Resilience and Governmentality of Unknown

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- "[…] the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back".

(J.M. Keynes 1936:241)

Ideas matter!

- "Governments not only 'power'… they also puzzle".

  <div align="right">(Heclo, 1974:305)</div>

- The power of ideas lies in:
  - what is said, who said it, where, when, how and to whom.

    <div align="right">(Schmidt, 2008)</div>

- Ideas are,
  - cognitive (***what*** *to do*) and normative (*what **ought to be** done*)

- The exercise of power,
  - "both prescribes what is to be done and codifies what is to be known." (Davoudi, 2015:10)
  - shapes our sense of "what counts as self-evident, universal and necessary." (Foucault, 1991:76)

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Intellectual machinery of governing

- Plays a major role in governing by "rendering the world thinkable, (and) taming its intractable reality by subjecting it to the disciplined analyses of thought."

  (Rose & Miller, 1992:182)

- (Re)defines and legitimates
  – government *rationalities* (governing to what *ends*)
  – government *technologies* (governing by what *means*)

  (Foucault, 1978)

Influential ideas of the 20th century

- Neoclassical economics
- Rational choice theory

(Bevir, 2013)

- Complex systems theory
- Resilience   (Holling, 1973)

Modernist 'knowledge'

- Based on Newtonian view of the world as:

    - an orderly mechanical device in a state of **equilibrium**

    - ruled by unknown laws

- The only limits to knowing these unknowns are scientific / epistemic limits.

- Knowledge is capable of knowing what is to be known.

Wetherell's **Clockwork Universe** sculpture, Canberra, Australia, 2009

Emergent complexity (Bryan & Callaghan, 2014)

- Predicated on the prevalence of unexpected
  - Not just *epistemic limits* to knowing the unknowns,
  - But also the *logical impossibility* of knowing the unknowns

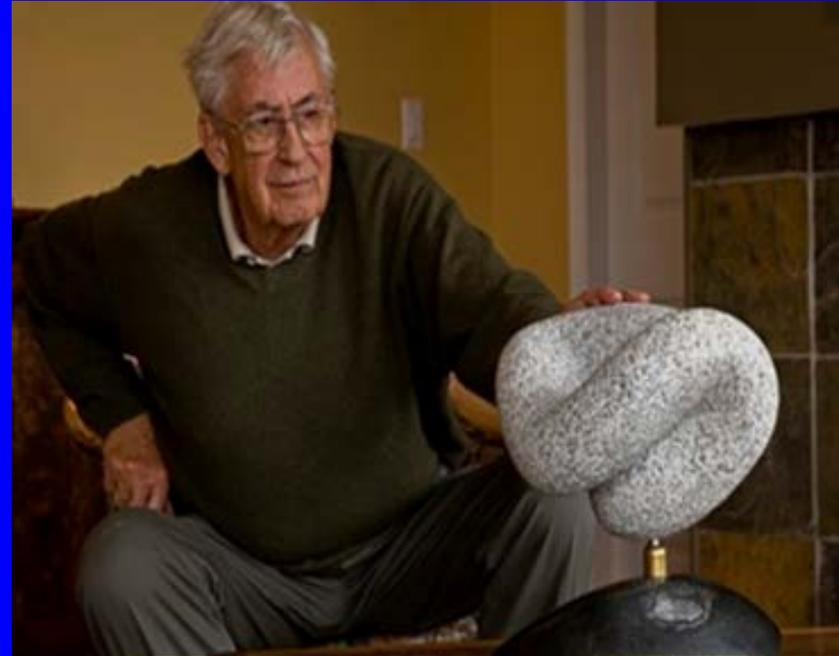- In open systems contingent outcomes emerge in a non-deterministic and non-arbitrary fashion.

The butterfly effect
(Edward Lorenz, dynamical systems, 1963)

- "Classical determinism continues to work within the framework of the unreachable – but conceivable – limit of the total knowledge of a system […].

- Quantum theory and microphysics require a far more radical revision of the idea of a continuous and predictable path.

- **The quest for precision is not limited by its cost, but by the very nature of matter**."

