Cruel Optimism: Resilience in the Anthropocene | Text Transcript | GIDS

This is a text transcript for the recorded discussion of "Cruel Optimism? Resilience in the Anthropocene" presented by the Guelph Institute of Development Studies (GIDS) at the University of Guelph. The event was recorded on November 2, 2022, with guest speaker Dr. David Chandler.

Transcript:

Craig Johnson:

Okay, great. All right, well welcome everyone. Welcome to people online today. My name is Craig Johnson. I'm professor of Political Science and Global Development here at the University of Guelph. It's a great pleasure to welcome David Chandler here for our world in 2030 event that's happening on campus. I'll introduce David in a few minutes. Before getting started, a few housekeeping items.

For those of you joining us online please ensure that your camera and microphone are turned off. We'll be having a q and a session after David's talk. David will be speaking for about 40 minutes and then we'll open things up for discussion that will both involve people here in the room, but also I'll monitor the online chat and I'm happy to relay questions from the floor.

I should add two that the session today will be recorded. Before introducing David, I'd first like to acknowledge that we're meeting on the ancestral lands of the Attawandaron people and most recently the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the credit. In making this acknowledgement, we offer our respect to the Anishinaabe and Metis neighbors as we strive to deepen our relationships. Okay, on to David.

David Chandler is Professor of International Relations at the University of Westminster in the UK. He's a leading academic in the field of international policy development and apart from his work with international institutions has written monographs articles and edited collections like I read somewhere more than a hundred peer reviewed articles on his website and has authored most recently or in recent years the Monograph Resilience, the Governance of Complexity, and has co-edited the Redlich Handbook of International Resilience.

He's also written extensively on the politics of state building on hegemony, human security and questions of subjectivity, complexity and non-linearity in environmental politics. David is a frequent contributor to news and public media and public discussions including appearances and op-eds and the Guardian, the spectator, the Daily Mail as well as the BBC Al Jazeera and CNN International.

So we're very fortunate to have David here today. Please join me in welcoming him and David, the floor is yours.

David Chandler:

Thank you. We're pleased to be here and think about resilience. I'm not sure, I'm not what you think about resilience. If you think anything about resilience are good to know. As you can see here, the title is Cruel Optimism, resilience in the Autopsy. And I guess the essence of what I want to ask you is that in the Anthropocene, I'll go on because like normally more people felt resilience than the, so I want to argue, in our contemporary condition, because we might call the scene, whatever that might be, I talk that I guess, but resilience can't help us.

That's my main sort of thing. I'm imagining that if you have come across resilience, you're thinking about international development issues, generally speaking, resilience is quite essential to our harmony policymaker and it's sort of seen as a way of maybe overcoming relating some of the difficulties, traditional understandings and traditional practices.

I want us to think about what is it about the think called resilience that enables us to think of it in these ways as solving problems for enabling us to think things differently. And I want to suggest that in today's world it's very, very difficult to think of resilience as doing what it says. It's very difficult to imagine how these other ways of thinking and doing things is actually going to achieve what we want.

What I want to argue provocatively is even the best ways of doing resilience as a whole field of thought about resilience and how to do it properly. I'm going to talk about some ways people understands being done wrongly otherwise thinking about being done properly, thinking about those things as sense.

Whatever I want to provocatively, push the button out and argue that even when we think about resilience as being done properly, whatever that might mean, it still can't work. But in the, there's no way Jose, the resilience is going to help us. Our guess. Moving on to my first slides, and website.

David Chandler:

In the title sort of cruel optimism and sort of do what I said I was going to do about, so answer, look at the limit in the context of this concept. Cruel optimist, I'm not sure if people are familiar with Lauren's work or with her cruel optimism idea that's talk about in a very limited and compressed way.

Of course what law argue in the book from 2011 cruel optimism is that we a sort of inevitable effective attachment to an idea that things will be better, but what we're doing no matter what has got value and purpose, you can give active examples of corrupt, it's possible hanging out in the university sector, but no matter how neo liberalized universities are professors, academics hang on.

So its belief that we are doing something valuable but no matter how management can reduce academia to an exercise, it's somehow something is going to go through because worlds or be opened and our jobs have meaning and satisfaction, no manner the limits of pain and stuff.

I think it would be a hard thing. So this is a classic case of CROs but you have this belief which is actually harmful to you because if you didn't have that belief you might be more than likely to take psych action, do different things, look for a different job, say to people this degree you're paying a lot of money. But it's really something like that. But the core optimism can be a double edge sword that we need to have this faith in order to decide in order to do our job. It's not like how I report, but at the same time it's sort of corrosive, it's undermining, it's problematic and it's why it's a cruel optimism I guess that corrupting way we are trapped.

