Performative resilience: How the arts and culture support austerity in post-crisis capitalism

Jack Newsinger

The University of Nottingham, UK

Paula Serafini

The University of Leicester, UK

Abstract

Resilience is a key theme in contemporary post-crisis capitalism, prominent across government policy, popular discourses, business and management thinking and academia. This article is about the deployment of the concept of resilience in cultural policy and practice under conditions of austerity. It is based on an extensive engagement with literature, an analysis of cultural policy discourse, and qualitative data drawn from 23 in-depth interviews with freelance cultural practitioners. The findings contribute to the literature on the politics of resilience in policy and society (Allen et al., 2014, Diprose 2014, Burman 2018, Gill & Orgad 2018, Harrison 2012) and the effects of austerity on culture (Felton et al. 2010, Pasquinelli & Sjöholm 2015, Pratt 2015). We adapt Robin James's (2015) concept of resilience to show how arts leaders and practitioners generate performative narratives that seek to publicly represent their capacity to adapt to austerity, and we explore the different versions of resilience thinking that these narratives mobilise. We argue that resilience in cultural policy and practice unwittingly produces a discursive surplus which becomes reinvested in institutions, providing subsequent justification for the processes of post-crisis austerity itself.

Introduction

In a very short space of time the concept of resilience has become a major theme across government policy, popular culture, business and management thinking, and academia. Resilience is everywhere: a buzzword of choice for business gurus, politicians and policymakers (Robinson 2010); a significant policy concept informing a range of areas of government including defence, health, education, finance and welfare (Walker and Cooper 2011, Harrison 2012, Ecclestone & Lewis 2014, Jennings et al 2017); a recurring motif in popular culture (Gill and Orgad 2018); and an established or emergent field of academic enquiry across a range of disciplines (Alexander 2013). For some, resilience describes a *post-*post-modern meta-narrative characterised by complexity and uncertainty (Chandler 2014). For others, resilience reflects reconfigured social relations in post-crisis, neoliberal austerity (Diprose 2014).

This article is about how and with what effects the concept of resilience has been deployed in cultural policy and practice in the UK. Our argument is twofold. Firstly, that the apparent ambiguity and plasticity of the concept, and its journey across and through different disciplinary and policy traditions, creates a discursive space in which power and responsibility can be redistributed in cultural sectors. Following Burman (2018) and drawing on the work of Robin James (2015), we analyse the deployment of the concept of resilience in discursive acts by policymakers and cultural practitioners as performative, in that it has led to a sector-wide identification with a particular understanding of the problem of austerity and the appropriate individual and organisational approaches to withstand and adapt to this new reality. In understanding post-crisis austerity as an opportunity to reconstruct the cultural sector in a new dynamic environment of constant adaptation to change and shock, we argue that resilience functions as a solution to the problem of austerity that supports austerity itself.

The ways in which institutions and individual practitioners have incorporated narratives of resilience, however, is not unified. As we will show, while institutions and policy display a version of 'system thinking' that is hegemonic, creative practitioners' responses to change and their ways of adapting in the cultural sector mobilise traditions of resilience thinking associated with romantic conceptions of the artist that precede the resilience discourse

promoted through recent cultural policy. In this paper, we will examine the way in which resilience discourse is mobilised through cultural policy and how it is received and performed by arts organisations and practitioners, resulting in different yet interrelated mechanisms for the justification and upholding of austerity measures in the arts and culture.

First, we review the literature on resilience, focussing particularly on its uptake in different disciplinary fields and the critical tradition that associates the concept with neoliberalism and austerity. We identify three main versions of resilience thinking: resilience as paradigm, systems resilience and individual psychological resilience. Using this as an analytical framework, we explore the deployment of resilience thinking in cultural policy discourses. We then draw on qualitative research with freelance, precarious artists to explore practitioner narratives of resilience and adaptation. The inclusion of practitioner perspectives is important as it serves to highlight the multiple ways in which resilience discourse is naturalised in the cultural sector, something not considered in the extant literature which tends to focus on dominant discourses. By considering the other narratives that are core to the social figure of the artist and creative practitioner, we can understand how and why resilience discourse is adopted and performed by practitioners, even when this is in coexistence with elaborate critiques of precarity, and the state's withdrawal of financial support for the arts and culture.

This approach enables a more rounded understanding of the complexities of how the concept of resilience has been put to work in post-crisis austerity in the UK, which could also serve to understand the mobilisation of resilience discourse in other contexts where the 2008 financial crisis has led to a sustained assault on post-second world war social democratic models of arts and cultural subsidy. The findings contribute to a growing literature on the politics of resilience in policy and society, and help understand the multiple effects of the hegemony of resilience thinking.

