticizing the overriding structure—risks being seen as a “bad
subject,” a “killjoy” (Ahmed 2010), as a threat to the system of enterprising activity, obligatory positive affect, and endless flexibility and adaptability.

The current expansion of the discourse of sustainability to include terms like resilience and innovation is reflective of the ways in which individuals and organizations are required to realign their orientations toward the mitigation of past, present, potential, and predetermined (in other words, all-pervasive) risks. The move from the rhetoric of sustainability toward the rhetoric of resilience reflects the shift in emphasis from looking for ways to keep up the status quo toward looking for ways to absorb potential shocks (as another way of maintaining the status quo), while the move from speaking about sustainability toward speaking about innovation uses creativity as a means of mitigating change (and quite possibly also maintaining the status quo). As shock-absorbing, status quo-maintaining, or forward-thinking as resilience, sustainability, and innovation, respectively, may sound, all three terms reflect the move from a proactive to a reactive subject position—one that may certainly be flexible, hardy, or creative, but not necessarily critical, let alone a threat to the established order of things.

Indeed, as critics of the concepts of social resilience, resilience thinking, and resilience policy and activism have recently pointed out, the application of the notion of resilience to the social sphere—a notion originally used to describe ecological systems—has “important limits” (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 475). First, the practical relevance of the term is questionable due to the lack of clear distinction between the descriptive aspects or “specifications of what is the case” and normative aspects or “prescriptions of what ought to be the case or is desirable as such” (Brand and Jax 2007, 22). In addition to the problems associated with such normative claims, there is also an epistemological issue. Although the term resilience has the advantage of being a more holistic and complex approach to studying socioecological change (such as anthropogenic climate change) by “emphasiz[ing] feedback dynamics between social and ecological systems,” the extension of the term resilience from the ecological to the social realm “problematically assum[es] that social and ecological system dynamics” function in similar ways (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 475). As a result, the normative and epistemological limitations of the concept of social resilience does not account for the ways in which “power and competing value systems” are integral (rather than external) to social systems; nor does it account (nor allow) for social transformation in any significant sense (ibid.). Indeed, the term resilience as used by the social resilience proponents focuses more on “accommodating” changing conditions and new risks rather critiquing their root causes or imagining and acting upon alternatives (O’Brien 2012). Resilience thinking reproduces an inadequacy...
common to a number of other approaches to risk science—namely, resilience theories “overemphasize” the role of “physical shocks” and “undertheorize” the importance of “political economic factors” in understanding “vulnerability” (Watts qtd. in Cote and Nightingale 2012, 478). This underlying assumption that shock is “natural” or “given” is problematic because it obscures the need to ask critical questions about power and to “unpack normative questions such as ‘resilience of what?’ and ‘for whom?’” (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 479).

Similarly, Danny MacKinnon and Kate Driscoll Derickson argue that resilience is a conservative concept when applied to social relations. Identifying it as the latest in a “long line of naturalistic metaphors” applied to the social sciences, and especially to cities and regions, the concept of resilience takes for granted and, in effect, naturalizes rather than problematizes resilience as a “common project” as well as existing social structures and relations that are to be mobilized in its pursuit (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 259). The rhetoric of resilience is thus fundamentally “anti-political” in the sense that it glosses over pre-existing social inequalities and “the role of the state and politics” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 259). Resilience may sound like a positive quality “imbued with notions of self-reliance and triumph over adversity” but, as MacKinnon and Derickson observe, this assumption overlooks its “affinities with neoliberal thinking” (2012, 259) that privileges market rationalities over social needs and requires that individuals and communities “constantly remake themselves in a manner that suits the fickle whims of capital with limited support from the state” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 263).

Drawing from the work of Donna Haraway, Muriel Cote and Andrea Nightingale point out that resilience as a contemporary concept cannot be “seen from nowhere” but must be seen as a concept “nested” within “political and social processes that give rise to the production and reproduction” of systems of power that operate “in and through” socioenvironmental systems (Haraway qtd. in Cote and Nightingale 2012, 481). To this end, they suggest an “engagement with social theories about structure/agency as a way to formulate questions that were previously invisible from a systems theory standpoint” (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 481). This kind of “situated resilience approach” means that