There's not an easy way out to fact. You can't just sort of give up and confronting meaninglessness necessarily. What I want to argue is that resilience is even better than academia.

As an example of cruelness that despite the end of our Muslim execution, progress, linearity, universal understandings cause and effects despite our belief in our rarity and our ethics when we're doing development, conflict work, democracy work, we're doing something good. But there's something really problematic with the resilience promise, the resilience as a solution, as a way of getting done was invading.

So you recognize when you're thinking resilience, I sort think you are rejecting that one way of doing this. There's something about the resilience become so central to our policy making, which is quite critical cause it opens up a certain set of promises.

So maybe what I want to look at is what is that problem? How does it work? What I'm going to suggest? So what resilience promises us is a more genuine and more real approach to the world. Though we think about modernities being too limited by closing us off and the multiplicities, the differences, the contexts just making assumptions. One size fits all these sorts of things. Silo, mentalities, development.

We just focus on listing and thinking about entanglement ideas external with ideas of gender and democracy. Other things that resilience open us, opens ourselves up to reality and it sensitizers us to feedback effects to the impacts of what we're doing. The consequences makes us more sensitive, makes us government recursively as our arrange, our resilience, how it enables us to maybe engage with the problem in a more real way, a true way, a more objective way.

I'm not sure, I mean I I'm imagined that you might sort of get what I'm getting actually thinking about resilience, how it works. So what I want to argue is that particularly this understanding of his cruel optimism, even though Brazil promises us a different way of working that's more genuine and more real, more open to complexity and entanglement that it's continuing to reproduce our blindness to the world.

It's continuing to reproduce the track of cruel optimism where we think that if only we could do this only we could be more real and more true. We'd could able to address the problems only we did resilience properly suggestion in my talk, even when we do is properly as far as we

understand it, we still blind to the inability of resilience to help us that all is actually today is making things worse.

Just like a naive belief in the traditional ethics of academia. So that's my sort of product thing in the limited time. Correct and I still think it's important to sort of do the introduction in a full way. So if you get lost in any technical, ya that's really cruel optimism.

So what I'm going to do, I'm going to talk about some ways of journalism, yes, which we understand as bad was limited and I'm going to go onto ways thinking about this which you understand is better and to illustrate the evening. So spec I wouldn't or anything but particularly something like this not normally is but I was thinking of that might be appealing. Who knows the ways of doing resilience banking, what are the sort of tropes and understandings of brand resilience?

In the article I am putting a little diagram up front, they call it coercive resilience. Coerced resilience. I'm not sure if you come across that especially sometimes it's called structural resilience, sometimes it's called top down resilience.

This is, sorry. It's okay. I did the wrong introduction just in case I wouldn't really miss anything. And what I'm talking about is that even though we discussed resilience in different ways, that even when we try improve resilience that we still reproduce the program. So this is a diagram about coercive resilience, about top down resilience.

Why is it that resilience doesn't work? Why is it that resilience is so destructive and these people have, they work as I say, they're scientist, they're fans, resilience. It's not like I'm using some <inaudible>, some mark on something. What I idea is that the more we think sensitively about problems, the more that we add inputs and adjust things in order to make things better, think the negative better, we're making them worse.

In this case we're talking about agricultural production. How do we make agriculture more resilient? I mean this is the bad resilience chance to say you may already agree for this type of disease, one way of making agriculture more resilient might be adding fertilizer or something like that. Helping out countries that are less developed, have less technology, have problems with soil exercise. But yes, we're going to go over and we're going to do resilience.

We're going to do international development, resilience, a systems, we're going to think about how we produce these fertilizers, how we have things, how we're going to improve crop production in this sort of diagrams, it's all working. Resilience is really good. We're doing really good development work.

We're helping out increased productivity, we're feeding people, we're evading problems of poverty and we realize that they linked to conflict and all the rest.

So we're solving a whole multitude of problems at the same time. However, as time goes on, this is the idea you can, sort of get addicted to resilience as soon as you start doing resilience

work. As soon as you start adding stuff and giving things, doing development work, even with your resilient hat on, the view is that it's like and ditch that you're going to continually keep doing it once you start that intervention every year.

