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## The death of hope? Affirmation in the Anthropocene

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### ABSTRACT

This article engages with the imaginary that the great age of hope as critique is finally at an end. For hope's detractors, the Anthropocene is imagined to be a gain in ethical and political possibilities at the price of the eclipse of both the modernist imaginary (with its optimistic telos of universal knowledge and progress) and its romantic critical counterpart of re-enchantment and hope. Hope can have no place in the Anthropocene if re-enchantment is no longer possible and we no longer maintain the belief that the world was ever there, in some way, 'for us'. It is argued here that, for hope to survive, it is necessary that the world be imagined as one in which it is possible for humans to find a sense of purpose or meaning.

### KEYWORDS

Hope; Anthropocene; critical theory

### Introduction

Hope is not a straightforward category to engage with. In popular discourse, hope is often confused with an optimistic outlook, as in 'hoping for the best', but in the history of philosophical thought hope has often been seen as an affective desire for alternative possible outcomes, which is not necessarily linked to any belief in probabilities (SEP, 2017). While standard accounts of hope link it with irrationality, Kant is the first major thinker to engage with hope as a complex category, in fact as a categorical imperative to believe that there is reason in the world, enabling the possibility of progress to a better world, even if we cannot perceive this empirically; thus hope is constructed as a moral duty in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant, 1970, p. 174). It is this Kantian framing – where hope is constructed as rational and necessary but neither grounded in positivist, scientific knowledge of possibilities nor in religious belief in any transcendental moral truths – that was to inform a wide range of post-Marxist and Frankfurt School critical theorists, perhaps the most influential being Ernest Bloch, who forwarded an immanent and processual ontology of hope as the state of being always 'in-possibility' (Bloch, 1986, p. 202). This article suggests that it is this Kantian or critical hope, which is held to be reaching exhaustion under the aegis of the Anthropocene.

If the Anthropocene spells the end of the modernist imaginary of progress and of the centrality of the human as somehow above and separate from nature, imaginaries of alternative possibilities can be less likely to be understood as critical but rather as a reactionary call to restore the human to its former hegemonic position. This position, is understood here in terms of the affirmation of the Anthropocene, seen as liberating critical thought from the constraints of modernist or anthropocentric thinking (see further, Chandler, 2018; Haraway, 2016; Latour, 2013; Morton, 2013; Stengers, 2015; Tsing, 2015). In which case, perhaps 'hope' will be seen to have been an unchecked privilege of

the moderns? To be more precise, perhaps ‘hope’ was the privilege of critical theorists, connected to the Frankfurt School tradition, who imagined that there would be a second chance after modernity; after the Enlightenment/modernist disenchantment of the world (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997) and the hegemonic divide between culture and nature (Latour, 1993)?

These are the questions this article seeks to engage with. In doing so, it will draw out the links between the affirmative assumptions of the Anthropocene and arguments asserting the death of hope today. The focus is upon highlighting what is unique about the affirmation of the Anthropocene and what increasingly makes this body of thought distinct from critical, neo-Marxist or cultural approaches towards hope in modernity: the fact that the critique of modernity is today not built on the basis that modernity was dehumanizing, separating man from nature, but its inversion: that modernity was not dehumanizing enough (Brassier, 2007; Bryant, 2011; Colebrook, 2014; Povinelli, 2016).

The death of hope has been called for, on the basis that there is no longer the possibility of alternatives to the world as it exists; i.e. that it is not possible to find reason in the world beyond that of the modernist imaginary. It is the lack of reason in the world itself that means there is no choice other than the affirmation of what exists (Brassier, 2007, p. 238). For theorists advocating the end of hope, the affirmative assumptions of the Anthropocene do not raise the possibility of alternatives – any alternative would merely reconstitute the ‘hopeful’ view of man as a knowing subject separated from the world. The affirmative politics of the Anthropocene insist upon the end of hope and acceptance that there can be ‘no happy ending’ (Tsing, 2015, p. 21). The price of the rejection of hope is held to be the liberation of thought and practice from modernist constraints. As Danowski and Viveiros de Castro note, today we appear surrounded by a cacophony of contemporary voices, with new and sophisticated arguments, all determined to ‘end the world’ and even advocating that the ‘real’ world, ‘in its radical contingency and purposelessness, has to be “realized” against Reason and Meaning’ (Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, 2017, p. 3). There is little doubt that these views are powerfully expressive of the underlying sentiments driving the affirmative assumptions of the Anthropocene.

