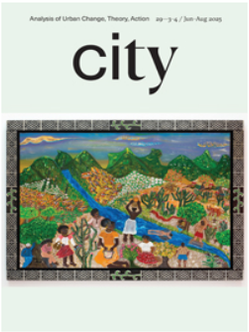

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Towards a crisis *of* resilience? Eight takes on a troubling concept

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Framed by the contradictory tonalities of United Nations (UN) discourse, the paper argues that the global governance concept of resilience is being drawn into the very crises it seeks to mitigate, pointing to a possible crisis of resilience as a master concept for governing the Risk Society. Through a wide-ranging interdisciplinary review, the paper therefore reconsiders the utility of the concept in addressing anthropocenic crises, and potential strategies for addressing the cognitive dissonance evoked by the UN's crisis discourse. It elicits three mainstream and five critical strategies for the study and practice of resilience. In synthesising these strategies, it provides conceptual clarification, highlights multiple grounds from which the crisis might be addressed, and seeks to inform future urban research and engagement with evolving theories and practices of resilience.

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Keywords **resilience, crisis, irresilience, United Nations, dialectical**

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Introduction

Over the past 30 years, 'resilience' has become a leading crisis-governance concept. Co-opted from natural science, it is concerned with the ability of individuals, institutions, systems and places to absorb, withstand, adapt, bounce-back/forwards and transform in a world of chronic instabilities and escalating disasters. The term has become ubiquitous and a key governance concept for the Anthropocene (Wakefield, Chandler, and Grove 2022, 392). It informs discussion of 'almost every physical phenomenon on the planet' (Neocleous 2013, 58). Climate and ecological emergencies are its central concerns, but resilience further encompasses military-security, economic, social and political systems (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 256–7). It has become pervasive in research on responses to escalating adversity, informing policy at all levels of public and corporate governance.

Resilience succeeds as a crisis-governance concept because of its fluidity and openness to interpretation (Cox, Grove, and Barnett 2022, 296). This fluidity makes it hard to oppose, evoking vaguely progressive associations, much like 'sustainability', 'inclusion', 'empowerment' and 'diversity' (Kaika 2017). However, post-COVID it appears to be increasingly stymied by the crises of governability that it is supposed to mitigate (Chandler 2019). Evidence for this proposition is found in United Nations (UN) discourses on the post-pandemic urban governance of resilience, analysed below (e.g. UN-Habitat 2022).

As urbanisation continues, resilience has become strongly oriented towards city, place and community. The UN, for example, makes urban resilience a central plank of its vision for building back 'differently' from the pandemic (e.g. UN-Habitat 2022). However, recent UN publications suggest that the conditions required for urban resilience are eroding. Progressivist prescriptions for resilience are interwoven with dire warnings about the iniquitous and unsustainable trajectories of urban development. UN messaging, simultaneously championing resilience, and depicting a brutal post-pandemic capitalism that sucks the life from it, appears contradictory and discordant, bringing the crisis of resilience into the public domain and re-politicising it. It suggests that the capacity of resilience to synthesise diverse stakeholder interests is corroding, and that in global urban policy, the concept evokes a sense of incipient crisis. The significance of the UN in this debate is two-fold. First, it is a major global facilitator of urban resilience planning, for example through its urban resilience hub and urban resilience profiling tool (UN-Habitat 2018). It is significant secondly for its representation of values such as cooperation, peace and equity. The dissonance in its discourse, and the realities of urban resilience that it describes, suggest that its interpenetrating objectives—resilience underpinned by social justice—are becoming unrealisable. The incipient crisis of urban resilience leads us to reconsider resources for re-reading and critiquing the concept. Stimulated by the cognitive dissonance induced by our reading of the UN's shifting discourse, the latter part of the paper explores critical resources for interrogating the concept. The paper proposes a new interdisciplinary synthesis and brings to the surface five critical strategies for thinking about and acting with and against resilience.

The discussion is organised into three main sections. The first explores three mainstream conceptions of resilience, influential in urban policy and planning.

These are, respectively, the reactionary, neoliberal and designerly synthetic approaches. The second section discusses ways in which the concept of resilience can be seen as embroiled in crisis, using recent developments in UN discourse as a practical example. We locate the incipient crisis of resilience in the inability of the UN to sustain a synthesis of competing perspectives. The third section discusses five critical responses to the postulated crisis of resilience. Two, the critique of resilience (repudiation) and critical resilience (appropriation) are well established. We derive three additional responses. These are sub-texts in the literature and reflect critical urban practices in public policy and civil society. They are 'boundary making', 'survival' and 'irresilience'. The 'boundary making' perspective refers to the isolation of 'resilience' by illustrating its limits and revealing worlds outside it. Reconceiving resilience in the language of 'survival' radicalises the concept and politicises the question of what is at stake for our species. Irresilience inverts resilience to reflect on the ways in which crises are manufactured, often by the very actors who champion the concept (Davies and Arrieta 2024). We suggest that made explicit, these critical perspectives provide a resource that scholar-activists and sceptical policy makers can employ tactically in seeking to work 'in and against' urban resilience planning and policy. The interdisciplinary synthesis in Table 1 is presented as a resource for navigating a ubiquitous but ever-troubling concept-in-action.

Table 1: Eight ways of (re)thinking 'resilience'.

	Perspective	Mechanism/ Strategy	Example
Mainstream	Reactionary	Cultural nostalgia	'Binmenism'—school of hard knocks (Hancox 2022).
	Neoliberal	Responsibilisation	Arts organisations that failed to survive austerity were not resilient (Newsinger and Serafini 2021).
	Designerly	Network Governance	Greater Miami and the Beaches (Cox, Grove, and Barnett 2022)
Critical	Boundary making	Isolation	*Urbicide*: South Florida Islands project (Wakefield 2022) *Urb-utopia*: Universal public affluence (Davis 2010)
	Critique *of* Resilience	Repudiation	UNDP resilience programme in São Tomé and Príncipe as 'dehumanizing' (Mikulewicz 2019).
	Critical Resilience	Appropriation	Miami Climate Alliance: 'Housing Justice is Climate Justice' (Cox, Kevin, and Barnett 2022).
	Survival	Radicalisation	Extinction Rebellion: 'Unite to Survive'.
	Manufactured Irresilience	Inversion	Irresilience overflows resilience. Metabolic rift and destructive dialectics drive irresilience, e.g. 'carbon bombs' (Foster 1999; Kühne et al. 2022).