3 On the one hand, as Walker and Cooper note, “resilience” has become “a pervasive idiom of global governance”—a term flexible enough to be applied to the realm of “high finance, defence and urban infrastructure” (qtd. in MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 254). On the other hand, MacKinnon and Derickson note that “resilience” is also often invoked by “progressive activists and movements,” including those critical of capitalism. It is due to the term’s more widespread use not only in the rhetoric of adaptive governance but also by activists themselves that they suggest there is a need for “critical appraisal” of the term itself as well as “the politics it animates” (2012, 254).
we must take context into account and ask, for instance, “Does the resilience of some livelihoods result in the vulnerability of others? Do specific social institutional processes that encourage social inequalities have implications for the resilience of these groups?” Or, “resilience for whom and at what cost to which others?” (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 485).

The rhetoric of resilience is often promoted by agents outside of local communities who are thought to have expert knowledge in spheres such as national security, financial management, emergency planning, public health, economic development, and urban planning, design, and policy making (Walker and Cooper 2011). These outside experts routinely impose “top-down” solutions that “place the onus on individuals, communities and places to become more resilient and adaptable to a range of external threats” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 254) while the cause of these threats themselves remain unquestioned, accepted, and even expected. This results in misplaced emphasis on the resilience of the “local” scale at the feet of individual citizens who have what Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell call “responsibility without power” (qtd. in MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 255). Citizens at the local level are expected to mobilize their own assets and resources to solve problems that unfold primarily at the scale of global “capitalist social relations” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 253). This top-down process of “responsibilization” involves citizens and communities in their own risk management: it downloads responsibility to individuals by promoting “greater community self-reliance and empowerment,” often in the form of voluntarism or “community activism” while simultaneously shrinking the responsibilities, capacities, and powers of the state and treating capitalism in its current configuration as if it were a “given” or even “natural” external force (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Resilience strategies may make localities feel like they are empowered; however, by ignoring broader issues, such as the imposition of global market forces and the absence of social supports that are causing adversity and limiting opportunity in local communities in the first place, local resilience initiatives may inadvertently sustain and even perpetuate policies that perpetuate the problems to which localities are then forced to respond.

As MacKinnon and Derickson point out, “capitalism is itself highly resilient at a systemic level” through its constant “reinvention and restructuring” in the face of demise (2012, 261). The paradox, of course, is that the resilience of the capitalist system is premised upon the making-vulnerable of local and regional economies (and ecologies): “The long-term success of capitalism is predicated upon the periodic undermining of resilience of certain local and regional economies, which are vulnerable to capital flight and crisis in
the face of competition from other places offering more profitable investment opportunities” (Smith qtd. in MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 261).

MacKinnon and Derickson argue that the rhetoric of resilience in economic development discussions is the current iteration of the “creative class” and “creative cities” craze of the mid-2000s (Florida 2002; 2008; MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 260). They point out that, much like the creative class and creative cities narratives, resilience is a “mobilizing discourse” that presents individuals, organizations, and communities with the “imperative [to continually adapt] to the challenges of an increasingly turbulent environment” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 260). Walker et al. point out, however, that there is a major difference between “resilience” and “transformation” as advocated approaches to crisis (2004); however, it can sometimes be difficult to discern between initiatives that are adaptive behaviours that take a given system of power for granted and the initiatives that question the root causes of the distributions of power and attempt to agitate and activate against them. Unlike the creative cities narrative, however, which was criticized for advocating policy making that served the interests of the privileged creative class, resilience narratives appear to provide “more socially inclusive” scripts that require the engagement of all community members (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 260). Even then, there are a number of critical questions that individuals and communities must ask prior to pursuing apparently resilient policies and socially innovative solutions. These questions might include: Do these initiatives shift the diagram of power? Or does the diagram become even more entrenched through what looks like a state of flux? More specifically, if social resilience activities focus on solving problems at the local level, do corporations operating at a global scale continue to benefit by being able to reap profits while avoiding having to pay for problems? Do governments benefit by being able to continue to ignore the needs of people, having off-loaded this responsibility to individuals, neighbourhoods, and not-for-profit organizations? Does the “freedom” of the enterprising subject circumscribed by creating DIY solutions in discourses of social resilience take the place of what Hannah Arendt described as a “free” citizen engaged in political processes such as policy making or, conversely, in protest against problematic policies?