The concept of resilience

Resilience, which can be defined as the capacity to adapt to abrupt change and shock, has, in a short space of time, become a global discourse, with resilience thinking becoming central to nearly all areas of public policy, government and business in the UK and internationally (Anderson 2015). Mark Neolceous (2013: 6), for instance, argues that resilience has come to inform governmental consideration of 'almost every physical phenomenon on the planet.' He continues

> Type 'resilience' into the website of the International Monetary Fund and the search reveals that almost 2,000 IMF documents contain some reference to the term; 'resilient' generates another 1,730 hits. 'Resilience' or 'resilient' appear in the title of fifty-three documents, all published in the last four years. (Neocleous 2013: 4)

In the UK the rise of resilience thinking coincided with the onset of the global financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent austerity agenda embarked upon by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2014 (Brammal 2017). Kristina Diprose notes, for example, that the 'mainstreaming' of resilience discourse in policy and politics 'coincided with a sustained austerity drive from government; the first domestic manifestations of the catastrophic consequences of climate change, and a seemingly irreparable standard of living crisis.' (2014: 45) Resilience is the discursive mode that corresponds to these post-crisis realities. Diprose explains the confluence of resilience and austerity in the following terms:

> A generation came of age and abruptly learned to lower its expectations. Resilient communities, resilient sectors and resilient people are required to suffer these troubled times. In this context, resilience resonates more as a statement of survival than of aspiration - and one that entreats people to consider man-made crises as mysterious tests of character. (2014: 45)

In this way, resilience can be understood simultaneously as an individual psychological quality (resilient people), as a system of social relations (resilient communities; resilient sectors) and as a post-crisis paradigm shift (resilient futures). This conceptual ambiguity, between paradigmatic versions of resilience, individual psychological understandings of the concept and those associated more with social systems and social relations, is, we argue, very important to understand how and with what effects the concept of resilience has come to dominate so much policy and public discourse. In particular, it helps to explain how resilience thinking can be mobilised as a panacea for the effects of austerity, simultaneously

offering the psychological resources for individuals to adapt to crisis and also the key to designing social systems that can withstand shock. In what follows we unpick the concept of resilience in more detail, focussing upon this conceptual ambiguity.

Resilience as paradigm

The broadest and most far reaching understanding of the significance of resilience thinking comes from David Chandler (2014). For him, resilience is not a specific policy concept but a set of 'methodological assumptions about the nature of the world, the complex problem of governance, and the policy processes suitable to governing this complexity.' (2014: 3) Resilience, Chandler argues, is a way of seeing and thinking about 'policy problems' – which could incorporate nearly any social issue – and how they should be managed, that operates at a much broader level than that covered in explicit policy. Chandler draws a distinction between what he calls classical resilience – which is based upon a clear subject/object divide central to modernity (as in personal inner strengths and capacities to withstand oppressive conditions, or unexpected trauma) – and post-classical or post-liberal resilience, which is a much more relational and dynamic conceptualisation. Resilience becomes an adaptive process of subject/object interrelations and is 'thereby both about adapting to the external world and about being aware that in this process of adaptation the world is being reshaped' (2014: 7). The key point, perhaps, is the conceptual understanding of resilience as defining a contemporary ongoing social process, the interrelationship of the subject to the sociological environment. Clearly, this makes resilience a particularly broad and all-encompassing conceptual framework, a definitive, epochal or paradigmatic shift in approaches to governance that affects all aspects of public policy, including cultural policy (although Chandler does not mention it directly).

Systems Resilience

While paradigmatic conceptions of resilience are important to understand its general ubiquity, the specific ways in which the concept has been deployed in different disciplinary and policy fields is significant to understand the political uses to which it is put. The etymology of the concept of resilience is complex, with different meanings and values emerging from different disciplinary traditions. The version that has had most influence in

the social sciences was adapted from ecological science in the 1990s (Alexander 2013). This is based on the idea of interconnected and interdependent systems that cannot be understood through linear relations of cause and effect, which was itself a revolt against the mechanical approach to scientific modelling based on Newtonian physics (Holling 1973). What we call 'systems resilience', understood in this way, has been adapted and adopted in a wide variety of disciplines and policy fields including urban planning (e.g., Swanstrom 2008), organisation studies (e.g., Seville et al 2006; McManus et al 2007), international relations (e.g., Brassett, Croft & Vaughan-Williams 2013), education (e.g. Ecclestone and Lewis 2014), and social policy (e.g. Harrison 2012). Importantly, according to Alexander (2013), systems resilience thinking as taken up in policy developed alongside but relatively independently of understandings of resilience in terms of individual psychology.