That's not a scientist, I mean magazine, these scientists do. You have to keep on adding more virtual essay more things and the worst thing why is the sort of cruel in this type of is that you, you're doing well every year the crop production goes up every year everyone says you're doing well, isn't it great going to give you more funding rewards, teach your ideas to people anyway, every year it goes on and like this and then there's like a tipping point.

Tipping point being that no matter how many chemicals you guys, you're not increasing the agricultural production. All the sort of unintended consequences of supply as chemicals means that you are producing other things, killing out the types of plants and whatever or the world is running out of chemicals that get expensive cause sort of drain on whatever they're produced. But the basic ontological concept is there's a tipping point.

You realize at some point that what you're doing hasn't worked even though you thought it was working and working and working, working and then the ironing that is that when you reach the tipping point you can't go back. There's no nature. Even if you wanted to, the nature that was there, the thing that you were helping accidentally you've killed.

So it's like a cruel optimism thing where you're doing your best, you're improving things and then it's sort of comes to an end. Now I'm just using this diagram as an illustration, but what I'm sort suggesting is in our contemporary condition of the athletic, it's reaching that tipping point and more broadly in a philosophical contextual sort of framing, it's like the tipping point for resilience itself.

That's what I want to suggest that as modernity was coming to a close as we releasing faith in, I don't know many markets do their thing or reason or accounting view and the magnificence of nature or whatever it was, whatever sort of modernist framework we had that things always going to get better, but nature is going to be on that side that we just act to add things, help things, support things, enabling things, facilitate things all of those enabling, facilitating things.

But eventually everything would be fine. What I'm suggesting is in the office scene we realized that we've reached the end and so I'm not the only person thinks that. So that it's a discussion. What people say is that, yeah, of course there was ler, we know about resilience. You're not even talking about resilience, this bad stuff, this coercive resilience. Top down resilience is not proper resilience and why is a proper resilience? Because it's deals with anthropogenic inputs.

Even a five year old, the sitting student would sort of know that resilience cannot be based on human-centered, anti presented inputs into the thing. It's obviously going to kill it. It's obvious. We could have told you there would be a tipping point but all you're doing is destroying nature rather than enabling and facilitate. So in the scene we realized a lot of things we thought were good weren't good.

So I'm just going to spend another few minutes just on this bad type of resilience. There's loads of examples. It's not just first line so you're probably going to be familiar with them anyway. Dealing flooding, people have to argue in the past building flood walls, flooding, how do we pay from them? We have central the walls and the rest of it. Surprise, surprise, flooding gets worse and we lose all the money. Is it faster? No, we're going to be resilient. We're going to build that batter. We're going to build pillar walls. What happens? No, what happens is always happens in your life and also in our demon clean media, all that happens is the flooding gets bigger and bigger.

Now modernity or even coercive resilience, it's this struggle against the world. This understanding resilience as building back better as adding to things as learning from the last time that flood enough making sort of building stuff right in that areas make the money to do something else that's like tinkering constantly for things going to be better.

However, in the Anthropocene we sort of realized that actually the way that we understood it was entirely wrong. That we rather than solving things and improving things and enabling things, what we're being blind to the world. We didn't think that actually we have to work with both, but we need to do proper resilience, this coercive stuff. So time is probably linked.

I don't want talk about even more antibiotics. Another example, medicine curing stuff. Again it's just seems like we think it's good but then obviously the viruses get worse. The more we do, the more bad things happen. And so essentially in the autopsy we in debates about resilience we understand that what we thought was good was actually bad. It's a bit like we're reading books Benjamin in Frank or something, but the history of modernity, the history of progress, even the history of resilience turns out to be an anti-progress.

Turns out to be cruel Optimism. Turns out to be entirely suicidal and destructive. So we learn coercive, top down, structural resilience, engineering resilience is corrupt, is counterproductive as I say. My nutshell, that's what I'm going to do it. So the key thing about what talk about is how when we learn about it and we learn about how to do resilience properly, but that doesn't really help us. Cause I think that everyone will agree that coerced top down resilience is <inaudible>. Although 20 years ago, 15 years ago would've been maybe a different understanding. It would've been a nice thing to be given to support.

The time moves really quickly for whatever reasons, for some reasons. So key point coming up what is it that we learn about how to do <inaudible> properly? What we learn is to respond to feedback effects, to listen to the world, not to think about our human-centered aspirations and goals and things. Not to think just because we want to take something or do something, but that means that we can do it because the more we're thinking about ourselves, the less we are letting the world tell us how it wants to be developed.