Indeed, the healthy sceptic of resilience discourses has good reason to answer these question by observing, for example, that all too often some parties “win” more than others; that those asked to share wealth and resources are all too often not those in position to accumulate wealth; and that those who move from ownership to usership models routinely become parts of an apparatus that concentrates ownership in the hands of a decreasing few while accelerating the
“mechanics of dispossession” for the majority (Tiessen 2012). The issue of ownership and control over what is shared is a key factor that is overlooked in discourses of agency in which people are asked to “take ownership” of problems that are, for better or for worse, not really in their control and to “take responsibility” in instances in which they have little if any power.

Foucault and Deleuze’s Neoliberal Diagrams: Producing Points of Resistance

The diagram is no longer an auditory or visual archive but a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field … a map of relations between forces, a map of destiny, or intensity … the cause of concrete assemblages that execute its relations; and these relations take place “not above” but within the very tissue of the assemblages they produce.

—Gilles Deleuze (1992, 34, 37)

Foucault’s late work and Deleuze’s work on Foucault focus intensely on the situatedness of the subject in a neoliberal diagram of power and endeavour to identify possibilities for subjective modes of resistance. For Foucault, the notion of the self as an “enterprise” expresses a neoliberal configuration of subjectivity that is simultaneously an individualized and individualizing locus of power (McNay 2009). Deleuze’s “dividual,” too, is both created by and recreates a neoliberal diagram of power (1992). As Foucault and Deleuze identify, a diagram of power, although it may present routes of greater and lesser resistance, neither determines nor forecloses any particular pattern or flow of power. In addition, subjects situated within any diagram may engage in practices that present very little resistance and that thus reinforce power’s existing configuration. Deleuze situates subjectivity as a key site of the production of power when he underscores that the “dividual” works as a point through which power operates.

Deleuze, writing with Guattari, situates his discussion of subjectivity within his process ontology. For Deleuze, subjectivity is a process of becoming, and a subject is never a stable entity. Deleuze and Guattari write about becoming as “no longer time that exists between two instants” but rather “the event that is a meanwhile” (2009, 158). The subject—always a subject “in becoming”—is an entity that exists both as an “already happened” and a “still
to come” (2009, 158). The subject, throughout Deleuze’s work, is a materially mediated and modulated entity. Subjectivity is material because subjects are always material instantiations—composed of matter. Their becoming is also a material process in both its actuality and virtuality. Subjectivity is also mediated because the forces and flows of materiality are mediations. Just as subjects are processes, becomings, unfoldings, and meanwhiles, so too are all of the materialities of which they are composed. This composition is always a mediation of materialities. And finally, subjectivity is modulated because the mediation of materialities is always produced by and productive of power relations. The diagram of power that materializes, mediates, and modulates the way in which subjects are composed is a diagram that composes subjects as “meanwhiles”—both as “having already happened” and as “still to come,” both as subject to “power over” and as subjects with a “power to.” The key to resisting the ways in which subjectivity is modulated by “power over” is to draw a “critical cartography” (Braidotti 2005) of shifting diagrams of power and to indicate what Deleuze called the possible “points of resistance”—points through which “power to” can be exercised in ways that transform the diagram and de-“dividualize” subjectivity as it is currently configured.

For a shift in a given configuration of power to occur, the process of resistance cannot, however, simply be an oppositional resistance to the diagram of power. As many critics point out, binary oppositions are reductive representations of complex situations and, in capitulating to false binaries, resistances framed as oppositions often serve simply to reproduce existing diagrams of power. In a diagram of power premised upon Deleuze’s notion of “modulation” as a form of control, resistance must instead be thought in intensive rather than extensive modes, as transformation rather than opposition, and as drawing new cartographies rather than reproducing cartographies of power as they currently exist. As Deleuze describes, what is needed for transformation to occur is the ability to locate the points through which power is produced and reproduced so that the pressure of intensive resistance can be applied and configurations can be shifted. If subjectivity is the “point through which power operates,” then, as I argue here, neoliberal subjectivity is a pressure point—a key site that, if paid attention to, called into question, and placed under scrutiny, is also capable of being reimagined. If subjectivity is a “point through which power operates,” then it is a point through which diagrams of power can be reconfigured. Deleuze’s notion of subjective agency is not a “dividualized” and thus inert site of the reproduction of neoliberal diagrams of power but rather an empowered notion of agency in that it emphasizes rather than overlooks the material, mediated, and modulated connections between the subject to the system, and the individual to the
context. Affect, then, is a crucial component of activating and deactivating agency. However, affect must not be thought in individual terms but as material, mediating, and modulating relation between subject and system, individual and context, the local and the outside.