Individual psychological resilience

Alexander traces the psychology of resilience to the late 1960s and early 1970s in work that sought to investigate the psychopathology of children, particularly around vulnerability to abrupt shocks such as bereavement, violence, disaster and so on (Bloch et al. 1956). This work shares some elements of the system approach from ecological science, but in this case the system is the mind of the child, not interrelated external factors and social contexts. Alexander argues that the concept of resilience that developed in psychology and its use in the social sciences is not always congruous:

> It is self-evident that psychology concentrates on the individual, albeit influenced by his or her social, cultural and physical environment, while sociology is the science of social relations. With regard to research on disasters and crises, the overlap between the two disciplines has not always produced harmonious views of the same phenomena. For example, the psychological and sociological definitions of panic are virtually irreconcilable (Alexander, 1995, p. 176). Thus, it is hardly surprising that there have been problems defining resilience in a manner that is acceptable to both constituencies. (Alexander 2013: 2713)

The ambiguity of resilience

The distinctions between resilience as paradigm, systems resilience and individual psychological resilience, and the journey that resilience thinking has taken through and

across disciplines and policy, are important if we are to understand its discursive power. Following this necessarily brief sketch, the first point we want to make about resilience is about its ambiguity and plasticity, which enables it to be mobilised in a great variety of different ways, as an analytical tool to understand contemporary modes of governance; a policy tool to prepare organisations and social systems for adaptation; and an individual psychological quality that can be cultivated and idealised to overcome challenges and trauma. Clearly the concept has the capacity to be mobilised in many different ways by different social actors in different contexts, drawing on a range of etymological, disciplinary and even ontological traditions. But we want to argue against the dismissal of the term on this basis, as incoherent or analytically useless (see Pasquinelli & Sjöholm 2015). Indeed, much of the power of the discourse of resilience lies in the deployment of these multiple meanings. Our second point is, then, that the discursive slippage between the different versions of resilience is a productive place for the re-distribution of power and responsibility, evident in many sites including in cultural policy and creative sectors. The next question is *how* does resilience thinking redistribute power, in whose interests and with what effects? In the following section we discuss the politics of resilience.

Neoliberal resilience?

There is a now well-established critique of resilience that sees it as associated with neoliberalism. This argument, in brief, sees resilience operating as a discursive mode of neoliberal thought and governance, naturalising some of the tenets of neoliberal doctrine and placing the responsibility of neoliberal crisis onto individuals, particularly in the period following the global financial crisis of 2008. Space restricts us from engaging with the work in this area in great detail, but in what follows we summarise the main points.

A number of writers have noted the fit between resilience thinking and some of the original conceptual apparatus of neoliberal doctrine. For example, Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper (2014: 144) argue that the success of the concept of resilience in spreading across multiple arenas of governance is due to its 'intuitive ideological fit with a neoliberal philosophy of complex adaptive systems', which they trace to the under acknowledged

legacy of Friedrich Hayek, the founder of the Mont Pelerin Society and one of the central architects of neoliberal thought and policy. For them resilience thinking as the governance of complexity serves as a source of naturalizing metaphors for neoliberal approaches to financial regulation, urban planning, environmental policy and development.

Mark Neocleous makes a similar argument: that the intense currency of resilience in transnational governance institutions such as the UN and the EU is due to its function in accommodating to capital, in neutralising resistance. He argues that

> resilience is by definition against resistance. Resilience wants acquiescence, not resistance. Not a passive acquiescence, for sure, in fact quite the opposite. But it does demand that we use our actions to accommodate ourselves to capital and the state, and the secure future of both, rather than to resist them. (Neocleous 2013: 7)

The notion of resilience as a 'naturalising metaphor', a discursive resource that has an enabling function for post-crisis neoliberalism has proved particularly productive for critical analysis.

The deployment of resilience has been critiqued in similar terms outside of policy literature as a wider cultural trope. According to Ros Gill and Shani Orgad, resilience has 'emerged as a central term in popular culture in genres such as advertising, lifestyle magazines, and reality television, as well as in a burgeoning industry for smartphone apps focused on self-transformation, positive thinking, gratitude, and affirmations.' (Gill and Orgad 2018: 2) They argue that at the 'heart of these very different iterations of resilience discourse is the promotion of the capacity to 'bounce back' from difficulties and shocks, whether this is getting divorced, being made redundant, or having one's benefits cut.' (2018: 2)