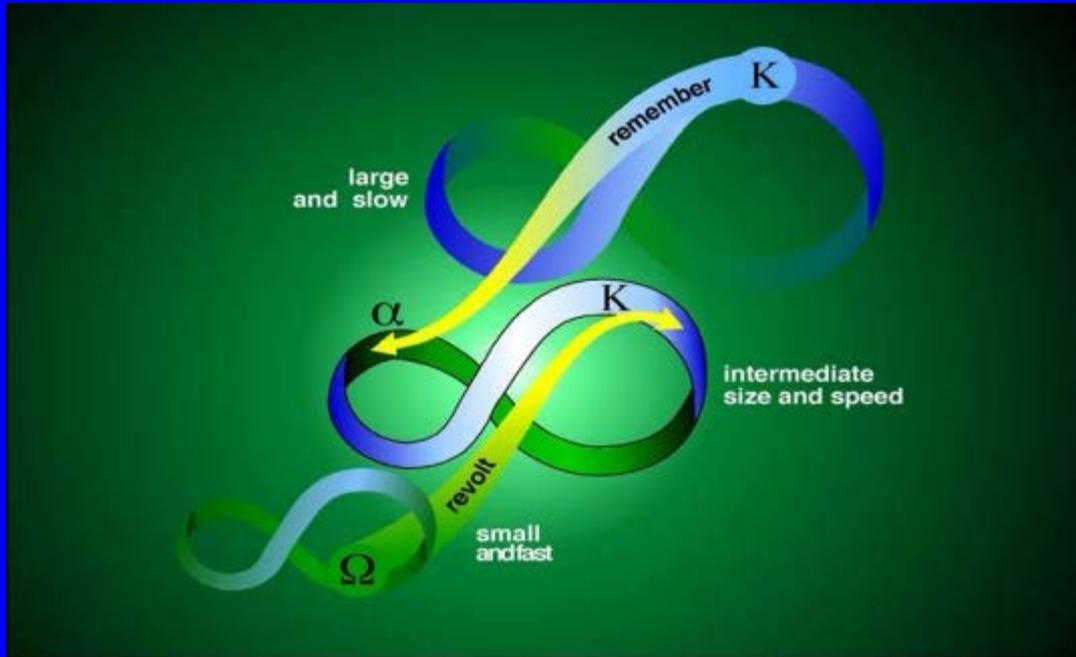(J. F. Lyotard, 1984:55 emphasis added)

Holling's ecological resilience

- A departure from mechanistic assertions of equilibrium
  - Typical of closed systems theory
- A departure from *engineering* resilience

- The adoption of the complexity science in the field of ecology

Crawford Stanley (Buzz) Holling (1973)

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From ecology to society

- A **total complex system** in which
- resilience is "integral to the co-evolution of societies and ecosystems."

(Walker & Cooper, 2011:147)

The 'Panarchy' model of adaptive cycle

(Gunderson, 2009:5 adapted from Gunderson & Holling, 2002)

Why resilience?

- Ideas matter in the narratives of change but their influence depends on their perceived:

  – credibility in the framing of policy problems

  – alignment with the established values and political rationalities

- Resilience seems to have offered both!

Dilemma of governing the unknown

Common features (Anderson, 2010):
- perceived imminence
- catastrophic consequences
- illusive and undiscernible causes of threats

Signalled the crisis of neoliberal state
Legitimated the call for alternative rationalities
and technologies

Resilience 'solution'

- Based on complexity theory and evolutionary adaptation of self-organised systems
  - "a qualitative capacity to devise systems that can absorb and accommodate future events in whatever unexpected form they may take." (Holling, 1973:21)

- Convenient alignment with:
  - the liberal understanding of **freedom and responsibility** (hence, the over-emphasis on self-reliance)

  - the conservative values of **resisting radical change** (hence, the underplaying of transformative potentials)

- Complex life can no longer be governed by planned intervention.

- It should rely on its own capacity for adaptation and survival.

Selective measures of resilience

- **Self-reliance**

  - translated from self-organisation in evolutionary resilience

  - puts the moral responsibility to cope with uncertainty on the resilient self with little or no state intervention

- **Bounce-back-ability**

  - appropriated from engineering resilience

  - privileges the return to normality without questioning the desirability of the 'normal' or seeking a 'new normal'

1. Freedom as 'an artifact' (Hayek,1976:163)

- How to govern the civil society without obliterating its endowed freedom and rights?

- Shape the conduct of the subjects by acting on: "the possible fields of their action"

(Foucault, 1982:221)

- In order "to align the aspirations of free and autonomous individuals […] with those of government in such a way that their self-fulfilments coincide with the fulfilment of government goals."

(Davoudi & Madanipour, 2015:83)

(UK Gov, 2010:2)

- Not *less* government but *different forms* of governing: '**governing at a distance**' (Miller & Rose 1990)
  - combining direct mechanisms of control with indirect technologies of steering, incentivising, auditing, nudging, ….

Responsibilization

- Is at the heart of the liberal way of governing the self

- Responsible *to whom*, *for whom,* and *to what end?*

- Different forms of liberalism approach these questions differently.

Under the welfare states

- Citizens are free individuals yet firmly "bound into a system of solidarity and mutual inter-dependency". (Rose & Miller, 1992:196)

- The state is the regulator and keeper of the social order.

- The responsibilized citizens have a reciprocal relationship with the state.