Deleuze describes the move from disciplinary to control societies as a shift from a more static to a more dynamic and flexible shape-shifting diagram of power. If the “enclosures” of disciplinary societies are “molds, distinct castings,” then the “controls” of control societies are “a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to another, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point” (Deleuze 1992, 4). The neoliberal apparatus (and the institutional systems that feed it) works, according to Deleuze, by dividing individuals from one another and within themselves by constantly presenting the “brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within” (Deleuze 1992, 5). Deleuze describes the deformations and undulations to which “dividuals” in contemporary capitalist societies submit and warns that so-called positive affect can be used to serve as a mechanism of control, which recalls van der Haak’s documentary:

Many young people strangely boast of being “motivated”; they re-request apprenticeships and permanent training. It’s up to them to discover what they’re being made to serve, just as their elders discovered, not without difficulty, the telos of the disciplines. The coils of the serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill. (Deleuze 1992, 7)

Scholars such as Deleuze, and more recently Sara Ahmed (2010), Lauren Berlant (2011), and others, have also taken up the ways in which so-called positive affects such as “happiness” or “optimism” or, as Deleuze notes here, “motivation,” can seem liberating, but, under particular diagrams of power, such as those that emphasize enterprising notions of subjectivity, can in fact be oppressive. Affect, then, must be understood as part of the material condition, part of what is mediated, and modulated in the political economy of power. As these affect theorists underscore, the affective economy does not run alongside but is a critical part of the political economy, and the affective economy is managed using, in part, conceptual, rhetorical, and semantic modulations. It follows, then, that our critical understandings of contemporary capitalist political economy should be extended to include affective economies—the “promises of happiness” (Ahmed 2010), the “cruelties of optimism” (Berlant 2011), and the “boasting of being motivated” (Deleuze 1992, 7).
Using Deleuze’s conceptual schema, I suggest that social resilience, social innovation, and social sustainability are a set of social (and rhetorical) technologies produced by control societies for modulating political economies. Their rhetorics and their activities, their discourses and materialities, their actualities and virtualities are produced and are productive through a particular neoliberal diagram of power that “dividualizes” the subject, and trades in an economy of affects and materialities and, indeed, affects as materialities. Deleuze’s comments on “technologies” or “techniques” of various modalities of power are instructive here. For Deleuze, technology is always “social before it is technical”:

> And if the techniques—in the narrow sense of the word—are caught within the assemblages, this is because the assemblages themselves, with their techniques, are selected by the diagrams: for example, prison can have a marginal existence in sovereign societies (lettres de cachet) and exists as a mechanism only when a new diagram, the disciplinary diagram, makes it cross “the technical threshold.” (1992, 40)

These neoliberal diagrams of power function simultaneously as “always-already” displays of existing “relations between forces” and as the “still to come” or as “transmission[s] of particular points or features” (Deleuze 1992, 86). Existing diagrams of power thus produce the diagrams of power of tomorrow by transmitting features and prescribing what is possible. Notably, however, the diagram of power is not a fixed structure that merely reproduces its form but is rather a strategy that modulates possible reiteration “like a series of draws in a lottery, each one operating at random but under the extrinsic conditions laid down by the previous draw” (Deleuze 1992, 86).

The discourse of social resilience, social innovation, and social sustainability is thus more than mere rhetoric; it is also part of the production of practices that are always “material-discursive” assemblages (Barad 2007). These programs and initiatives and the rationale behind them belong to contemporary neoliberal governmentality that, under the pressure of international agenda setting organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, endeavour to bring about the kind of “rational economic” behaviour they desire by, as John Protevi argues in an interview with Manuel DeLanda and Torkild Thanem,

actively producing the social situations the model assumes:
normalization of behaviour by making people behave in individual self-interest (due to lack of social interaction/social security). The problem comes when people write about such
economics as if they were only a matter of assumptions and models rather than prods for concerted efforts to produce a social reality conforming to the model’s assumptions. (DeLanda, Protevi, and Thanem 2005, 73)

The discourse of social resilience, social sustainability, and social innovation can then be said to function as an “abstract machine” that, as Deleuze and Guattari describe, links “a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field” (1987, 7). The diagrammatic or abstract machine, as they point out, “does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 142).