Three mainstream perspectives on resilience

Resilience has precise scientific meanings but is also a colloquialism. It's journey to prominence as a crisis-governance concept can be traced to the 1970s, emerging in paradigmatic form from the rethinking of modernity associated particularly with Beck (1992) and Giddens (1994). The essence of Beck's argument was that the industrial societies and sciences of first modernity produce accelerating complex and incalculable risks, confronted in second modernity not through structural class conflict between capital and labour, but by problem-solving individuals and networks. Today's understandings of resilience as a governance concept are anchored in similar presuppositions; capital and class are discarded, while escalating risk is naturalised or taken for granted. Individuals and organisations are compelled to navigate a continuous stream of threats: an experience that can be 'self-actualising' for Giddens' self-starting and self-governing individuals (1994, 192), or result in 'insidious forms of a modernized barbarism' (Beck 1992, 101). Reflexive modernisation thereby deflects attention from the tangible causes of escalating risk, towards complex adaptive systems thinking that focuses on system maintenance, recovery or adaptivity.

Instead of asking what kind of transformations would be required to mitigate risk production, mainstream perspectives on resilience tend to naturalise it (Amirzadeh, Sobhaninia, and Sharifi 2022, 4). For example, an influential management studies editorial argued that disasters 'are triggered by improbable events the causes of which are not well understood' (van der Vegt et al. 2015, 972). This complexification encapsulates the ontology of mainstream resilience planning. Escalating 'risk' is taken for granted, or reified, while 'resilience' is cast as a response to the growing probability that acute and chronic crisis events will manifest in the real world. The result is a symbiotic hierarchy of concepts where 'risk' demands 'resilience'. The critique of this framing of risk, as it translates into mainstream urban resilience planning, is that it lacks an underlying crisis theory and forecloses radical possibilities for reducing risk, remediation and repair (Davies and Arrieta 2024).

This thinking penetrated deeply into the social sciences and the worlds of governance and public policy, especially in the US-European 'third way' period (Davies 2011). It continues to inspire international organisations, like the United Nations, driving resilience as a global urban policy agenda (see discussion below). As a mainstream crisis-governance concept, 'resilience' has at least three main strands reflected in reactionary, neoliberal and designerly approaches. The first, associated with the radicalised right, is reactionary nostalgia for character-building struggles. In its crusade against COVID lockdowns, vaccines and masking, for example, the American right invoked survival-of-the-fittest principles (Rubin and Wilson 2021). The notion that 'things were worse, therefore they were better' is a key theme in the culture warrior's castigation of weakness. Hancox (2022) memorably called the British expression of this tendency 'Binmenism', capturing the reactionary's sense of nostalgia for grit and hard graft in tough times. This ideology informs 'anti-woke' politics, which denies structural inequality and oppression and regards suffering either as self-inflicted or as character-building. Cities are by no means immune to this

form of reaction, expressed by 'populist' figures such as former mayors Rob Ford (Toronto) and Dave Bronson (Anchorage) (Kiss, Perrella, and Spicer 2020). Reactionary discourses are not always couched in the language of resilience, but there are obvious affinities.

The second strand in mainstream resilience thinking is the neoliberal approach, which overlaps or contradicts the reactionary outlook depending on its relationship with the ideology of 'globalisation'. This advocates economic discipline, responsibilisation and personal or organisational entrepreneurship in the face of economic, social and climatic-ecological shocks (Joseph 2013). Athens (Greece), for example, suffered the most draconian and prolonged austerity regime in Europe. Its mayor endorsed doctrines of self-reliance (Chorianopoulos and Tselepi 2020, 45), and the city became an early signatory to the Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities Programme. As a professed antidote to austerity, its boosterish 'green' and 'cultural' resilience strategy prioritised the commercial revitalisation of historic squares (City of Athens 2014), a controversial and conflictual approach. The concept is equally influential in the business world. For example, the World Economic Forum (2022, 3) argued that the 'capacity to anticipate and adapt rather than simply react will increasingly be a competitive advantage in a future defined by myriad risks'. Moss-Kanter (The Economic Times 2013) encapsulated this outlook: 'The difference between winners and losers is how they handle losing. … no one can completely avoid troubles and potential pitfalls are everywhere, so the real skill is the resilience to climb out of the hole and bounce back'. This idea of corporate resilience conjures up the adaptive organisation as the means of maintaining competitiveness and market share in a turbulent world.

Cox, Grove and Barnett (2022, 392) thirdly distinguish 'designerly synthesis', what they call an eco-cybernetic approach mobilising a wide range of stakeholder resources in a city and directing them towards new agendas and solutions. Here, 'large-scale ecological and technical infrastructures work together with … the poor and vulnerable' to constitute an 'adaptive urban network' (Wakefield 2022, 922). Cox, Grove and Barnett show how these approaches are neither straightforwardly appropriated to neoliberalism, nor capable of driving the critique of iniquitous urban development. They discuss the Greater Miami and the Beaches planning process, one of the 100 Resilient Cities projects sponsored by Rockefeller until the programme was phased out in 2019. They argue that 100RC was closed precisely because it was 'not neoliberal enough' (Cox, Grove and Barnett 2022, 295). Building on this theme, Wakefield, Chandler, and Grove (2022, 400) conclude that rather than being a straightforward continuation of neoliberalism, urban resilience planning envisions the construction of inclusive networks capable of responding to new risk-related problems. This 'designerly' approach dovetails with collaborative or partnership-based urban governance (Davies 2011) where state, market and civil society actors are exhorted to contribute towards shaping collective problematisations and solutions.