Key to the asserted end of hope is the contemporary perception of the failure of modernity. The affirmation of the Anthropocene thus appears to be overdetermined. The arrival of climate change and global warming, indicating a new set of problems and potential limits to progress and development, seems to have coincided with an already existing exhaustion of the modernist episteme, creating a potent political dynamic. As Claire Colebrook (2017, p. 7) notes: ‘The Anthropocene seems to arrive just as a whole new series of materialisms, vitalisms, realisms, and inhuman turns require us to think about what has definite and forceful existence regardless of our sense of world’. In fact, Richard Grusin (2017, p. viii) argues that ‘the concept of the Anthropocene has arguably been implicit in feminist and queer theory for decades’. This is why, for many theorists, the Anthropocene appears as something that is non-negotiable. Jessi Lehman and Sara Nelson, for example, argue that: ‘In the Anthropocene, we are always already living in the aftermath of the event’. The delayed dynamics of climate change mean that its impact is unavoidable while the entanglement of human and geological factors mean that human agency can never again be imagined in modernist ways (Lehman & Nelson, 2014, p. 444). Stephanie Wakefield asserts that: ‘the crisis is the age. It is on this terrain of an exhausted paradigm – both historical and metaphysical – that a battle is underway’ (Wakefield, 2014, p. 451). This sense of modernity as ‘an exhausted paradigm’ has enabled the affirmative politics of the Anthropocene to rapidly cohere and appear to be powerfully vindicated in every extreme weather event or unexpected accident or disaster.

In answer to the question of ‘Why affirm the Anthropocene?’ The same ready-made explanation is repeated over and over, regularly wheeled out everywhere from newspaper articles to graduate presentations, conference papers and scientific journal articles: the Anthropocene is alleged to liberate us from the prison and constraints of modernist or Enlightenment thought, which has been revealed to be too linear, too binary, too abstract, too reductionist, too subject- or human-centred, too rationalist, too instrumentalist, too hubristic, too Euro-centric, too anthropocentric, too totalizing ... add any other popular trope of your choice. The speed and ease of the (at least rhetorically asserted) rejection of modernist understandings is something that takes more explanation than merely the finding that the earth might be entering a new geological epoch.

The desire for affirmation and the rejection of hope takes a particular and highly contemporary form. Unlike earlier critiques of modernity (Bennett, 2011), the affirmative political framings of the Anthropocene do not seek to return the human to the world, to ‘re-enchant’ the world after modernity’s passing. Rather than becoming ‘at home’ in the Anthropocene, the opposite movement is at play: the earth is understood to be more alien to us, more inaccessible and stranger than we could have imagined. Counter-intuitively, it is this alienation from the world, the world as lacking in meaning for man (the world as a ‘desert’ in Arendtian terms, see 2005, pp. 201–204), which provides the affirmation of the Anthropocene and distinguishes it from earlier, more hopeful, critiques of the modernist paradigm. The Anthropocene is not merely the recognition of the importance of climate change or global warming; but neither is it merely a critique of modernity: for a growing number of theorists, it is affirmed as a new framework for understanding and acting in a world, which can never be considered a ‘home’.

This article is organized in four sections. The next section introduces the problematic of hope in the Anthropocene, highlighting that critical theory approaches tend to see the Anthropocene within a discourse of hope. The second section draws out the importance of understanding the distinct mode of contemporary affirmation, which rather than seeking to return man to the world, emphasizes the impossibility of finding meaning in the world. It is this inverting of critical understandings that enables the affirmative politics of the Anthropocene to move beyond discourses of hope. The third section expands on this to consider how some contemporary theoretical approaches articulate life without the possibility of hope. The final section illustrates this point through its reflection in policy-discourses; in this case, the shifting understanding of resilience and adaptation as being problematic and counterproductive the more the Anthropocene is accepted.

