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Environmental Humanities of Critique and Creativity

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# Resilience Is Cyborg

Feminist Clues to a Post-Disciplinary  
Environmental Humanities of Critique and Creativity

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The notion of resilience has something in common with the word cyborg: a legacy of systems theory, cybernetics thinking, and other ambivalent sources. Like the cyborg Donna Haraway re-formulated with irony in the 1980s, the concept of resilience has also taken on a wily and non-innocent life of its own. From ecology to earth surveillance, it has seeped into various areas of the social sciences and humanities, covering everything from global finance to trauma psychology, national security, public health and urban planning. Resilience as a scholarly power word seems highly resilient.

If resilience's most common definition is the capacity of a system to bounce back to its original form, we are in deep trouble. And we know we are: trouble is our starting point! Resilience could reverberate with neoliberal conservatisms of all kinds, with social and environmental engineering, human exceptionalism, and also with an ontology and ethics of sameness. All four are unsustainable modes of thought practice to me, but in my view we need to think with Haraway, again, and learn to "stay with the trouble."<sup>1</sup> Resilience needs to be treated as such—as trouble, as cyborg, as monster—and with great care as we translate, over-code and practice environmental literacy of the more than human kind. We need to take it on and work with its excess of meaning—for example, with the links between resilience and cultural resistance. Critically and creatively we need to deal with resilience in passionate conversations with previous, or ongoing, research that may extend well

beyond our disciplinary comfort zones (feminist cultural studies of science in the posthuman register, in my case). The promise of resilience as monster lies in its post-disciplinary life: environmental humanities is but one way the human sciences are reinventing themselves when moving away from Universal Man as the pinnacle of world order and civilization. The promise lies in resilience's inherent resourcefulness, that is, *if* taken in attentive conversation with theories of vulnerability, embodiment, material difference and (sexual) difference, transcorporeal reciprocity, and with a healthy dose of posthuman ethics. This is a resilience without any originary form to return to, only ongoing differentiation and regeneration: think Heraclites's impossible river bath!

From where I sit feminist materialisms of post-natural sciences and environments, toxic bodies, and other Human Others seems helpful in this regard, especially as they weave politics, ethics, aesthetics (as ways of enlivening), epistemology, ontology and counter-disciplinarity in both critical and creative patterns of the posthumanities (the "post" here implies not after, but running through and parallel to many forms of humanities). Change, creativity, difference making, agency, like resilience and resistance, in the vein of Karen Barad, Stacy Alaimo, and Vicky Kirby, does not come from outside-in. There is no outside of world or text. Culture was always already part of nature. As was resilience. Identities, entities, and scholarly labels do not precede relations. In that process ontological and relational vein, if thinking with is also *becoming with*, as Haraway's move from cyborgs to "companion species" taught me, the question is really, for this journal and beyond, *what kind of resilience to you want to become with? Relate to us.*

#### NOTE

1. Haraway, "Staying with the Trouble."

#### WORK CITED

Haraway, Donna. "Staying with the Trouble: Xenoecologies of Home for Companions in the Contested Zones." *Fieldsights—From the Editorial Office, Cultural Anthropology Online*, July 27, 2010. <http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/289-staying-with-the-trouble-xenoecologies-of-home-for-companions-in-the-contested-zones>.