The next part of the article shows how this 'progressivist' approach to resilience is becoming mired in contradictions. We argue specifically that contradictory UN discourses herald the potential exhaustion of designerly synthesis as a methodology for global urban resilience planning. The following

discussion demonstrates emerging limitations to this hitherto successful paradigm, leading towards an incipient crisis *of* resilience in the urban planning arena.

'Code red for humanity'[1]: towards a crisis *of* resilience?

A critical aspect of the argument developed by Cox, Grove, and Barnett (2022) was that designerly synthesis absorbs the critique of resilience by establishing equivalence between different kinds of knowledge, including knowledge(s) of inequality and oppression. However, the absorptive capacity of the synthetic approach might be diminishing, even as the term 'resilience' continues to saturate public discourse. Griggs and Howarth (2020, 105) argued that as crises escalate, prevalent governing concepts become prone to tension and contradiction. The common-sense position is questioned and re-politicised. We suggest that this is happening to resilience, as designerly syntheses begin to unravel. Concluding a special issue of the journal *Resilience*, Chandler (2019, 304) argued that resilience is increasingly exhausted as both a concept and as a framework for governing the risk society. The source of this exhaustion, claimed Chandler, is that it is preoccupied with adapting systems to what exists, when what exists is the source of the problem. Consequently, critical public policy must go beyond resilience and its roots in complex adaptive systems theory (2019, 305). Developments in global urban policy bear Chandler out, suggesting that some strands of resilience are becoming mired in the very crises of governability that they are supposed to mitigate. We propose that this is because, in the post-COVID period, the designerly, collaborative or progressivist approach is losing its capacity to synthesise irreconcilable goods, resulting in cognitive dissonance.

There have been numerous signs of crisis in the international urban resilience paradigm. One was the sudden decision by Rockefeller to phase out the 100RC programme in 2019. Leitner et al. (2018, 1282) found that the programme had objectified places and communities, and taken no heed of the way resilience was practiced on the ground. It became fraught with disagreements over the template for strategy development and tension between the Rockefeller mission and core values in some cities. Durban withdrew from 100RC in 2017, citing irreconcilable differences over its bottom-up approach to resilience (Roberts et al. 2020).

These tensions highlighted growing conflicts over the ownership and execution of urban resilience strategies. The period since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated them, to the point where they are becoming stark contradictions. The work of the United Nations on urban resilience exemplifies. The UN is a significant actor, as custodian of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. It is an international actor in urban resilience planning through its Urban Resilience Hub, hosted by UN-Habitat, the agency responsible for human settlements and sustainable urban development. The contradictions that emerge in UN readings of urban resilience after COVID are therefore of considerable importance for thinking about both the vectors of an incipient crisis in the concept, and the future of cities.

The UN presents resilience as a master-concept in its vision for sustainable cities. The World Cities Report (UN-Habitat 2022, iii) reflects this centrality: 'building resilience must be at the heart of the cities of the future' stated General Secretary António Guterres. It talks of possibilities for building back 'differently' (a qualitative distinction with 'better'), together with the need for 'new social contracts'. The report evangelises resilience and normalises turbulence through readings of crisis that echo complex adaptive systems thinking. For example, the following sentence is replete with depoliticising buzzwords: 'Cities should focus on developing *inclusive urban governance* processes that promote *transformative resilience* to *multiple risks* by using *local knowledge* in the face of *uncertainty*' (2022, xx: emphases added). Moreover: 'Future urban governance should institutionalize the mindset of planning for shocks and disruptions' (2022, xxix). Here, echoing risk society themes, resilience naturalises tumult and is deployed as a practical way of learning to live with it. Reflecting the privileged role of networked governance, UN-Habitat argues for 'multisectoral, multidimensional and multi-stakeholder' resilience planning (2022, xxxii). It insists that with appropriate measures, shared prosperity and social inclusion can be attained (UN-Habitat 2022, xviii).

However, at the same time, the UN captures the dissonance between this progressivist aspiration and the realities of surging manufactured 'irresilience' post-COVID. By manufactured irresilience, we mean damage incurred by people, places and planet, which undermines the possibility of resilience, and results from knowable and reparable human actions (Davies and Arrieta 2024). We discuss our use of 'irresilience' as a critical device further below. The World Cities report describes a 'bitter cocktail' of crises and threats facing the world's cities (UN-Habitat 2022, vii): 'High inflation and unemployment, slow economic growth, looming recession, mounting public debts, supply chain disruptions, armed conflicts, and a global food and energy crisis'. Cross-cutting climate and ecological emergencies are seen as 'crisis multipliers' (United Nations 2022, 2). UN discourse is replete with dire warnings. 'The looming climate emergency could trigger calamitous damage which could generate additional urban crises in both developed and developing country cities' (UN-Habitat 2022, 18). Pointing to the reversal of progress towards the 2030 SDGs, UN-Habitat warns of a 'high damage' scenario, in which 'extreme poverty could increase by 32 per cent or 213 million by 2030'. African cities 'could lose up to two-thirds of their financial resources and the weak urban service delivery and governance systems in some of these cities could collapse' (2022, 17).

Wider UN discourse presents the crisis in even starker terms. In a review of progress towards the 2030 SDGs, it warned that they now require an 'urgent rescue effort' (UN 2022, 2). The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) stated bluntly that 'risk creation is outstripping risk reduction. Disasters, economic loss and the underlying vulnerabilities that drive risk, such as poverty and inequality, are increasing just as ecosystems and biospheres are at risk of collapse'. The central theme of 'resilience' intersects the parallel and complementary emphasis on collaborative urban governance, where the UN entreats stakeholders to work together in pursuit of a shared endeavour. However, the basis for resilience through collaborative urban governance is also questioned. The World Cities report cites an assessment of political rights and

civil liberties by Freedom House, documenting radical deterioration of political rights and civil liberties in 73 countries, representing 75 per cent of the global population across G20 and low-income countries alike (UN-Habitat 2022, 258). Should these threats to civil society and public participation continue, it warns, the drift to authoritarianism will continue in both cities and nations (2022, xxix).