## Hope and the Anthropocene

Whereas contemporary theorists, such as Timothy Morton and Bruno Latour, are happy to point out that climate scientists and climate change itself have done more to shake the modern episteme than critical theorists and the entirety of continental philosophy (see, for example, Latour, 2013, p. 77; Morton, 2013, p. 181), it is suggested here, that the Anthropocene is affirmed precisely because it does something that critical theory had not merely not achieved but, more importantly, had not attempted. Thus claims regarding the end of hope and the affirmation of the Anthropocene cannot be properly understood without a clarification of the concept of hope’s relationship to the critical thought of modernity.

For the modernist world, especially for the Marxist Left, there was little need for hope when science and technology seemed to assure a positive future: there was always the possibility of a ‘happy ending’, through the development and extension of the productive forces, with the removal of capitalist forms of exploitation and oppression, instituting an alternative future based on reason

and technological development (Pachter, 1974). This level of confidence in the promise of modernist progress increasingly dwindled throughout the twentieth century, with the experience of fascism, the purges of Stalin's Russia, world war, the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This critical disillusionment was expressed well in the pessimism of critical theory of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School, whose approach was much less 'scientific' and instead relied on less rationalist framings of 'hope', than did the Marxism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, shifting focus to (psycho)analytical problems of the instrumentalisation of knowledge and social construction of meaning (for example, Jeffries, 2016).

Thus it is clear that, as stated in the introduction above, hope understood as a philosophical concept or category, should not be confused with the common sense expression of hope as meaning merely optimism or as having a positive outlook on life. For the Frankfurt School tradition, critical hope provides an alternative approach to discredited Marxist and modernist scientific and technical frameworks of human progress, through giving meaning to a world constructed in more immanent and processual ways. As Bloch argued, against Bergson, for hope to exist, this process of becoming could not be arbitrary, a 'sheer aimless infinity and incessant inchangeability' (1986, p. 140), but draw upon an agential 'bottom-up' or immanent alternative way of creative being, more attuned to new possibilities.

The new epoch of the Anthropocene can be seen as a continuation of a trend towards a more pessimistic view of the possibility of progress on behalf of radical or critical theorists and commentators. To the point where, today, it is no longer necessary for critical approaches to promise even the possibility of an alternative 'happy ending' (Tsing, 2015). Thus hope itself is often understood to be problematic and increasingly reactionary, as its impossibility becomes clearer. This radical malaise is captured well in Fredric Jameson's often cited observation 'that the end of the world is more easily imaginable than the end of capitalism' (Jameson, 2003, p. 73). As far as there is a shift from a critical focus on capitalism as a specific system of social relations to the problem of reflection upon human forms of social existence more generally (see, for example, Chakrabarty, 2009; Ghosh, 2016; Wark, 2015), the affirmation of the Anthropocene seems both to build on and, importantly, to differ from the hopeful critical theory tradition of the Frankfurt School.

Perhaps one of the most 'hopeful' or traditionally 'critical' approaches to the Anthropocene is that of Bonneuil and Fressoz's *Shock of the Anthropocene* (2016), in which they argue that the problematic of the Anthropocene ought not to be captured by the scientific and technical expertise of eco-modernisers with their conceptions of 'spaceship earth' or 'interplanetary boundaries'. They particularly emphasize the importance of the legacy of the Frankfurt School, who first popularized a left-leaning and critical understanding that the problem was not capitalism per se but rather the modernist episteme itself, in its development of technological and instrumentalist reason at the expense of relational and communal sensitivities (2016, p. 281). What is interesting about Bonneuil and Fressoz's 'left' critique of the Anthropocene is precisely the way they tie it to modernist drives and understandings in order to maintain a hopeful and critical approach. While critical of modernity, Bonneuil and Fressoz seek to follow the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School in returning man to a human-centred world of meaning and progress.