Gill and Orgad, and others such as Erica Burman (2018), Nick Taylor (2018) and Aura Lehtonen (2018), see resilience as part of a wider 'turn to character' in contemporary capitalism. Resilience sits alongside other key austerity discursive modes such as stigma (Allen, Tyler and De Benedictis, 2014) which redistribute the burden of social problems onto working class people, particularly women. Resilience emerges, 'alongside other notions such as confidence, creativity, and entrepreneurialism, as being among the key qualities and dispositions highlighted as necessary to survive and thrive in neoliberal societies.' (Allen, Tyler and De Benedictis, 2014: 2) Robin James goes even further, arguing that resilience is

neoliberalism's upgrade on modernist notions of coherence and deconstruction – the underlying value or ideal that determines how we organise artworks, political and social institutions, the economy, concepts of self-hood and so on. Resilience is the hegemonic or 'common sense' ideology that everything is to be measured, not by its overall systematicity (coherence) or its critical, revolutionary potential (deconstruction), but by its *health*. This 'health' is maintained by bouncing back from injury and crisis in a way that capitalises on deficits so that you end up ahead of where you initially started[.] (James 2015: 4 – emphasis in original)

For James, within the normative basis of resilience discourse 'crisis and trauma are actually necessary, desirable phenomena – you can't bounce back without first falling' (James 2015: 4).

What does it mean to describe all these different kinds of discourses, notions, approaches, representations and practices as resilience? The promotion of the capacity to 'bounce back' might be general and flexible enough to be applied across social systems, organisations, communities and individuals. But there are differences between an individual's psychological capacity to 'bounce back' from being violently attacked, say, and the design of systems to allow an organisation to 'bounce back' from reduced funding. These differences are important: how an individual is affected by trauma, psychologically and socially, will be contingent upon many factors that are quite removed from the adaptive capacity of an organisation in which the *failure* of one person is of little consequence, or even a necessary component of transformation, as in laying-off workers or increasing exploitation. We might go on to argue that one of the uses of resilience thinking is that it tends to erase differences between individual people and their subjective experiences and social positions, and the situated contexts of systems, hierarchical organisations, and general policy paradigms and goals which are the basis of government (see Burman 2018 for a similar point made about education policy discourses). The dynamics of class, race, gender, and all unequal social categories are erased, made unremarkable or unimportant in resilience thinking, with individuals unshackled from social categories valued only in their contribution to the wider health of the social system.

For example, a DEMOS report on national resilience argues that 'Individual resilience, based on our instinct for survival, is central to a resilient nation' (Edwards 2009: 18). This instinctive resilience is expanded to organically inform business and society more generally:

> As humans we have the capacity to learn and adapt. Just as humans change their habits continuously, especially after emergencies, other communities – like the business community – constantly reorganise themselves, especially after a major shock like the credit crunch and/or when the profit margin is at stake. And this goes for society as well: we adapt our lifestyles, change our habits and learn from people around us. (Edwards, 2009: 17)

It is through this conceptual slippage, between the individual and the social system, that the responsibility for successful adaptation to change can be placed onto individuals and disarticulated from social structures and social relationships; a move from the political to the personal. In this way, the performative work that a resilient subject does to successfully adapt to crisis and trauma produces a discursive surplus that is central to the maintenance of resilience discourse itself. To apply this to the terms of our argument, the ability of organisations and individuals in the cultural sector to adapt to the conditions of austerity are a measure of the *health* of the cultural sector. Conversely, those organisations and individuals who aren't able to bounce back, who don't survive austerity, are weak and are not contributing sufficiently to the overall health of culture and society. Austerity is therefore, perversely, a desirable phenomenon which actually improves the overall resilience of the cultural sector.

Clearly the critical understandings of resilience as a kind of neoliberal disposition or mode is quite different to the ostensible aims of resilience thinking in policy, but also to the understanding of resilience as a much more complex and reflexive paradigm of governance as put forward by Chandler (2014). There is a debate here, about the extent to which resilience is an expression and tool of the powerful, a demand for the active acquiescence to neoliberal capital, or a resource that can be appropriated and put to use by subaltern social actors. This is what Ceceilia Pasquinelli and Jenny Sjöholm (2015) argue in their study of the resilience of visual artists in London, one of the few studies to investigate resilience empirically from the point of view of cultural practitioners themselves. They note that the 'semantic domain' of resilience, which includes tropes such as 'flexibility, self-help, and self-organisation' can easily fit with a neoliberal agenda, that resilience can 'be interpreted as a 'mobilising discourse' that places responsibility on local communities to adapt to global capitalism.' (2015: 75) However, they nuance this by arguing that resilience also 'works as a platform for discussing and organising reactions that challenge the status quo and for negotiating alternative routes of development, in contrast to the consolidated arguments

about resilience as a neo-liberal and regressive agenda.' (2015: 75) Resilience emerges as – potentially, at least – a resource for challenging the effects and terms of post-crisis neoliberalism as opposed to reinforcing it.

We come back to the notion of resilience as resistance later in our analysis. A key point here is that there is still a lack of research focussing on subaltern social actors, often the subjects of resilience discourse and the building blocks of resilient social worlds, on their own understandings and uses of the concept. Here we move onto the next part of our argument, which is to understand the deployment of resilience thinking as a performative discourse. We begin by mapping out the uses of resilience in cultural policy and argue that it is deployed to re-invest individual resilience into the resilience of organisations. We then contrast these dominant versions of resilience thinking to those deployed by cultural practitioners themselves.