- Welfare provides a sense of 'ontological security' in times of hardship. (Giddens, 1990)

Under the neoliberal states

- 'Society', as the embodiment of collectivity, is redefined as the sum of individuals.
  - Liberal individualism "amputates the individual from the organic body … plunges him into the unknown and perilous world of the struggle for survival." (Bobbio, 1990:43)

- "There is no such thing as society" (Thatcher, 1987:10)

Under the neoliberal states

- Citizens are 'atomised actors' whose conducts are determined by their own morality rather than the wider social structures.

- They are made responsible *for* and *towards* themselves first.

    - "...people must look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves, and then to look after our neighbour".

        (Thatcher 1987:10)

- Markets are the preferred regulators and keepers of the social order.

The move from welfare to neoliberal modes of government

- Has replaced 'expectational citizenship' with 'aspirational citizenship'   (Raco, 2009)

- With an emphasis on entrepreneurialism and competitiveness

  – "that's what the **Big Society** is all about […] *responsibility* is the absolute key, giving people more control to improve their lives and their communities […] But above all, it's *entrepreneurship* that is going to make this agenda work."

                    (Cameron, 2011, np, emphasis added)

An ideological fit with neoliberal values

- **Self-organisation g**enerates a contingently common platform from across the political spectrum for the critique of global capitalism and promotion of self-sufficiency.

- Self-reliance is advocated as a common sense, neutral and universal measure of resilient self,

- To which a responsible citizen should aspire in the face of uncertainties.

Not a coincidence!

- Hayek's criticism of the state-engineered equilibria of Keynesian demand management was based on **complexity theory**:
  - Social systems are like biological systems newly defined by scientists as complex, adaptive and non-linear.   (Hayek, 1974)

- Theory of '**spontaneous order**':
  - Social order emerges from the interaction of self-serving individuals using market mechanisms.   (Hayek, 1974)

Dominant discourses of resilience

- Call for less intervention and more responsibilization of the subjects:
  - Let people self-organise and deal with the 'unknown unkowns' as they emerge.

- Policy is reactionary.
- Learning happens *post hoc*.
- Emphasis is not on achieving collective goals but solving problems as they emerge.

Self-reliant resilience:
a new 'existential yardstick' of a responsibilized self

- It reflects and reproduces the broader processes of "*existential politics*" by which
  - "selective meanings and understanding of human subjectivity" is identified and institutionalised.

(Raco, 2009: 437)

- People are expected to carry "the weight of the world on their shoulders", and become "responsible for the world and for themselves as a way of being."

(J. P. Sartre, 1957:51)

"If the Government takes greater responsibility for risks in the community, it may feel under pressure to take increasingly more responsibility, thereby **eroding community resilience**".

(RRAC, 2009:6 emphasis added)

- Resilience: a measure of the fitness to survive in the turbulent world of insecurities

- Reiterating Darwinian law of natural selection and survival of the fittest
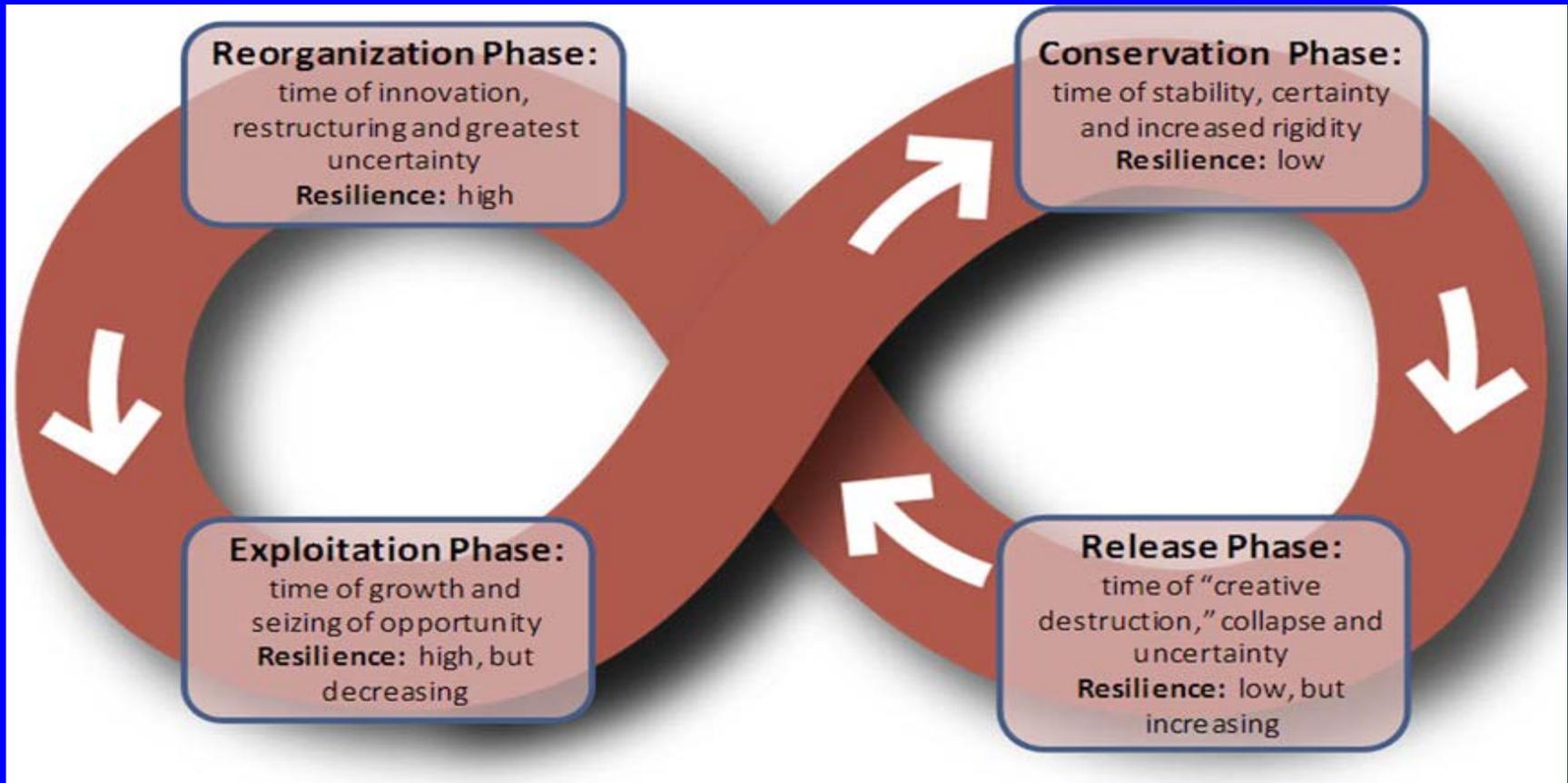
2. The return to 'normal'