The UN's diagnosis is normatively at odds with both the reactionary and neoliberal conceptions of 'resilience', which respectively accentuate moral fortitude and entrepreneurial self-reliance. The World Cities report is emphatic that 'poverty and inequality are incompatible with sustainability and resilience', because they undermine the fabric of urban society (UN-Habitat 2022, 303). Yet, it argues that urban poverty and inequality are becoming pervasive (2022, xxi). The UN implies, but does not say, that to the extent that they were present before the crises of neoliberal globalism (Davies 2021), the conditions of resilience are now deteriorating and often do not exist in meaningful form beyond bare human fortitude and solidarity in the face of indifferent risk-manufacturers. Despite the indictment of global elites, and recognition that resilience develops downstream of social justice, technocratic remedies obscure a substantive critique of the system that produces these damaging behaviours. As was also evident in criticisms of the Rockefeller programme, discussed earlier, hard managerialism is frequently enmeshed with progressivism (Mikulewicz 2019). Despite its bitter critique, the UN does not therefore pursue the baleful logic of its position: resilience-through-equality is beyond reach for a large global majority.

How do we make sense of the discordance in terms of the UN's goals? In the first instance, as the framing of the report makes clear, its central objective is to rescue resilience, the theoretical architecture on which it is built and its governance mechanisms. It is not to retire them. At the same time, UN institutions, and the SDGs, profess to articulate the needs of the global majority. Consequently, a discourse that evades the inequity of the COVID and post-COVID worlds and the implications for resilience, for example by tilting towards neoliberal and reactionary self-reliance, would lack credibility and alienate a key constituency. As exemplified by the World Cities report (a multi-authored, multi-stakeholder effort by a heterogeneous group of academics and officials), the UN therefore conspicuously fails to sustain a plausible synthesis. It rather highlights the unravelling of conditions that enabled governments of the minority and majority worlds to unite behind the SDGs, a case of designerly synthesis par excellence. Echoing Chandler's thinking on the emerging crisis of resilience (2019), and to paraphrase Cox, Grove, and Barnett (2022), the widening chasm between rich and poor can no longer be absorbed into an integrative designerly synthesis on the global governance of resilience. We are left with a vicious circularity, where cities must cultivate resilience to preserve themselves against escalating instability, whilst escalating instability undermines the conditions for resilience. Cognitive dissonance ensues.

Resilience: towards a critical taxonomy

This critique begs a question: in the face of escalating crises, what comes next for resilience as a subject of critical inquiry and as a political practice?

What resources are available to scholars and activists to address the crises of resilience? The third part of the paper addresses this question by reviewing and surfacing five critical strategies and practices, putting equality and solidarity at the forefront of inquiry and clarifying resources for addressing the cognitive dissonance provoked by our reading of contradictions in UN discourse, and other emerging symptoms of crisis.

The mission of City, as described by Mayer (2020), is to cast light on 'what can be done', especially with respect to what constitutes sustainable urban development. Our argument is that tensions and contradictions within the dominant urban resilience paradigm present opportunities to disrupt and radicalise it. The taxonomy of critical strategies presented below (see Table 1) aims to serve as a resource for urbanists positioned as activist-scholars and scholar-activists. Taxonomies do not in themselves change the world, but there can be a constructive interplay, and activists can find them useful in staging campaigns and devising tactics. Fraser's (2003) framework of social justice based on recognition, redistribution and participation is one influential example of a taxonomy rooted in practices then being adopted to organise strategies, tactics and demands.

The taxonomy emerges from a review of resilience literatures, which disclose a multitude of critical urban practices. We suggest that the five critical strategies it describes can serve as a modest resource for engaged researchers involved in disrupting or de-centring dominant conceptions and practices of resilience, and in broader struggles for climate justice. Specifically, it captures resources that can enhance challenges to the urban resilience planning orthodoxy, as it is experienced in practice (Roberts et al. 2020).

We elaborate five critical strategies. Two of these, the critique *of* resilience as a facet of conservatism or neoliberalisation (repudiation), and critical resilience as the study of progressive interpretations and practices (appropriation), are well-established in the literature (e.g. Chandler 2019; DeVerteuil and Golubchikov 2016). Three further strategies emerge from our reading of practices described in the literature. We surface these and incorporate them into our taxonomy. These are *boundary making* by isolating the concept and disclosing its limits in relation to other concepts, subsuming it into the frame of *survival* and thereby radicalising it, and situating it a dialectical relationship with the idea of *irresilience*, thereby inverting it. We suggest that these strategies provide a menu for articulating concrete political demands and actions around the urban governance of resilience.

Critical strategy 1—Boundary making

Cox, Grove, and Barnett (2022) argued that designerly synthesis has been very effective in enabling resilience planning to absorb or neutralise critique. One sign that a concept might be sucked into a crisis is therefore its loss of absorptive capacity and re-politicisation (Griggs and Howarth 2020). The cognitive dissonance evident in the UN World Cities Report, where the necessity of resilience is confronted by its seeming impossibility page-by-page, augurs one plausible vector of crisis and one such opening for re-politicisation. A second sign might be that boundaries hove into view in relation to what is often seen as an infinitely malleable concept, thereby isolating it—or putting it in its place.

Resilience is a 'boundary object', imbued with sufficient interpretive flexibility to influence many policy spheres and scholarly disciplines. Those doing 'boundary work' may seek to enlarge or restrict the influence of a boundary object, from inside or outside, obscuring or revealing that which lies beyond it. Beck and Mahony (2018) discuss boundary work undertaken from the inside by the IPCC, seeking (arguably in vain) to uphold a distinction between its scientific function and the political realm. Conversely, boundary work from the outside brings the limits of resilience as a governance strategy into sharp relief, by demonstrating alternative scenarios. The concepts of 'urbicide' and 'urb-utopia' exemplify.