This is a point of fundamental importance regarding a critical stance to the affirmative politics of the Anthropocene. The critical contemporary theorists who affirm the new politics of the Anthropocene, may share some of Bonneuil and Fressoz's disdain for modernity and their more psychotherapeutic and cultural critique of hegemonic ideas, but they take a fundamentally different stance towards hope. Rather than mourning man's separation from the world, the 'post-critical' (Anker & Felski, 2017; Felski, 2015) politics of Anthropocene affirmation, celebrates it and wishes to take this as its

ontological starting point. The modernist episteme is critiqued from the opposite aspect today, that it is too hopeful, that it is too humanist or human-centred, not that it is alienating and dehumanizing. It is for this reason that, for these theorists, there is no demand for the human to be returned to a world of meaning, allegedly denied it by modernist rationalism and instrumentality, but rather for the human to be expunged further. This distinction, which is fundamental for those concerned with the future of hope in the Anthropocene, will be expanded upon further in the next two sections.

### Frankfurt school redux?

Perhaps the classic critical work on the problem of modernity is the one that established the reputation of critical theory and the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's (1997 [1947]) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For them, modernist thinking was dehumanizing: the Enlightenment was problematic in denaturalizing the world and the human, and reducing, universalizing, and equalizing the experience of the world. For critical theory, the Enlightenment was problematic and oppressive rather than liberating. The Enlightenment view of reason contained its own seeds of destruction. The Enlightenment as the modern era was re-read as a history of the separation of humanity from nature through the power of rationality – based on the subsumption of difference to the rule of equivalences, casting the Enlightenment as a totalitarian project with no inherent limits (1997, p. 6): 'Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes the dissimilar comparable by reducing it to abstract quantities' (1997, p. 7). For Adorno and Horkheimer:

What was different is equalized. That is the verdict which critically determines the limits of possible experience. The identity of everything with everything else is paid for in that nothing may at the same time be identical with itself. Enlightenment ... excises the incommensurable ... [u]nder the leveling domination of abstraction. (1997, pp. 12–13)

Rather than a process of progress and reason, the Enlightenment was seen as a machinic, deadening, reduction of the world and of the human individual. For Adorno and Horkheimer, this was a world with no possibility of an outside as everything was subsumed into equivalence through conceptual abstraction (1997, p. 16). In other words, this meant that nothing new could ever occur as 'the process is always decided from the start'; even unknown values could still be put into equations, dissolving the world into mathematics. Everything new was thus already predetermined, producing a world of 'knowledge without hope' (1997, pp. 27–28).

Thus the history of civilization was the attempt to bring the outside under control through the extension of equivalence; Mauss's gift economy and pre-modern magic and sacrifice being early versions of the exchange of non-equivalents (Mauss, 2002). The performative exchange of non-equivalents then led to the reflection of equivalence in thought – conceptual subsumption – through the ratio, i.e. the proportion of conceptual equivalence. Under capitalism this process was formalized further, in both practice and in thought, through money as the universal equivalent of exchange and through the abstractions of democracy and universal rights and the development of science and the digital (see also Sohn-Rethel, 1978). The modernist project was thus one of the extension of the imaginary of control, with the development of subject/object and human/nature binaries. Critical theory and its inheritors thereby sought to challenge the dominance of this modernist imaginary, questioning hierarchies of reason and progress and contesting the grounds upon which equivalences and subsumptions of difference were established.

The Frankfurt School sought to address the crisis of modernist thinking understood as a crisis for the left, i.e. for those who aspired to critically advocate alternative worlds and social progress. The

question at the heart of their work was that of the possibility for critical thought after the Holocaust and Hiroshima. If the Holocaust and Hiroshima were symptoms of rationalist thinking and technological progress, what possibility was there for progress? The alternative to the totalizing and ‘top-down’ engineering and technical solutions of modernity was that of critical hope, based not on humanist hubris but a return of the human to the world.