- Kauffman's (2000) influential ideas:
  - Emergence and contingency are key characteristics of life as biological being.

  - "Contingency is itself constitutive of what it means to be a living thing.
  - If life, understood as biological being, is to be secured, such life cannot be *secured from contingency.*"

  (Dillon, 2008: 314 original emphasis)

A governing dilemma

- How to secure complex life without destroying its essence as emergent being.

- Uncertainty is a source of threat as well as opportunity;
  - "both that which must be secured against and that which must be enabled" (Andeson, 2010: 782)

- **Resilience solution**:
  - Not to prevent uncertain futures but to live with and flourish from them.

Adaptive Cycle

Reorganization Phase:
time of innovation, restructuring and greatest uncertainty
Resilience: high

Conservation Phase:
time of stability, certainty and increased rigidity
Resilience: low

Exploitation Phase:
time of growth and seizing of opportunity
Resilience: high, but decreasing

Release Phase:
time of "creative destruction," collapse and uncertainty
Resilience: low, but increasing

(Pendall, et al, 2010:76; adapted from Gunderson & Holling, 2002)

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Negation of transformative opportunities

- Privileging a narrow engineering perspective, premised on bouncing back to existing social order construed as normal.   (Davoudi, 2012)

- Aligned with conservative values of accepting, adapting to, and maintaining the status quo.

- Ensuring that emergent social order does not spiral out of control and lead to 'undesirable' surprises.

Ideas matter!

- Especially if they:
  - offer a credible framing of policy dilemmas
  - match the dominant political rationalities

- **Resilience** scores high on both accounts.

Why?

- It presents a temporary match between the:
  - cognitive rationality of complexity science
  - normative values of neoliberal mentality

- It is based on the alignment between the:
  - engineering interpretation of resilience as bouncing back
  - conservative values of the defence of status quo

An alternative way of governing the unknown?

- Influenced by complexity theory and resilience thinking but,

- remains highly selective in the definition, calibration and mobilisation of them.

- Demonstrates the difficulties of disentangling *powering* from *puzzling* in the narratives of change.

Redrawing the contours of citizenship

- Vulnerability is self-afflicted.

- Self-reliance is the best way to a resilient self, capable of adapting to crisis and returning to the 'normal' order.

- Resilient self is an existential yardstick to which free and responsibilized individuals have to measure up.

- New links are being forged between governing others and governing the self.
    - People become the *target* of resilience building and its voluntary *partner*.

Governing at a distance

- Through technocratic and calculative technologies of resilience engineering

- Negating transformative possibilities

- Self-reliant individuals are deemed to act rationally in reducing their own vulnerabilities but,

- in such a way that their adaptation is aligned with maintaining the existing order.

Further details and the references can be found in

- Davoudi, S. (forthcoming) Resilience and governmentality of unknowns, in M. Bevir (ed.) *Governmentality after neoliberalism* (Routledge).

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