Wakefield's (2022) 'urbicide', lurking in the imagined near future of Miami, presents one instance of making a world beyond resilience visible through boundary work. Influential players in the city consider abandoning it altogether given its increasing and anticipated inundation and vulnerability to cataclysmic weather events. In place of resilience, argues Wakefield (2022, 924), the 'South Florida Islands' concept for pulverising Miami and using its rubble for 'Islanding' the region presents us with an 'anticipatory urbicide', the purposeful destruction of a city. A near-antithesis of urbicide is 'urb-utopia', rejecting the naturalisation of 'risk' in mainstream resilience for revolutionary transformation and repair. Davis (2010, 44) found powerful affinities between egalitarian aspects of city life, and the resources required for conservation and carbon mitigation. He argued that this cannot be achieved without democratic control over urban space and resources. Consequently, he argued only explicitly utopian thinking is now sufficient for the task of preservation 'in face of convergent planetary crises' (Davis 2010, 45).

'Urbicide' and 'urb-utopia' break with the underlying precepts of resilience, which depicts a futureless future in which we are perpetually adapting to new manifestations of risk, for a pragmatopian notion of repair in the so-called 'communian' phase of the Anthropocene, beyond the 'capitalinian' (Foster and Clark 2022, 4).[2] If the capitalist city undermines the environmental efficiencies that derive from dense urban settlement, the public affluence signified by urban parks, free museums and libraries creates infinite potential for human interaction, and signifies an entirely different pathway to human prospering based on 'Earth-friendly sociality' (Davis 2010, 43).

Such ideas find immediate practical resonance in work on reparative climate infrastructures, exploring how climate finance can be switched or siphoned away from destructive investments and into decarbonised, democratised infrastructures (Webber et al. 2022). These conceptualisations of urbicide and urb-utopia are not only situated beyond resilience, but also antagonistic to it. Urbicide negates resilience through wilful destruction, while urb-utopia challenges it through every day and revolutionary transformations. Active, purposeful boundary-making is one way of making sense of the crisis in resilience and responding to the cognitive dissonance evoked by the UN.

Critical strategy 2—The critique *of* resilience

The critique *of* resilience rose in parallel with its spread through the social sciences. It challenges the 'hegemony' of resilience in three ways. The first,

and perhaps most influential strategy repudiates resilience as a concept 'fatally compromised' by its associations with urban neoliberalisation (Cox, Grove, and Barnett 2022, 296), for which it served as a 'naturalizing metaphor' (Newsinger and Serafini 2021, 594), and with conservatism in the sense of preserving a dysfunctional and iniquitous system (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). The critique of resilience as an adjunct of neoliberalism follows numerous vectors, including:

- re-acculturation framed by the discourse of resilience (Newsinger and Serafini 2021);
- the boomerang effects on communities of reckless system engineering projects (Malm 2022—see further below);
- the aggravation of inequalities and insecurities that in turn aggravate vulnerability (Donoghue and Edmiston 2020);
- the manner in which it treats all places as if they were the same, mis-identifies the root causes of 'risk', not in climate events as such but their amplification by inequalities (Mikulewicz 2019);
- celebration of masculinist productivity, de-prioritising use-values and exacerbating class, gender and racial inequality (Mikulewicz 2019);
- imposition of 'resilience' on communities that use entirely different vocabularies and values (Mikulewicz 2019);
- survival of the fittest thinking, for example where public welfare is undermined by austerity (Newsinger and Serafini 2021); and
- the coercive and violent acceleration of displacement through 'solutions' drawn from neo-colonial blueprints (Yarina 2018).

Martin and Sunley (2015) argued, consequently, that resilience-as-neoliberalisation locks agents into sub-optimal states, reproduces and accelerates ostensibly targeted inequalities and forecloses the possibility of alternatives. Bonilla (2020, 148) captured the critique, arguing that while we need physical infrastructures to be resilient, communities should not become acculturated to disaster or violence.

A second related perspective is that mainstream conceptualisations of resilience naturalise capitalism. Exemplars include Malm's (2022) 'rational optimists'. These are elites of a libertarian hue who see technological innovation as the road to salvation, holding out the possibility of continuing indefinitely with fossil fuel consumption. Malm's critique highlights the escalating side-effects from innovations designed to evade the impact of climate change. He explores plausible near-future geo-engineering projects to seed the atmosphere with carbon-depleting, sun-blocking particles: the so-called 'Pinatubo option' (2022, 14).[3] Supposedly sustainable bio-fuelling prefigures Malm's geo-engineering dystopia. Burning trees to produce power is presented as part of a 'net-zero' strategy, whilst accelerating deforestation and creating new global supply chains all of which generate their own environmental costs with questionable impact in reducing emissions (Jeswani, Chilvers, and Azapagic 2020).

A third vector in the critique *of* resilience is that it is overflowed or contradicted by calamities and structural injustices that arise not only from

extreme events, but also the (in)actions of governments and corporations, sometimes undertaken in the name of resilience itself. In a study of English local government, Arrieta and Davies (2024) argue that measures to reinforce financial resilience tend to be zero-to-negative sum games that offload costs onto partners and thereby unintentionally exacerbate their 'irresilience'. Gray (2022) also shows how 'good practice' boomerangs when resilience is abstracted from iniquitous social relations. In her study of the 2018 Montecito debris flow (California), she illustrates how 'conspicuous resilience' was used by local elites as a marketing tool to attract donors. This approach perpetuated a false sense of recovery and illusions of equality by 'washing over the struggles of the poor and ignoring the social corrosion' evident in the rebuilding process (Gray 2022, 622). Garcia-Lopez (2020) argued in even stronger terms that the global governance of resilience is replete with colonial development logics (also Yarina 2018). Rose and Lentzos (2017, 34) concluded that demands for resilience made without the requisite powers and resources are at best disingenuous and at worst toxic. In other words, urban resilience programmes that ignore the transformations needed to enhance the lives of the global majority have a striking tendency to exacerbate irresilience. In Miami, the urbicidal South Florida Islands concept looms large, but unnoticed and un-synthesised, over the designerly synthesis of the Greater Miami and the Beaches resilience strategy.[4]

The critique *of* resilience views the concept as irrecoverably tainted by its affinities with neoliberalism and the continuance of extractive capitalism. It is also deemed contradictory in the sense that mainstream resilience produces boomerang effects of the kind we term 'manufactured irresilience'. Employing 'manufactured irresilience' as the dialectic of resilience is our fifth critical device, discussed below. The critique *of* resilience resolves cognitive dissonance in UN discourse by repudiating the concept altogether in favour of radical struggle concepts, like 'survival'.