As noted in the introduction, we approach resilience as a performative discourse which works to naturalise both a particular understanding of the problem of austerity and the appropriate individual and organisational responses. When speaking of the performativity of discourse, we adopt the frame developed by Butler, who builds on and expands Austin's (1962) notion of performative speech. Austin, explains Butler, argues that there are two kinds of performative speech acts: perlocutionary acts which are 'performed as a consequence of words' and in which the act and the words uttered are different from each other (e.g. the act of marriage following the statement 'I do'), and illocutionary acts of speech, which are 'actions that are performed by virtue of words'. In the latter case, which is the one of interest for our argument, 'the meaning of a performative act is to be found in this apparent coincidence of signifying and enacting' (Butler 1995:198). We understand performativity as 'a set of processes that produce ontological effects, that is, that work to bring into being certain kinds of realities' (Butler 2010: 147), in this case in relation to the nature of art-making and austerity. In other words, performativity means that certain ideas and structures are sustained by daily acts that reproduce them, as a result naturalising ways of doing things and seeing the world that are in the end only constructs. In the case of resilience, it is not just that resilience discourse is reproduced and naturalised through discourse and speech acts in policy and practice, but also, those acts have an effect on the subject of enunciation (Butler 2010:155): as we will show, the immersion in and

reproduction of resilience discourse contributes to building the *resilient* creative subject. This approach allows us to grasp the ambiguity inherent in the ways in which resilience has been adopted and reproduced by arts organisations and practitioners as a way of adapting to austerity, crucially, without challenging its normative basis.

Methodology

The data set for this study is composed of survey data, interviews, and policy documents. The survey and interview data was gathered as part of a larger study that looked at the effects of austerity on arts and cultural practice, called Creative Industries, Diversity and Austerity (CIDA) Project.

CIDA Project conducted an online survey with freelance creative practitioners in the East Midlands. The survey, which was carried out between 30 June and 19 August 2016, included 24 questions. The first part addressed individuals' creative practice, current earnings, changes in income, contract status, and reliance on other forms of income or debt. The second part covered demographic characteristics and experiences of discrimination. The survey was promoted through a network of organisations in the cultural and creative industries in the region and gathered 169 self-selected responses. Following this, the project team conducted interviews with 23 of the survey respondents, in order to further explore some of the themes from the survey. Interviews took place between October 2016 and January 2017. All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone, anonymized upon transcription and analyzed by the project team using NVivo software. Interviews were coded through a 2-stage process that allowed the team to refine the categories employed. The process produced six main nodes: aspirations and life stories; enterprising selves; narratives of cultural and creative industries; resilience; stress; and work. Entries were often double-coded, which allowed us to consider, for instance, resilience in relation to other aspects of practitioner's work and life stories. In addition to the survey and interview data, we analyzed a set of policy documents and public speeches by key figures in arts and culture, which were selected according to their impact and visibility within the sector.

Resilience and cultural policy

In cultural policy, as in other policy fields, resilience is ubiquitous. Some of this simply reflects the embeddedness of resilience thinking more widely; some is more specific to cultural sectors (Pratt 2015).

Some of the claims made about the importance of resilience in the arts and culture are generic, in that they do not draw attention to the specificity of cultural practice or the cultural economy. For example, the Culture White Paper of 2016, one of the only major pieces of cultural policy to emerge from the UK's Conservative government since 2010, makes a lot of resilience, devoting a whole chapter to 'Cultural investment, resilience and reform'. Here, resilience is conceived in purely financial terms. For example:

> Resilience remains a key issue, particularly at regional and local levels. Cultural organisations need to ensure that every pound of public investment goes as far as possible. They must also think more broadly how they will adapt their business models and financial strategies to deal with potential challenges to funding.' (2016: 51)

Resilience is deployed as the mode of thinking that enables organisations to adapt to austerity and the withdrawal of state support for the arts and culture, with the more resilient parts of the sector diversifying funding towards commercial and philanthropic revenue streams. This version of post-crisis resilience was echoed in a controversial speech made at the Arts and Business Northern Ireland Awards ceremony in January 2018 by Arts Council Northern Ireland Chair, John Edmund. Edmund linked a perceived lack of resilience in the cultural sector to a 'dependency culture' and lack of entrepreneurialism associated with public funding models, noting that 'We are all facing deeply uncertain times. But both sectors, arts and business, if they recognise the opportunities they share can support one another to face into the challenges that lie ahead.' (Edmund 2018) The problem is that the 'current funding model for the arts has created a high level of dependency and, frankly, has not been a sustainable one for some time.' (Edmund 2018) For Edmund, the solution to this policy problem is that