Bonneuil and Fressoz therefore provide a contemporary framing of this, seeing modernity as the failure to appreciate humanity as part of a material, natural world and seeking to heal the ‘metabolic rift’ (Wark, 2015) caused by the extraction of ‘cheap nature’ (Moore, 2015), restoring a more holistic framework for politics. For these critical thinkers it is the political struggle against modernist thought, which is the emancipatory aspect of the Anthropocene. The hopeful and critical approach thus seeks to reduce the separation of man from the world to political problems of perception and projection and to resolve the problems through bringing man back to the world, through its emphasis on lived experience, the body, affect, ethical entanglements etc. Very much echoing the approach of Bloch, cited earlier, leading posthumanist theorist Rosi Braidotti, seeks to develop a posthumanism that can ‘actualize the virtual possibilities of an expanded, relational self that functions in a nature-culture continuum’, expressing an ‘affirmative, ethical dimension of becoming-posthuman’ as a community bound ‘by the compassionate acknowledgement of their interdependence with multiple others’ (Braidotti, 2017, p. 34; p. 39).

Perhaps, in his more recent work, Bruno Latour could be seen to symbolize the last gasp of the politics of hope – of the critical attempt to return man to a world of meaning – with his conception of the earth in terms of the complex adaptive system of Gaia, where there is nothing ‘natural’ about the interactive agencies of the planet, which together produced life (Latour, 2013, pp. 62–63). For Latour, like Bonneuil and Fressoz, the problem is the divide between culture and nature: a product of modernist human invention (2013, p. 67). Like other critical theorists, and despite his claim that ‘critique has run out of steam’ (2004), Latour seeks to heal the rift that modernity is held to have opened and restore the ‘Earthbound’ to their true home (2013).

I wish to set these theorists, who maintain that hope is possible and necessary to confront the challenges of the Anthropocene against those theorists who assert a much more affirmative politics of the Anthropocene. These theorists, considered in the following section argue that the Anthropocene is not a future to come, that must be warded off, but is already here, thereby transforming and inverting the hopeful aspirations of critical theory.

### **Extinction: after hope ... after failure ...**

It is important to emphasize that for those who advocate critical theory and its alternative of hope we are still living in the modernist world, one in which hope is possible. While critical theorists are clearly critical of the modernist episteme they are still anthropocentric or still live in the legacy of modernist assumptions in which progress is possible – they highlight the critique of Cartesian rational man in order to have a happy ending – their concern is to save humanity and the planet rather than to affirm the Anthropocene (see, for example, Burke, Fishel, Mitchell, Dalby, & Levine, 2016). The new relational, embodied and entangled subject of late modernity, is thus sometimes seen as an extension of the modernist will to govern and problem-solve on the basis of intervening, adapting and being resilient in the face of non-linear or complex life, which is seen to set new norms for governance and problem-solving. This ‘hope’ is entirely lacking in some contemporary affirmations of the Anthropocene, at home in a world without meaning ‘for us’, where what is important is the

lack of stable relation and the lack of intentionality. Claire Colebrook would appear to hit the nail on the head:

Humanism posits an elevated or exceptional ‘man’ to grant sense to existence, then when ‘man’ is negated or removed what is left is the human all too human tendency to see the world as one giant anthropomorphic self-organizing living body ... When man is destroyed to yield a posthuman world it is the same world minus humans, a world of meaning, sociality and readability yet without any sense of the disjunction, gap or limits of the human. (Colebrook, 2014, pp. 163–164)

For Colebrook, these approaches are problematic in that they offer a narrative of hope and redemption: after the detour of modernity, man is returned to the world. In which case, the rejection of the foundational assumptions of modernity would still make hope possible: man could still find other modes of reasoning in the world. Colebrook asserts powerfully that:

The problem with humanism, so it seems, is that it is deemed to be rather inhuman. The Cartesian subject of calculative reason, along with computational theories of mind or representation, including both older humanisms of man as supreme moral animal and posthumanisms envisioning a disembodied world of absolute mastery, cannot cope with the complexity and dynamism of affective life. (2014, p. 173)