What possibilities do such pre-emptions and preclusions leave for subjectivity as a site of power? How can oppressive affective and political economies be transformed in a system of power designed to appropriate resistance, sustainability, and innovation in order to perpetuate, reproduce, and even pre-empt shifts in the status quo? How might we stay attuned to the ways in which tools of resistance might themselves become systemically absorbed and resistant to transformation?

The documentary *California Dreaming* ends by focusing on a housing commune created by a group of thirty-somethings, including architect Laura Burkhalter. Although Swiss-born, Burkhalter epitomizes the kind of forward-thinking subject position van der Haak ascribes to Americans, but she also articulates a number of important critiques—even if tensions exist between the two narratives she articulates. One of the key ways in which she differentiates the communal living project we see in the film from the communes of the 1970s is precisely by suggesting that the contemporary commune is “less ideological” and “more practical.” Burkhalter also observes that the housing crisis “helped us out” by making plain that you “can’t depend on the system,” a system that, for example, builds cities for “cars, money, and power” rather than for people. She remarks that the “system has made us [citizens] believe we’re powerless, but we’re not—the system only exists because we take part in it.” She adds that the financial crisis has prompted people to ask themselves how they can become empowered and self-sufficient. The solution, she argues, first involves “daring to imagine” how a “good city” would operate and, second, “taking some action.”

For Burkhalter and the friends living together in an urban commune, “taking some action” involves living together and growing and sharing their own food. She finds that in a post-financial crisis world, creating communities
is more important for people across income levels and observes that they “need each other and depend on each other” and are “not as self-interested” now. When asked about whether the crisis represents a failure of the American Dream, Burkhalter replies that, although the “gold rush” may be over, the American Dream is bigger than that; the “American Dream has to do with freedom and self-expression,” which she argues has been caught up in materialistic self-expression and is currently being “redefined.” Perhaps “freedom,” she muses, is “freedom from the system” or maybe it’s “finding one’s own power.” She concludes by remarking that Americans are “very optimistic” and “very flexible”; they accept new identities and are experts at starting over and giving second chances.

Burkhalter’s critiques and proposals demonstrate the tensions inherent in the positioning of the subject in the neoliberal diagram of power. On the one hand, she makes the claim that the breakdown of the system demonstrates the ways in individuals have been systematically disempowered through the unequal distribution of resources. However, she credits this breakdown for reminding individuals of the agency that they have, suggesting this agency exists “outside of the system.” At the same time, she argues that the current system only exists “because we take part in it.” Burkhalter’s response seems to be that the crisis prompts the creation of alternative communities, but it remains unclear whether or how these alternative communities, in her view, represent or ought to represent any challenge, connection, or transformative role vis-à-vis “the system” she describes. Since such communities are intended to exist precisely as alternatives to the system, this leaves the question of their relationship to the larger system unresolved. Critics of neoliberalism have problematized the idea that individual purchasing decisions are political gestures because they remain premised upon individualism, channelling the expression of “free choice” via market logics. Does moving from a consumption-oriented toward a production-oriented social model present a shift away from a “dividualized” lifestyle politics?

Further, Burkhalter asserts that the American Dream, which has to do with “freedom” and “self-expression,” was caught up in “materialism” and “self-interest” before the crisis and is only now being “redefined” as “finding one’s own power,” being “optimistic,” “flexible,” finding new identities, and starting over. Although she acknowledges aspects of her own relatively privileged position as a well-educated person with a strong social network, one of the unacknowledged ironies is that she was able to purchase the property for the commune in part because it had been foreclosed upon and was being sold at a post-crash price. It follows, then, that her own resilient, sustainable, and innovative activities are dependent upon another person’s poor fortune in a
system that perpetuates power no matter how much Burkhalter wishes to be “free.” Finally, Burkhalter does not acknowledge that the ability to make the social shift she advocates (from self-interest and materialism toward community living and self-empowerment) depends heavily upon class position and relative material privilege. As a contrast to the people profiled earlier in the documentary who have little to no access to basic goods such as a place to live and food to eat, Burkhalter is clearly in a more empowered position to begin with. Does it not follow that the contemporary, flexible, optimistic subject that Burkhalter enacts is a result of the current configuration of power, a mode of its reiteration, a mode of its own resistance to change?