Critical strategy 3—critical resilience

Newsinger and Serafini (2021, 596) discuss an important debate about whether resilience is irretrievably lost to neoliberalism and reaction, or a resource that can be appropriated to urban struggles. The notion of 'critical resilience' rejects the blanket critique *of* resilience, highlighting myriad ways in which it is recuperated and utilised by those resisting neoliberalism. De Verteuil and Golubchikov (2016, 143) made a formative contribution to this strand. They argued against those who equate resilience with neoliberalism that resilience (i) can sustain alternative practices that contradict it; (ii) is more active and dynamic than passive; and (iii) can sustain survival, thus acting as a precursor to more overtly transformative action through resistance. Many commentators echo this call for critical resilience. Grove (2018) urges the recuperation of resilience to realise its transformative potential (also Yarina 2018). Relatedly King, Crossley, and Smith (2021) argue for turning the values associated with resilience into objects of struggle. In researching community resilience, Wright (2021) suggests that the concept is useful in shifting debate towards

climate, ecological and disaster studies in fields like sociology and social policy, thereby broadening their horizons and encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue.

Research also amply illustrates critical resilience as a grassroots practice. Bonilla (2020) shows how, following the hurricane disaster, Puerto Ricans responded to state abandonment by asserting their autonomy. Hence, while resiliency has close associations with neoliberalisation, 'it can also be the site for gestating new forms of sovereignty and new visions of postcolonial recovery' (Bonilla 2020, 147). Cox, Grove, and Barnett discuss the work of the Miami Climate Alliance, grounded in struggles over the longue durée of racist expropriation of poor neighbourhoods. They found that like 'urbicide', black experiences of oppression and struggle could not be subsumed into the Miami and the Beaches synthesis. They concluded that tensions in the concept can be productive, and argue that strategic interventions that capture 'overflowing knowledges and experiences' is a fruitful way of amplifying the emancipatory potential in resilience (2022, 304).

Another productive appropriation is the coupling of resilience with resistance. For Extinction Rebellion, 'Resilience for Rebellion' is a recurring theme entreating supporters to 'stress less, enjoy more'![5] This instance of critical resilience is striking because in invoking joie de vivre, it also takes a swipe at reactionary and neoliberal conceptions that reject progress and depict life as inevitably a slog. The idea that resilience and resistance are coupled in a productive relationship is advanced by Gordillo (2002). In his study of an indigenous group of Argentine Chaco and their memories of suffering and death on a colonial cane plantation, 'the breath of the devils', contrasts with the experience of the bush as a 'place of resilience, relative autonomy, and healing' (2002, 33), where identities lost to imperialism are recovered. Importantly today in the face of the Israeli genocide in Gaza, Bourbeau and Ryan (2017) couple resilience with resistance in their depiction of the Palestinian freedom struggle. The word *sumud* translates as steadfastness or resilience, a practice that creates space to breathe and fosters conditions for renewed resistance. Resilience and adaptivity, they argue, create space for resistance to be mounted under terrible duress (also De Verteuil, Golubchikov, and Sheridan 2021).

Each example of critical resilience foregrounds practices that can be overlooked by the critique *of* resilience, aiming to empower those who subvert the concept or use it to create alternative realities from the bottom-up. Critical resilience thereby heralds the possibility of resolving the cognitive dissonance arising from UN discourse by appropriating and re-politicising the concept.

Critical strategy 4—from 'resilience' to 'survival'

Critical strategy 4 derives from dire diagnoses and prognoses, should Anthropocenic development continue its current course. More than a decade ago, Davis (2010, 39–40) warned: 'No one—not the UN, the World Bank, the G20: no one—has a clue how a planet of slums with growing food and energy crises will accommodate their biological survival, much less their aspirations to basic happiness and dignity'. Today, the UN (2022, 2) echoes Davis in warning that the

SDGs require an urgent rescue effort. Annual climate summits are viewed as fig leaves, leading humanity in entirely the 'wrong direction at maximum speed' (Foster and Clark 2022, 16). Kühne et al. (2022), for example, identified 425 new fossil extraction projects supported by governments and corporations, each of which would produce at least a gigaton of carbon. The projected climate impact of these 'carbon bombs' would be to exceed the 1.5-degree warming threshold by a factor of two. Petro states are repeatedly charged with censoring scientific conclusions (Foster and Clark 2022, 22). Is it even possible to remain within the 1.5-degree limit? One source suggests that it would be necessary to eliminate all fossil fuel production by 2034. Alternatively, countries like the US and Norway and Australia and Germany and Canada and Qatar and the UK would need to halve their output in six years. If they did, it is surmised, the world would have a 50:50 chance of keeping warming below 1.5 degrees (Malm 2022, 36). With every passing day, the target becomes more remote and fantastical: an illusion sustained by state and corporate elites, who know exactly what the score is.

The sheer scale of Anthropocenic threats and betrayals, evoked by the UN, brings a different master concept into view, which simultaneously absorbs, negates and radicalises resilience. O'Connell (in Suvin 2022, 10) termed this 'survival studies' or 'salvational politics'. Problematising 'survival' positions discourse far beyond the officially sanctioned mainstream, where other de-politicising mystifications like 'adaptivity', 'transformation', 'sustainability' and 'inclusion' also lurk (Kaika 2017). Debate over terminology, for example what is at stake in defining the period as Capitalocene, Anthropocene or Plantationocene (Gandy 2022) might be diagnostically, analytically and prescriptively significant but unlikely to have much public resonance. Everyone knows what survival means.