> the arts sector has much to learn from business, we need to develop your focus on outcomes, your skills (particularly with regard to planning and performance measurement) and your commercial know-how. Thinking like a business, integrating

skills and expertise will help build greater resilience into the creative sector (Edmund 2018 No page number).[i]

These are examples of what we might term neoliberal resilience – the expectations placed upon the cultural sector to adopt the supposed resilience of business, but crucially, framed here as part of a wider attack on arts and cultural funding under austerity (see Newsinger 2014). While Edmund's speech was widely condemned[ii] for its perceived attack on the traditional basis of arts and cultural subsidy and the way it drew upon wider conservative tropes of welfare dependency and inefficiency, the mobilisation of resilience thinking as post-crisis cultural policy need not be so combative. For example, in a speech titled 'What does it mean to be resilient in the arts?' (2017), Paul Hamlyn Foundation Chief Executive Moira Sinclair argues that resilience comes from establishing a shared sense of purpose within an organisation:

> What I'm sure about is that a resilient arts organisation doesn't *start* with a robust business model – sure you can't be productive without one, but the first thing I'd stress is the importance of a really clear sense of what you are there to do. It's more than a mission statement […] it is a culture of shared purpose and value, the reason you come to work and feel passionate about what you do. (Sinclair 2017, No page number)

This is generic systems resilience thinking that can be placed within the tradition of management literature identified by Alexander (2013), with a focus on 'human assets', 'vision', 'networks', and so on, being important for the ability of an organisation to adapt to change. The deployment of resilience works to align the workers towards the 'shared purpose and value' of the organisation. While Sinclair also notes some of the specificity of the arts and culture (she mentions, for example, a 'compact […] with our audiences', the importance of genuine community engagement and the importance of art) most of the speech is rather generic.[iii] It is revealing, however, for the way that the resilience of individuals – human assets – becomes invested in the resilience of the organisation in the highly competitive environment of post-crisis austerity.

The most coherent and influential version of resilience thinking in cultural policy is to be found in Mark Robinson's Arts Council England report, 'Making adaptive resilience real' (2010). The report explores the relevance of resilience thinking to the arts, identifying characteristics of resilient organisations, and making recommendations for how Arts Council

England can enhance resilience. Robinson adopts the framework of systems resilience, drawing from thinkers like Holling (2000), and offers an analysis that is more focussed on cultural markets or 'ecologies'. Similarly to Sinclair, however, Robinson does place values and human assets at the core of organisational resilience, highlighting issues of 'purpose' and 'identity' in his definition of resilience:

> Adaptive resilience is the capacity to remain productive and true to core purpose and identity whilst absorbing disturbance and adapting with integrity in response to changing circumstances (2010: 14).

Robinson links both innovation and resilience to cycles of ups and downs which provide 'the opportunity to build resilience to events without becoming defensive or static' (Robinson 2010: 5). Resilience is positioned as a better and more 'realistic' goal than sustainability, and instability, challenges (and we might therefore say, austerity) are portrayed as normal and necessary conditions for achieving that goal.

One of the key points in Robinson's report is that resilience is about attitude; more precisely, it is about being positive. Blurring the lines between systems and individual psychological resilience, he claims that 'taking a conscious and designed approach to building resilience is a stance that is increasingly being adopted' (2010: 15) by organisations, which places the responsibility for adaptation onto organisations as well as individuals themselves. He follows by arguing that funding agencies must help organisations develop this adaptive resilience, suggesting resilience is something all organisations are capable of, if they undergo the necessary transformations in their business models. In Robinson's account, the individual's resilience is aligned to that of the organisation. In the same sense as Edmund, he emphasises the need for a 'business logic' and cutting 'dependency' from public funding, looking instead at other sources of income such as public sector revenue or sponsorship.

Robinson, Edmund and Sinclair's mobilisations of resilience thinking share a common basis in systems resilience thinking most associated with business and management. Across these examples we see variations as resilience is adapted to the particular conditions of the cultural sector – Robinson for instance, adopts a business-oriented perspective that is