The Struggle for Subjectivity in the Face of Dividualization

The struggle for subjectivity presents itself, therefore, as the right to difference, variation and metamorphosis.

—Gilles Deleuze (1992, 29)

For Deleuze, the points through which power flows are the points through which power can be transformed. The configuration of subjects as “dividuals” is one such point in this diagram. Such a view of subjectivity—even in the context of the neoliberal diagram of power in which subjects are “dividuated”—means that subjects or “dividuals” are points qua material; subjects are products of mediated and modulated relations with the capacity not only to reproduce but also to fundamentally challenge contemporary rationalities “founded in the logic of the market and ‘enterprise culture’ and a dystopian vision of society” (Venn and Terranova 2009, 10). The non-oppositional, non-binaristic, but also non-resilient mode of intensive resistance is described by Venn and Terranova as the assertion of the possibility of new forms of sociality and ways of being constructed on the basis of a view of the human an essentially collaborative, convivial spiritual and historically located social being. This ontology is in solidarity with the view of life itself as grounded in the dynamic compossibility of all creatures. It follows that such a view is diametrically opposed to all ontologies founded on egocentric, self-interested, individualistic, atomized and abstract views of the human and of life generally. (10)
If, as Deleuze suggests, the “dividual” is a point through which power is co-produced and reproduced in the neoliberal diagram, what can this way of understanding power offer for a critical analysis of the relationship between subjectivity and systemic power? If power is produced both “from above” and “from below,” if the entire diagram is shot through with power, with subjects as a point through which power flows, then we must attend not only to community resilience as a “top-down” mandate of governmentality but also as a “bottom-up” activity of “community groups and environmental campaigns” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 257). Further, we must be attuned to the ways both top-down and bottom-up approaches might be co-opted and reshaped such that they begin operating as two expressions of a single diagram of power.

In his essay “Postscript on Societies of Control,” Deleuze describes the transformative potentialities that inhere in any diagram of power, including the neoliberal diagram. He argues that the diagram, “as the fixed form of a set of relations between forces, never exhausts force, which can enter into other relations and compositions” (1992, 89–90). Every diagram—shot through with forces—“presents particular features of resistance, such as ‘points, knots, or focuses’” that “make change possible” (ibid.). In this article, I have explored subjectivity as one such “point, knot, or focus” in the neoliberal diagram, and the way in which so-called positive and negative affects modulate imagined and actualized subjective capacities.

Deleuze goes on, in the same passage, to focus not only on subjectivity as a “point, knot, or focus” through which a particular diagram of power is reproduced or transformed, made more resilient or resisted, but also on the role of thinking and action that exceeds the existing diagram. He writes:

_The diagram stems from the outside_ but the outside does not merge with any diagram, and continues instead to “draw” new ones. In this way _the outside is always an opening on to a future: nothing ends, since nothing has begun, but everything is transformed_. In this sense … [the outside] presents itself as the possibility of “resistance”…. Moreover, the final word on power is that … power relations operate completely within the diagram, while _resistances necessarily operate in a direct relation with the outside from which the diagrams emerge_. This means that a social field offers more resistance than strategies, and _the thought of the outside is a thought of resistance_. (1992, 89–90, emphasis added)

What emerges as a crucial criterion for activities that resist reproducing neoliberal diagrams of power is whether particular approaches to community
resilience, innovation, or sustainability interrogate, challenge, or otherwise act upon processes of power that lie outside of their immediate zone of potential. This outside can be thought of as having three critical dimensions. Distinguishing characteristics of resilient versus resistant or transformative initiatives is their ability to: (1) challenge “dividualized” subjectivity by connecting to a yet unknown or imperceptible “outside”; (2) question the outside’s relationship to broader power structures; and (3) connect local initiatives to other initiatives across spatial and temporal scales.

New Weapons

There is no need to ask which is the toughest or most tolerable regime, for it’s within each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another…. There is not need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.