The response to the Anthropocene would, for critical theory, be that of hope – to continue to counterpose the present reality to a metaphysics of harmony and conciliation, a secular vision of heaven on earth – and thus to learn our lesson and to assert ‘never again’ on the basis of overcoming modernity’s detachment from entangled and affective life. ‘All our talk of mitigation and stability maintains a notion of stabilized nature, a nature that is ideally there for us and cyclically compatible with production’ (Colebrook, 2017, p. 18). The affirmation of the Anthropocene is, in this respect, the inverse of critical approaches to hope. For affirmative approaches the slogan of ‘never again’ still places the human at the centre of the world and still promises hope. ‘Never again’ is always therefore just the prelude to the next hubristic assertions of human-centred solutions, leading to the next failures and disasters and new claims of ‘never again’, in an ever repeating cycle of imaginaries of human mastery.

For affirmative approaches to the Anthropocene, this cycle can be broken, and declarations of ‘never again’ become impossible, precisely through the imagination of the extinction of the human as a securing subject. As Audra Mitchell states, it is ‘because IR [international relations] is so invested in human survival that it renders the assumption of its possibility unquestionable – and therefore renders extinction unthinkable’ (Mitchell, 2017, p. 12). Following Colebrook, she argues that rather than seeing the problems as solvable on the basis of alternative forms of securing, it is the drive to secure itself which is problematic; ‘only questioning the dogma of survival can enable us to critique this condition, and possibly (although not necessarily) to transcend it’ (2017, p. 17). A very similar position is offered by Madeleine Fagan, who argues:

Ecology offers a reordering of the world, a recreation of the world as a whole, a neutralizing of the threat to logic and sense posed by the Anthropocene ... This matters for thinking about security because to give the modern subject a home is to secure it; it is to reproduce the claims about universality and particularity that constitute the modern subject. (2017, p. 308)

Those theorists, who affirm the Anthropocene, challenge international relations’ discourses of security and strategic thinking at the most fundamental level of the subject of security itself. Even ecological thinking, while it sometimes challenges modernist assumptions of technological solutions, still



seeks to secure the human against the world and is thus seen to be precisely part of the problem that needs to be overcome.

Theorists who seek to positively affirm the Anthropocene can be seen as completing the process of the rejection of modernist and Enlightenment thought but through the inversion of the Frankfurt School's critical project of hope. The Frankfurt School was caught in the trap of modernist thinking, in that they looked for hope in the world rather than looking to the world to critique the possibility of hope. Thus the rise of affirmative and radical 'post-critical' approaches to the Anthropocene, which seek to avoid this trap of still clinging to hope – seeking to repeat the subject-centred attempt to 'restore' humanity to a world of meaning. It is for this reason that the conceptual focus upon extinction is often seen as so important, in assuring a world without hope, and thereby freeing, as Mitchell argues, 'the political possibilities of becoming [that] are precluded by the imperative to survive "as we are" at all costs', enabling 'new modes of ethico-political action and forms of life' (2017, p. 18).

The affirmative politics of the Anthropocene is thus an inversion of the critical focus upon finding hope or meaning in the world, instead seeking to push or enlarge the rift between the human and the world. The rift is naturalized or reified: the world is not and never was there for us, so there can be no hope of healing or of overcoming it. *There can be no basis for hope*. It is precisely hope – the flight from reality of the destruction wrought by modernity – that the Anthropocene is held to bring to an end (Latour, 2010, pp. 485–486).

Humanity can no longer 'progress' in line with the imaginaries of critical thought if the world is no longer seen to be there for our benefit; to provide us with hope or meaning. For affirmative approaches, the world is not a set of scientific and political puzzles set for us to solve; it is no longer 'all about us' – i.e. about what cultures, beliefs, politics, institutions, policies, education systems etc. are better to access the world of reason and progress. Without a world that is there for our benefit, problems can no longer be understood as epistemological: problems of the social, cultural, economic or political barriers to our knowing and understanding. The flip side of this is that the modernist or Enlightenment drive to separate the subject from the object of knowledge is revealed to be an error or mistake only in so far as it has not been pushed far enough. There is no such thing as an Enlightenment subject – a subject that imagines itself as separate to other beings, somehow capable of eventually building up more and more universal knowledge of an external world so as to control, direct and to dominate this world in order to live happily ever after. There is no world 'for us', no separate subject and no hope for a happy ending. As Ray Brassier (2007, p. 25) puts it: 'Science subtracts nature from experience, the better to uncover the objective void of being'. The only thing certain is the 'necessity' of contingency itself (Meillassoux, 2008).