A practical case for rethinking resilience in terms of survival is that while carbon producers, the rich and privileged of the world 'have lifeboats as well as strategically beneficial geographies from which to deploy them' this is not the case for a growing majority, wherever we live (Connolly and Grove 2021, 51). If resilience is an increasingly scarce commodity, there will always be a bounce-back or bounce-forward strategy for a shrinking minority, richly endowed with resilience capital. As the UN highlights, low-GDP countries are under the greatest and most immediate threat, but the working class, people of colour and women in otherwise wealthy high-carbon cities fare increasingly badly (Gray 2022).

Biro (2013, 57) argued that part of what gets lost in pursuit of resilience is the ability to imagine alternatives. Like Bourbeau and Ryan cited above (2017), De Verteuil, Golubchikov, and Sheridan (2021, 84) show how the act of survival can itself create breathing space in which possibilities for more radical transformations emerge. In Davis's terms, the concept immediately invokes the urgency of urb-utopian thinking, pushing back against the de-politicisations of complexity theory. It tips the scales away from managing risk towards the threat of urbicide and the salvational potential in urb-utopia(s). Survival politics are maximally politicising, maximally dramatising and minimally technocratic, and implicitly invoke an insurgent universalism from which to resist chronic crises and disasters (Tomba 2019). They immediately draw attention to the biggest questions in a way that mainstream resilience does not. No concept is

immune to co-optation, but 'survival' is by far the more radical and provocational signifier, drawing attention to dystopian trajectories in the Anthropocene, as well as the system overhaul required to begin the work of risk reduction and repair. Radicalising resilience by recasting it in the language of survival is a strategic move to highlight the stakes for the global majority raised by multiple accelerating crises. The UN itself recognises that the 'world is facing a confluence of crises that threaten the very survival of humanity' (United Nations 2022, 3). Science now takes seriously scenarios in which runaway climate change could lead to human extinction (Davidson and Kemp 2024). In the realm of struggle, the very name 'Extinction Rebellion' (ER) creates a fertile coupling that conjures survival as its goal, through the campaign slogan 'Unite to Survive'. Invoking survival accentuates the emergency and demands action equal to the extinction threat. It at once repudiates mainstream resilience and re-appropriates it through a new conceptual synthesis, showing a pathway beyond the widening contradictions in UN resilience discourse.

Critical strategy 5—manufactured irresilience

Critical Strategy five begins with the UNDRR's recognition (cited earlier), that the relentless manufacture of risk vastly overflows the finite material resources of resilience available to most of humanity. From this vantagepoint, we propose that the concept of 'manufactured irresilience' is a fruitful dialectical counterpoint to resilience. Following our definition given earlier, manufactured irresilience is the predictable, necessary outcome of the continued expropriation, extraction, vulnerablisation and disempowerment depicted by the UN (also Davies and Arrieta 2024). In a period of mounting crises, the concept of manufactured irresilience pushes back against de-politicising 'risk' discourses and sharpens our sense of where crises are coming from and why they multiply, whilst cultivating 'social indignation' (Fraser 2012, 50–1) and drawing on the other four critical resources.

For example, it can be argued against the theory of reflexive modernisation that the central problem is not that causal mechanisms are too complex to be known, but rather that capitalism relentlessly and visibly manufactures irresilience by undermining the socio-ecological niches in which we subsist, exacerbating what Foster (1999), following Marx, called the 'metabolic rift' between humanity and the non-human biosphere. Hence, where the critique *of* resilience negates the concept, and critical resilience reappropriates it (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov 2016, 150), the concept of manufactured irresilience inverts it, drawing attention back to the tangible, remediable means by which crises are created. The dialectical concept of the 'metabolic rift' illustrates the principles underpinning the concept of manufactured irresilience.

The metabolic rift, recovered from Marx by Foster (1999), emerged from the former's analysis of unsustainability in nineteenth century capitalist agriculture, where soil nutrients were not replaced, causing a cycle of declining quality. The expropriation of guano from the colonies to mitigate environmental depletion then caused irreparable harm to the places from which it was extracted and led eventually to the devastations of modern agrichemical farming. The widening

rift between agricultural capitalism and the Earth encapsulated 'the material estrangement of human beings in capitalist society from the natural conditions of their existence' (Foster 1999, 383). In early Soviet thinking, pre-Stalinism, and latterly through the eco-Marxist revival led by Foster, the notion of the metabolic rift was extended to myriad spheres of extraction from human, non-human and more-than-human nature and reflects a generalised alienation of human beings from each other and the planet, endemic in capitalist labour, and now threatening our survival as a species (Foster and Clark 2022). This perspective also contributed to framing the 'rift' between city and countryside under capitalism (Swyngedouw and Kaika 2014) and more recently urban political ecology, where capitalist urbanisation is held to exacerbate the rift 'between a relatively stable self-sustaining biosphere and the lurch toward irreversible environmental destruction' (Keil 2020, 1126).

The concept of metabolic rift accentuates the structural limits of resilience and the dynamics of accelerating irresilience: by both foregrounding the crises internal to capital accumulation, and framing the relationship between humans and non-humans in terms of damage to the ecological niches in which life subsists. Dialectical biologists define ecological niche construction as the 'process of organism-driven environmental modification' (Odling-Smee, Lala, and Feldman 2003, xi). Organisms modify their environments, and are modified in perpetual interaction with them, a dialectical process that drives evolutionary emergence and differentiation (Royle 2017, 1438). 'Metabolic rift' here denotes human-inflicted damage to the ecological niches in which life subsists, from which we derive our understanding of 'manufactured irresilience' as the dialectical antagonist of resilience. Homo Sapiens have always been vulnerable to geological instability, climate changes and other natural and cosmic events (Connolly and Grove 2021) and there is likely no future in which that would not be the case. Anthropocenic irresilience, however, is qualitatively distinct, uniquely self-destructive and uniquely iniquitous. It is driven by the conscious, species-induced crisis of our own and myriad other socio-ecological niches. For the UN, risk manufacture continues to overwhelm risk reduction. One recent example, with significant implications for the urban governance of resilience, was the US Inflation Reduction Act. This demanded that space for new wind and solar projects on public land be paired with equal or greater space for new oil and gas licenses. This 'suicidal policy' for producing carbon bombs illustrates perfectly how manufactured irresilience contradicts and sabotages the green transitions advocated by some of the very actors who espouse the language of resilience (Beck 2024, 19). Resilience is reduced to 'greenwashing'.