As long as we're building rules against something, against flooding, we're not listening. Flooding is our friends in nice resilience and community resilience in bottom up resilience, whatever the new resilience can be. We're not like going to war what against war on flooding. Flooding

actually isn't our enemy. Flooding is like Gaia tapping us on the shoulder and saying, Hey, there's something wrong here.

I'm going to give you a little bit of flirting to enable you to think about how you do things differently. If you ignore me, I'm going to give you more of the messages. I'm going to make the flooding worse until eventually you listen to what I'm saying would be the, but as long as we are sort of self-centered, confident in our own capacities to do things, to be of enabling and facilitating things, as long as we are thinking in our self-centered and centered human centered way, we're not listening to the world repeat the basic plan even like diseases and things instead of going to war alone, we listen to them.

What are the diseases coming in a sort of community bottom up resilience way. What we're thinking is the problem is actually us. We don't need to be protected. Our goals aren't the things that we need to be secured.

We need to be thinking about how we work with things, how we understand. We look in a relational and top of world, no more agen solutions. You can't give people development even in a nice resilience way. We can't give people democracy no matter how much we've vulner, sanction or whatever. We realize somehow magically there's counterproductive. We can't give people anything anymore. And we also compared war with this. Steven has problems in a black and white way where good these problems are correct.

So in a community resilience where even climate change is not a threat to us, climate change is a consequence of us. We are climate change. Climate change is telling us this is who you are. If you humans want to be like that, this is how your world is going to manifest itself. Okay, yada yada yada. So how do we do resilience in a way of responding to reality in chasing the effects of what we do? How are we sensitive to feedback? How is that going to help us? There's many different ways, sorry.

Some ways it's do with like traditional knowledge, other ways of being, ways being less anti percent less like that humans are separate from the rest of the world with special power control and knowledge. Otherwise thinking about the world, what are more equalized, more relational, more equalized in different ways. So you know, people might call it local knowledge, indigenous knowledge, ways of working. So another way it's like because modernists can't, modernists aren't necessarily assimilated instruments, non-modern knowledge.

Sometimes that's seems like problematic in different ways. We don't need to go into other ways. People often think about technology. A lot of our development institutions international agencies, they talk about data, they talk about big data. We talk about the other side of things because big data and the thing don't want to big data stuff, data deification how we turn aspects of the world into meaningful s of messages.

Once we understand of diseases and bad weather and pairing messages about the reality of the world, you realize that everything, there's a message about the reality of the world. What colour the leaves turn in autumn what time they turn different colours. That's all messages,

that's all telling us about nutrients, about the weather, about temperatures, about the relationships. But as humans we can't see those messages. Idea is that technology can help us.

We can be sensitive to things. We can think about correlations rather causation. We can begin to see beyond a narrow human centered way of thinking about things. That's sort of an idea in new resilience, in relational resilience, we expand our world, we expand our thinking and our consciousness and our sensitivities into the world. So we can be more real, more contextual, more real time, more responsive. It's sort of like a superhuman or a more than human.

How do we think about it? One expression that I saw recently was that the old human and the old west dream cities was a bit like being a domestic cast, but domestic cats, they're fiercely autonomous, independent thing of, they're like governing themselves and everything, but they have no consciousness of their world, their relationships, their dependencies on the owners that might feed them and people, houses and all the rest of it.

The cat is even entirely ungrateful, disrespectful, just based on its ignorance and the smallness of its world pass happy until the Anthropocene and we imagine humans as being like that as well. Just like the cat. So self sensitive and wrapped up in themselves and unaware of the world. So resilience team just to sort of and realize it's wrap resilience tube, how do we get into the worlds? How are we more real?

How are we more sensitive? So I don't know Berlin at all may have come across network theory. It's a way of thinking about relations rather than entities. But in modernity <inaudible>, in modernity I imagine that things are separate with essences in a fixed grid of time and space or premium at all. Any relational theorists would say that's not right. But we can't just cut an entity up and thing up and find out about it. But things, properties, it's powers relational.

But in some relational context, something's good, something's bad, all the rest of it. But we need to move beyond fixed modernist, understanding that we need to think about things in their relations. One way of doing that, it's a bit like the true example I just told you about is being able to, being able to understand those other entities, what they're trying to tell us, how they tell us different things, different relations.

A good, I think one of my favourite examples of book kind up last year tries to do that is the revenge of the real politics of post pandemic world. Benjamin bat in the Benjamin batting world, it's a bit like humans have one of those quantitative self fitbits where you're continually paying attention to your health. You're continually, continually being reflexive if you have a temperature or whatever.