## Resilience and the death of hope

So far the discussion has taken place on the fairly abstract level of political and philosophical thought. The claims that hope can no longer play a critical role may not necessarily appear obvious, especially for readers in the policy-making world, in which the crisis of the Anthropocene seems to be a dynamic for a wide range of adaptive and critical thinking. The implied death of hope is rarely declared in celebratory terms outside of discussion in rarefied academic circles. It is for this reason that this final section focuses on the shifting problematic of resilience. If any discourse has grown to prominence in the shift of policy-making towards a consideration of the Anthropocene, it is that of resilience.

Resilience, for many advocates, begins to stake out a break with modernist or 'top-down' understandings of governance as 'command-and-control' and instead seeks more processual forms of

engagement, working with difference and contingency, often from the ‘bottom-up’, seeking to understand processes in their emergence and to work with more immanent forms of agency (see Chandler, 2014; Grove, 2018). Of interest with regard to the possible death of hope and the shift to more affirmative approaches in the Anthropocene has been the internal critique of resilience in the policy literature. Two contrasting examples will suffice to make the point.

Firstly, a critical piece by Lizzie Yarina in the radical urban architecture journal *Places*, titled ‘Your Sea Wall Won’t Save You’, which criticizes ‘highly engineered, technocratic programmes’ of urban resilience through the building of floodwalls and defences (Yarina, 2018). For Yarina, attempts to impose ‘engineering’ resilience are mistaken in their ‘top-down’ approach of ‘*enforcing* resilience’ (italics in original). Resilience is understood to be ‘enforced’ as rather than solving the problem, engineering solutions are seen to be promoting unsustainable growth based on massive construction projects to keep the status-quo working while not dealing with the ‘root causes’ of flooding, soil erosion and groundwater extraction. Referencing Ulrich Beck’s conception of ‘risk society’, she notes the recursive nature of the problem, whereby resilience, done this way, ‘just makes the situation worse’, through favouring ‘hard systems’ of infrastructural control and regulation rather than ‘soft systems’ capable of adapting to local realities rather than fighting them (see also Chandler, 2017). Yarina instead argues for a different resilience, ‘critical resilience’ which would ‘draw on local vernaculars for living with water’. As can be seen clearly, the shifting approach to resilience here illustrates the shift from a modernist to a hopeful and more affirmative construction of living with the problem rather than trying to fight it. Thereby, exploring the local and contextual possibilities revealed by the problem of flooding.

A similar discussion can also be seen in more policy science oriented journals. One example of this shift, highlighted by the Stockholm Resilience Centre, is the idea of the problem of ‘coercive resilience’; again a type of resilience which seeks to evade or cover over problems rather than tackle them in their immanent forms of emergence (Rist et al., 2014). The group of scientists writing on ‘Applying Resilience Thinking to Production Ecosystems’ define ‘coerced resilience’ as: ‘Resilience that is created as a result of anthropogenic inputs such as labour, energy and technology, rather than supplied by the ecological system itself’ (2014, p. 3). As the authors state: ‘In the context of production systems, coercion of resilience enables the maintenance of high levels of production’ (2014, p. 3). The authors focus specifically on food production, where the addition of nutrients, fertilizer and technological aids over the last few hundred years has seen the ‘substitution of human and human-made capital for natural capital and processes’ (2014, p. 3). Their argument is that although leading to higher levels of production in the short-term, in the long-term this process of increasing agricultural productivity has been counter-productive as natural processes have become artificial. Agricultural resilience is now more difficult as there is much less reliance ‘on the maintenance of local ecological processes [which provided] ... clearer feedbacks regarding proximity to ecological thresholds’ (2014, p. 4). Not only is resilience lost locally but also the reliance on ‘anthropogenic inputs’ sourced externally is ‘often at the expense of externalities imposed elsewhere’ (2014, p. 4). Rather than human inputs creating resilience to food shortages, agricultural productivity increases are seen to be counter-productive, undermining natural systems and necessitating continual increases in artificial measures seeking to shore up an increasingly non-sustainable status quo.