—Gilles Deleuze (1992, 4)

In this article, I have argued that the concepts of social resilience (as the capacity to resist change) and social innovation (as the capacity to change), though they seemingly occupy opposite poles of a “sustainability spectrum,” do not necessarily sustain anything other than prevailing systems of (neoliberal) power. This diagram of sustainability “dividualizes” and depoliticizes the subject by determining his/her agency in relation to structures and processes of power that demarcate the subject’s capacities and possibilities. Critics of contemporary narratives that are meant to address today’s social and environmental problems point out that while “adaptation” to the current situation is “clearly a necessary choice,” it is “only one of the numerous plausible options” (O’Brien 2012, 668). For critics like O’Brien, the idea of transformation is given too little attention within research and policy circles as a valid response to global environmental change. In one sense, this is not surprising since transformation often challenges the status quo, threatening those who benefit from current structures and systems (O’Brien 2012, 668).

As Paulo Freire (1970) pointed out in his work on education, the well-adapted human is one who does not problematize the changes that are being adapted to—a situation that conveniently suits the needs of the oppressors: “the more completely the majority adapt to the purposes which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of their right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe” (Freire 1970, 76 qtd. in O’Brien 2012, 669).
O’Brien argues that research that focuses on adaptation fails to engage with “the real ‘adaptive challenge’ of climate change.” In her view, adaptation research fails to question “the assumptions, beliefs, values, commitments, loyalties and interests that have created the structures, systems and behaviours that contribute to anthropogenic climate change, social vulnerability and other environmental problems in the first place” (ibid.).

One promising transformative approach is MacKinnon and Derickson’s suggestion that we adopt a politics of resourcefulness as an alternative to resilience (2012). Resourcefulness is meant “to problematize both the uneven distribution of material resources and the associated inability of disadvantaged groups and communities to access the levers of social change” (2012, 263). Indeed, if resilience, as Cote and Nightingale argue, shifts the focus “away from the quantitative ability of resources” and towards the scope of response options (2012, 478), then resourcefulness might be a strategic example of a form of resistance that can transform the ways in which structures of power are being materialized, mediated, and modulated. Developed with collaborators in the Govan Together project, resourcefulness as a strategy is characterized by incorporating an understanding of the “outside” that today’s popular narratives of resilience, sustainability, and innovation often take for granted and leave unchallenged. In response to the problem of resilience-oriented solutions—namely, that individuals and communities adapt to change from the bottom up while the top-down external structures of power maintain their dominance—MacKinnon and Derickson emphasize that resourcefulness begins with the “normative desirability of democratic self-determination as its fundamental starting point” (2012, 264). MacKinnon and Derickson argue that the concept of resourcefulness is both “more scale-specific” in attending to the need for capacity building in communities and more “outward-looking” by focusing on the importance of “fostering and maintaining relational links across space” (2012, 264). Resourcefulness is thus “spatially grounded in identifiable local spaces” but also “open and relational” in that it “recognizes the wider politics of justice that often underpin local activism” and “emphasizes the need for alliances between community groups and broader social movements” (ibid.). A politics of resourcefulness challenges the conservativism of resilience-based policies by focusing instead on fostering the “tools and capacities” for communities to find the “the discursive space and material time that sustained efforts at civic engagement and activism, as well as more radical campaigns, require” (2012, 265). MacKinnon and Derickson suggest that community groups can, in this way, form a part of “an expansive spatial politics” and connect to “broader campaigns and social movements that seek to challenge
neoliberal policy frameworks at the national and supranational scales” (2012, 266).

Researchers like MacKinnon and Derickson note that the “the burgeoning sphere of action” established by contemporary narratives of “social resilience” and “social innovation” tends to operate according to a kind of “inclusive localism that is largely apolitical and pragmatic in character” (2012, 258). In the face of the apolitical characteristics of these status quo sustaining social movements it seems to me that different, more globally minded (even if locally rooted) and more politically engaged (even if pragmatic and practical) tactics are necessary. Communities wishing to develop transformative strategies with which to challenge neoliberal configurations of power and their reproduction through “dividualized” modes of subjectivity and control could begin the journey out of the diagram by: (1) interrogating their complicity with the ubiquitous diagram of power of which they are an expression, a diagram of power that more often than not grows stronger by being confronted directly (rather than by being sidestepped obliquely); (2) re-imagining the human subject as being connected to and dependent on, rather than “dividualized” from, others; and (3) extending their vision for change beyond not only the local and the present, but also beyond the “human” and beyond the “social,” by pursuing new epistemological and ontological trajectories adequate not only to the problems of today but to the challenges of future generations.
Works Cited