somewhat more tamed than Edmund's, as he argues against the efficiency paradigm that seeks to eliminate all that is 'redundant' (e.g. jobs) in organisations. What seems redundant today, argues Robinson, might not be tomorrow, and might in fact be what helps an organisation bounce back in the face of unexpected change. However, all three share the promotion of resilience as something that can be adopted by the cultural sector in order to improve its *health*, its ability to adapt to outside shock—in this case post-crisis austerity. This dominant version of resilience does nothing to challenge the normative basis of austerity: the attack on public funding models, the promotion of the values and practices of the private sector over the public, ideas of welfare dependency as bearing responsibility for capitalist crisis, and so on. Further than this, and drawing on James (2015), we would argue that these kinds of mobilisations of resilience thinking do a lot of discursive work to justify the austere conditions of the post-crisis cultural sector. Arts and cultural organisations that are able to develop resilience and adapt to the new realities of post-crisis capitalism are the living proof that the problem of austerity can be overcome through more efficient means of social and economic management, emerging as more resilient, commercial, audience-focussed, and so on. Resilience in cultural policy thus capitalises upon the trauma of austerity, recycling damage into value, which in-turn provides retrospective justification for austerity itself, as a productive social process. It is in this sense that statements like those cited above can be understood as performative, deploying resilience as a discursive mode that re-imagines the cultural sector on the basis of more resilient commercial values and practices, and incorporates a disciplinary function about the relationship between individual subjects and the organisation.

Cultural practice and romantic resilience

Post-crisis cultural policy mobilizes resilience performatively in order to reconstruct the cultural sector in a new dynamic environment of constant adaptation to change and shock. This process seeks to align workers to the values of austerity, and reinvest individual psychological resilience into the systemic resilience of organizations and the cultural sector more widely. But how successful is this process? In this final section we answer this question by exploring how cultural practitioners themselves mobilize the concept of resilience. Little

work has explored resilience empirically with cultural practitioners (exceptions to this are Jennings et al 2017, Pasquinelli & Sjöholm 2015 and Felton et al 2010). There is, therefore, a significant gap in knowledge as to how close or far the public discourses of resilience are from the everyday lived reality of relatively subaltern social actors, the subjects of much resilience discourse. The differences between the two are important because they can serve as a measure of the extent to which the discourse is imposed from above, how it works as a 'disciplining technology', and the extent to which the subject is reinvented in the terms of post-crisis neoliberal governmentality.

In our research, practitioners were asked questions designed to assess how they have been affected by austerity and how they sustain and experience careers as cultural workers more generally. The responses elicit a number of themes relevant to the discourse of resilience as a metaphor, and as a practice of adaptation. However, in contrast to the more dominant versions of systems resilience thinking found in policy, cultural practitioners draw on a much longer and richer tradition of what we are referring to as *romantic* resilience, as it aligns with the narratives and imaginary of the artist that developed in 18th-19th century Europe (O'Connor 2010, Banks 2010). In what follows we theorize this mode of romantic resilience in contemporary precarious cultural work.

The importance of the romantic tradition of the individual artist to contemporary precarious creative practitioners has been noted in the cultural labour literature (Pratt 2015, Gerber 2017). Key to this tradition is a powerful distinction between sense perception and rationality, with the aesthetic representing a way of knowing the world in contradistinction to the abstract universals of scientific knowledge, as found in German romantic and critical philosophy of the mid-18th century (O'Connor 2010). It was in this period that the figure of the artist came to be understood as 'that special, self-regulating being and "free spirit" possessed of rare and precious gifts' (Banks 2010: 253). As O'Connor notes, an artistic identity 'also came to be seen as a response to or rejection of the market and the industrial-bureaucratic society that reduced everything to interchangeable commodities and administered objects.' (2010: 15). While arts sectors have always contained complex institutional and commercial structures through which value is generated, for long this particular image of the artist prevailed, one that has been shaped and reproduced through

popular culture (Charles Arznavour's *La Bohème* hits all the bases: poverty, youth, the genius artist and Paris).

The importance of this romantic tradition in more contemporary cultural fields has also been noted by Alison Bain, who argues that in artistic professions, occupational identities 'are not learned through shared workplace cultures and everyday social interactions in a shared workplace'. Rather, 'they are learned […] through myths and stereotypes.' For Bain:

> The spirit of Romanticism was embodied in the stereotypical image of the starving artist living in a garret – an image that glamorized the precarious position of the artist and communicated a powerful new definition of the avant-garde artist as a Bohemian rebel, outsider and social critic who sacrificed status, money and material comfort for the supposed freedom this afforded the imaginative spirit to pursue individual creative expression. (2005: 28-29)

Bain argues that this image has adjusted very little up to the present, despite the massive changes to the position of artists in society and economy.

However, as Bourdieu and many others after him have argued, not everyone can afford to perform the myth of the romantic artist and sustain a career in the arts:

> The propensity to move towards the economically most risky positions, and above all the capacity to persist in them (a condition for all avant-garde undertakings which precede the demands of the market), even when they secure no short-term economic profit, seem to depend to a large extent on possession of substantial economic and social capital. (Bourdieu 1993: 67)

Bourdieu focuses on economic and social capital as necessary resources to make it in the sector. Our interviews with practitioners revealed awareness of the structural barriers Bourdieu refers to, which prevent certain people from entering and sustaining careers in the arts. But in addition, resilience was also described by many as an essential psychological asset for the artist. In what follows, we draw from interviews to demonstrate how resilience is adopted as a narrative and performed by creative practitioners.