If you're not sleeping so well that's brought to your attention and you're thinking about how do I respond, how do I adapt to those things? How do I turn my temperature, whatever it is molecularly into a message into sun, I can respond to the logical extension of Benjamin Braham's world is that as humans we're more than just Mayans and reason thinking about doing things make directing this integral world. We're also material beings in material relationships with producing.

We're consuming. How do we understand humans as data objects rather than data subjects? The book is a pandemic thing because Covid is a great example. So we can't see covid but, and it's not about our thinking and our feelings and yeah, we're autonomous subjects. We have the right to wear masks, not wear masks. That's a material reality. If we could see covid, we'd be able to respond to it.

So how can we use data? How do we use stratification to see and respond to things? That's the sort of promise of a sensitive resilience because we can't even, as much as we might want to turn towards non-modern cultures, non-modern knowledges, those sort of sensitivities, those awareness of operations in the autopsy, those relations are also disruptive. But even if something used to happen in a certain way at a certain time, in a certain planet in today's, actually no from our sunny day today, those kids can't be relied upon.

Even traditional local contextual indigenous, if you want to call it that knowledge doesn't necessarily work in the ways that it used to. How do we use data, internet of things to sensitize to see things as processes, to see things in their relations.

So one example of how might do that might be Kar, I'm only using this because I don't really do, I've got anything apart from it. But I did happen to go to Jakarta and do some work patent like flood monitoring agents and Jakarta's useful for different ways thinking about sensitivities to your problem.

It's a major or something. The difficulty is that it's under sum. It's got no future in but many, many coastal mega cities. Anyway, so this is a map of flooding in Kar where not only is that the rest of flooding from the sea, there's also a whole network of canals and everything. It's a whole water underneath as well as the next door to it's flooding us happening all the time.

How can we have a resilience discussion now in old-fashioned resilience? People argue we need to concrete over the rivers. In the 19th century or whenever the area was colonized by the Dutch, stuff like that, Dutch are obviously modernist experts in coercive modern plastic was doing.

They would like reshape rivers, whatever they wanted to compromise over the rivers and the water going into war on the property, trying to concrete off fence off water. However, nowadays we realized that that's work because all of those walls and things, they were all leaking and plucking his back again with a vengeance.

The more you concrete things, the more you haul them off, the more you proliferate the problem. We make it even more difficult to regulate and predict them. Anyway, what I wanted to study is they came up with a more community, the use of technology to enable the citizens such Carter to sort of moderate their relationships with the board to be aware of it.

The project was sponsored by Twitter and other people. Idea was that would, when you come across a bit of flooding, as I say, I'm not an expert just trying to or whatever you would take a photo.

The photo would be <inaudible> so people would know where it was. You would measure the depth of the water or at least work out for this first until or whatever. And then you would text it to karta, the ngo. And then obviously the more people are texting and flooding stuff, you'd have a real time map immersion a matter not with predictions of flooding or something like you can't already predict it city, but you can see it when lights are, the lights are flashing, things are coming up, people are reporting it. What happens in a sort of adaptive real time relationship, you can avoid the flooding you, you're going to go around and see your family members.

You might be affected by, you're going to be in a real time responsive adaptive living relationship with a problem. You're no longer thinking of waring it off and fencing it.

You are seeing the world in reality. You can even call it as a sort of you're not think imaginative, productive way did anyway. So that might be a useful way of thinking of how we use technology and people and citizens. We do a lot of things, a lot of positive stuff. In thinking like that, if you wanted to have a good resilience, maybe you don't actually assume things, but generally speaking this wouldn't be the worst type of resilience.

There's other types of resilience in Chicago as well. The informalized used to be called some journal people informal housing. They can certainly have to cope. Clubs of the river you might call a local knowledge or indigenous knowledge thing of knowing when the river's going to be flooding. People might contact them from up the river, they might be able to sense it and they would move out the house as the first floor would just be on stilts,

like many people who lived in flood areas and you would move yourself out, you'd move back in afterwards. So that's a less technological way, but it's still a real time process of adaptation.

So I could go one, I want to want you to hold in your mind that sort of way of thinking about it. It's whatever. It's good or bad. I think it's around the best. You might get to and just use one more example of resilience, which I think is even nicer. So I know store say and it doesn't turn out well but nevertheless sounds like it's even less. And that's like New York Harbor waste detection certainly where waste is broad voice class articles about it.