We therefore propose that the concepts of resilience and irresilience should be situated in a dialectical pair and considered in parallel when studying any event or process, so that demands for greater resilience are coupled with a clear diagnosis of where, how and by whom disasters and chronic instabilities are constantly manufactured. This strategy refuses the naturalisation of escalating risk and insists on naming the active ingredients in the UN's 'bitter cocktail' of crises. The escalating threat of irresilience therefore poses the question of who might be capable of producing resilient (human) nature(s), and how. Following Davis (2010) and Foster and Clark (2022) the concept points to a potentially

fruitful engagement with recent debates on how best to struggle against capitalism (e.g. Wright 2019). Manufactured irresilience further politicises the crisis of resilience, by amplifying and centring attention on the UNDRR's depiction of a burning world in which relentless risk manufacture outstrips risk reduction.

Conclusion

Inspired by increasingly discordant narratives on the master concept of resilience in global urban planning, the paper attempts to synthesise and systematise diverse strategies for engaging a fundamentally contested concept. To this end, Table 1 summarises the eight perspectives discussed, divided into mainstream and critical approaches that seek to problematise or radicalise resilience. Contributions are threefold. First, the paper presents the inability of UN discourse to synthesise as evidence that in the global urban planning arena, at least, resilience is becoming mired in the crises it is supposed to mitigate. This harbinger of a concept crisis (Chandler 2019) warrants renewed attention to its future evolution and applications. The second contribution is to make legible different strategies for the practice of critique through our wide-ranging interdisciplinary synthesis of critical perspectives. In addition to the well-established critique of resilience (repudiation) and critical resilience (appropriation), it identifies three new strategies for thinking and practicing critique: *boundary making*, exemplified by the frames of urbicide and urb-utopia; radicalisation of the concept by subsuming it into the concept of *survival*; and advancing *manufactured irresilience* as the dialectical concept through which escalating crises of resilience can be understood and acted upon. Each of these critical perspectives provide a different approach to resolving or mitigating the burgeoning crisis of urban resilience implicitly diagnosed by the United Nations.

The classification presented in Table 1 reflects themes that often overlap, sometimes contradict, and sometimes complement each other. The intention is not to privilege any one of the five critical strategies. Indeed, others could be disclosed and added to the framework. We suggest that they are tactical responses in a repertoire to be employed situationally, for example by refusing or disrupting designerly synthesis in urban resilience planning. Repudiating and reappropriating resilience are contrasting political strategies, but can nevertheless be used expediently or situationally. Boundary making, survival and the pairing of resilience with irresilience are complementary tactics, which can also be employed in juxtaposition with either repudiation or reappropriation. For example, invoking survival can entail boundary-making by pointing to the impotence of mainstream syntheses. It can be employed to radicalise resilience, or to repudiate it.

The five critical strategies recur in the literature and, importantly, are widespread in real world urban struggles. It is therefore hoped that by capturing them in a taxonomy, our analysis clarifies some resources available to assist scholars, activists and critical policy makers in critiquing, transforming and resisting urban resilience. We have sought to clarify the terms, utility and

limits of a muddled, slippery and crisis-bound concept, whilst sharpening and extending the repertoire of critical tools in research and practice.

Our final contribution is to highlight the need for research to better capture the many ways in which critical perspectives on resilience are generated from the bottom-up in political struggle and action. Practice and struggle overlap with and inform scholarship. However, there has been little systematic research into the resonance or otherwise of 'resilience' in the spectrum of urban struggles against neoliberalism/capitalism, or conversely the resonance of social justice in urban resilience planning and policy. Research dedicated to discovering new ways of re-thinking resilience through struggle could be richly rewarding, for example in determining whether it can be liberated from the cognitive dissonance articulated by the UN. This question is partly about power, and how effectively mainstream interpretations can be overcome, and partly about what is revealed by heeding the UN's dire warnings about escalating urban crises, and exploring the future of cities through the prism of critical perspectives on resilience. These perspectives could fruitfully be brought into dialogue with other frameworks on transformation, such as Wright's (2019) five strategies for overcoming capitalism. Relatedly, new research could explore different modes of subjectivation, or consciousness, in urban struggles over resilience. To what extent is resilience the subject of resurgent class, intersectional or interstitial struggles that prise open cracks in the system? Cities are increasingly central players in the governance of resilience, so what role can they play in radicalising or subverting the concept in a way that presents new strategies for halting the manufacture of irresilience? More attention to these issues would cast light on what plausible futures emerge from mobilising the five critical strategies for engaging resilience, through which urban geographies, and contribute to a better appreciation of the relations of human frailty and fortitude that make them possible.

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Notes

1 The term employed by Antonio Guterres in response to the 2021 IPCC report on climate change. https://press.un.org/en/2021/sgsm20847.doc.htm.

2 The terms 'capitalinian' and 'communian' in Foster and Clark (2022) describe phases of the Anthropocene. 'Communist' is eschewed because countries styling themselves 'communist' are also major polluters.

3 'Pinatubo option' refers to the cataclysmic eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991.

4 Link from https://resilient305.com (accessed 2nd October 2023)

5 https://extinctionrebellion.uk/event/resilience-for-rebellion-stress-less-enjoy-more-workshop/ (accessed 2nd October 2023)

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