N38 (male, aged 56-65) for instance, alludes to resilience as an essential skill for this kind of work, and something one either possesses or they do not:

> my art school tutor […] always said the same thing - it's a tight-rope, a precarious way to earn a living. You look forward rather than look down and if you look down you scare yourself, you just try to look forward all the time. It's enjoyable but it's not

for everyone, not everyone would be comfortable with the precariousness of it, the lack of security.

Another practitioner, N71 (female, 46-55), talks about her capability for adaptability as a valuable skill or resource to navigate short-term and unstable work:

I'm very adaptable and I can adapt to many different ways of working and I think that's what helped me be full time because I don't just do one thing, I can do many different things. So it gives me more options of finding work really.

N05 (female, 65plus) explains that being an artist is 'a question of being resourceful and adaptable and pragmatic and finding a way to make that sustainable.' She compares the struggle of artists to that of migrants, and describes this resilience as 'incredible' and 'phenomenal':

You know, it's like being an immigrant, you know, somebody who's travelled across the world […] that incredible resilience that is needed to actually do that and for artists to make the work... If somebody is in their kind of 60s, 50s/60s/70s/80s and they managed to stay in a practice and grow their work as an artist, that's a phenomenal achievement because everything is in a way against that journey economically.

N05 also describes people who have resilience as being 'blessed' with vocational drive that allows them to thrive in a difficult environment.

Similarly, N71 says : 'I don't think talent is enough, you have to have kind of determination and kind of be very resilient because you get knocked back constantly. You kind of bounce back from it all the time or you just give up.' In the face of a changing art world and as a result, a shift in what makes up the identity of the artist, resilience is not only a mechanism to withstand precarity, but also becomes a defining identity trait. Perhaps the narrative of resilience as a special quality possessed by (some) artists is part of the way the choice of a precarious job can be justified: I do it because I love it, but also, *I have what it takes*, not everyone does. Having what it takes is no longer only being blessed with talent; it is also being resilient. In this sense, adopting the resilience discourse is performative: as artists adhere to and reproduce a discourse of resilience, they contribute to establishing resilience as a dominant trait or attribute in the contemporary identity and social imaginary of the artist.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the concept of resilience is complex and ambivalent, made up of various meanings developed across disciplinary traditions and policy fields. We trace three main understandings of the term: resilience as paradigm, systems resilience and individual psychological resilience. Crucially, the discursive slippage between these different versions of resilience makes it a productive concept for the redistribution of responsibility for adaptation to change, which helps to explain its prominence as a policy theme in post-crisis austerity.

The deployment of resilience in cultural policy and by individual cultural practitioners can be understood as performative: it discursively constructs a particular conception of the problem of austerity and the appropriate individual and organisational responses. In understanding post-crisis austerity as an opportunity to reconstruct the cultural sector in a new dynamic environment of constant adaptation to change and shock, we argue that resilience does nothing to challenge or resist neoliberal capitalism; indeed, resilience (perhaps unintentionally) reinforces its logic. In this way our argument complicates and stands in distinction to those who see resilience among artists as offering a form of resistence to neoliberal capitalism (e.g., Pasquinelli and Sjöholm 2015). While romantic resilience is clearly an important part of an artistic identity that helps to sustain practitioners, we do not find evidence of it as a resource of resistance to neoliberal crisis or the precarity of artistic labour. While our research shows how practitioners draw on a longstanding imaginary of the romantic, individual artist as developed in the 18th century, the performance of resilience in contemporary cultural policy and practice does not challenge the normative basis of austerity or the relatively weak position of precarious artists within the sector. The romantic resilience that is central to the identity performance of the precarious artist is better understood as the kind of active acquiescence to the trauma of post-crisis capitalism that Mark Neocleous (2013) describes. We therefore agree with Bain (2005: 35) when she argues that the 'long-standing socioeconomic marginalization of artists and their relatively weak position in the labour market can be attributed, in part, to the encasement of artistic practice in myth, and the isolation of artists from one another.'

Individual resilience in the face of trauma and crisis might be necessary for individual survival, but it is not a basis upon which to challenge austerity.

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Acknowledgements

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[i] For the full text of the speech see https://alifitzgibbon.com/2018/01/26/out-of-touch/
[ii] For an account on the controversy surrounding the speech, see Ali Fitzgibbon's blog: https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/arts-council-chair-john-edmund-urged-to-quit-after-criticising-sectors-dependency-on-grant-aid-36532734.html)
[iii] For the full speech see https://www.phf.org.uk/blog/mean-resilient-arts/)