In these, increasingly prevalent discourses of resilience, the faith in modernist science and technology – in ‘top-down’, ‘anthropogenic’, ‘engineering’ or ‘technical’ solutions – is displaced through a hope in ‘critical’, ‘local’, ‘natural’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches. My argument is that this attempt to dismiss modernist frameworks of problem-solving and to rely on ‘hope’ – as constructed in this article, as a critique of Enlightenment assumptions and the return of the human to the world in the Anthropocene – is doomed to failure. Logically, there is no possibility of developing alternative

forms of resilience, which can survive this critique. Increasingly it is the case that whatever is done to preserve humanity will inevitably be construed to be problematic, when humanity is collectively seen to be the problem rather than the solution, i.e. in the era of the Anthropocene.

I close this section and this article with one final example regarding resilience, Stephanie Wakefield and Bruce Braun's essay on 'oystertecture' or 'living breakwaters' (2019). This is a study of plans to do resilience the 'natural' way, following super storm Sandy, by building two miles of oyster reefs off Staten Island, New York. Building oyster reefs not only is said to provide a natural flood barrier rising and falling with the tide, oysters are also a natural way of cleansing pollutants and improving water quality. Thus enrolling nature in infrastructure would seem to meet the requirements of 'critical' and 'non-coercive' resilience. Except of course this does not and cannot. Oystertecture is still doing 'resilience' it is attempting to adapt to the changing world in order to preserve the productivist and consumptionist way of life of New Yorkers.

Any imaginary of resilience as 'hope': as a 'natural' or non-coercive way of becoming in harmony as a 'posthuman' community bound 'by the compassionate acknowledgement of our interdependence with multiple others' (Braidotti, 2017, p. 39), is increasingly seen to be reactionary and problematic. Open to the accusation that on behalf of the needs of capital and corporations there is a pretence that sea-level are not rising, that climate change is not already here and that the Anthropocene is somehow a condition to come. Hope is part of the problem not part of the solution. As Wakefield and Braun illustrate, hope cannot be any better than a modernist 'engineering' or 'technical' solution as it still promises salvation. It still promises a world different from the one that exists rather than affirming this world. Oystertecture is still an attempt to fight the Anthropocene rather than accepting and affirming it. Oystertecture provides hope when the affirmative approach increasingly appears to see hope only as the enemy, operating on the side of maintaining an unsustainable status quo.

## Conclusion

The affirmation of the Anthropocene is precisely the affirmation of this world 'after the world'. In the modernist world of reason, there was nothing new or creative in the world: the agential power was the human subject's attempt to find or to discover hidden hope or reason in the world. The Anthropocene promises a world without the modernist privilege of hope; a world that, in its affirmation of what exists, has no more need for hope than for progress towards an alternative future. As Claire Colebrook argues, rejecting hope forces us to 'stay with the trouble' without 'bestowing an epic agential power in "man"' (2015, p. 176). This is highlighted in comparison with Kantian or critical hope, based upon a hidden reason in nature, which enables human discord, war and aggression to ultimately tend towards a level of stability and harmony: a transcendental telos of progress, which enables order to emerge from disharmony and conflict (Colebrook, 2014, p. 106). Thus it would appear that our contemporary condition expresses both the exhaustion of modernist understandings of reason and progress and of critical and post-foundational attempts to keep hope alive and to open alternative possibilities. It is not just that 'the end of the world is more easily imaginable than the end of capitalism': it would appear that 'after the end of the world' it is no longer possible even to imagine any alternative. If these critics are correct, that no alternatives are possible, even in the imagination, then hope will have no future.

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