The idea is instead of using technology or relying on local knowledge, we can use nature and natural knowledge, a whole range of alternative resiliency, waste. What does it mean to use nature and natural knowledge?

That's called wasting voice related there where you have a bay of oysters, a chain of oysters that are growing and thriving when the lack of flood waters arrive, the oyster bays like Rios with oysters are growing and adapting, relating and they're continually forming a barrier. Now I heard people complain about that's what people will complain about everything.

No crystal theorists, they need something critic, precise. They've argued it's exploiting the oysters, just rearing oysters, just sort of saving resilience. I'm not going to say it, I've said it but I'm not going to say it. So there's a whole range of nice evidence.

Now what is wrong with those? Even the nicest resilience things. I would argue that in. It's like terrible things. This is real cruel optimism even when you're doing nice resilience. Why is it cruel optimism? Why is it so terrible? Because the irony of ironies this, we think we're hearing the message, we think that we are adapting.

We think that people are being really clever, we're ticking all the boxes. We're brilliant. High technology, the masters of work we're doing citizen participatory developmental democracy.

We're doing multi-species democracy work so that the world can be safe for us and the oysters at the same time we can to other species, collaborative words. If we were Donna Haraway or Anna Single or other radical feminists, relational otologists or multi species is everyone would be happy. However, in the Anthropocene I would argue it's cruel optimism and it's refusing to signal consequences. It's refusing to listen to the messages.

Climate change, it's refusing to respond to feedback because all that happens, even when we do the ice detection stuff, is that we can just continue producing and consuming like we did before. All that's happening when the slum dwellers, the informal living in informal sections on the side of the river when they're doing the <inaudible>, they're just protecting the city dwellers in their rich, trust the city from the impacts of flood. You can argue the same thing with any other sort of marginal subsistence living in agricultural view and first life you should use other things.

You're just keeping people on the age of subsistence so that other people can live a life of luxury and have their big cars and all the rest of it. So in the Anthropocene, these things that we do often think as the best case scenarios for resilience are the worst case scenarios because we feel really good about these land community and obvious resilience things and anything is so good about it.

We'll just keep living life that we were living before and we'll just keep on destroying planet. That's what we provide. I'm not saying that's my personal normative position, I'm just saying that if we were to think about resilience in the framework of product, we would see that there's like the resilience is a solution.

It's another part to ourselves that we can keep on doing what we used to do. But resilience is no better than some sort of modern risk approach that maybe it even worse cause we don't really see the true limits. So that's why Brian Upbeats message for today. So that's that and that looks great.

Craig Johnson:
Thank you, David. I hope people online, I don't know where to look here. I think the camera's up there. I keep looking at the ceiling anyway. I hope people online can hear me and hear us. If you have questions online, feel free to share them and I'll relay them in real time here.

But we'd love to open the floor to everyone now with questions, comments, observations lots of critical perspectives I think to take in mind in thinking about both resilience as a concept and a practice, but also development and how we might think about its relationship to resilience systems, human populations and city of Jakarta. So fire away Ian Spears has raised his hand.

Ian Spears:

So, thanks very much. That was a provocative discussion and or presentation and I learned a lot and I certainly brought me out of the normal boring ways that, or conventional ways I think. So I, I mean I'm not sure I have a question as much as I want to have you elaborate a little bit more.

I'm not sure if you're familiar with the Canadian historian, Ronald Frank, who talks about progress traps that we keep on that technology allows us to continue solving problems and in fact we make things worse. So he says we find every more efficient ways to catch fish and it's terrific as long as there's fish. But at some point we and Canadians know something about this because we over we're fish in our east coast fishery but that it actually leads to disasters. So I was thinking about parallels with that, but I was also wondering is foreign aid another example of your bad resilience if that's the right term.

So far as we keep, we continue to think that I'm a little reluctant to say this with our foreign aid expert here, although certainly Is good quotation.

David Chandler:

Well I know that Craig is well aware of the good and the bad and the ugly of foreign aid, but is it that we continue to think we're solving problems, we think that we're advanced in development but that in fact just as you're talking about this cat who thinks that everything's fine that these community might be unsustainable or at least it would be unsustainable in that environment if the four eight ever stopped you were, I mean are you essentially saying that we're propping up a problem thinking that we're solving it and yet were it to stop that project would essentially collapse?

David Chandler:

Well I got the right, am I understanding you correctly At some of some, yeah, that's beginning of a door that might be open obviously if it was true. But inevitably foreign age was going to maintenance worse and development aid, any development of conduction promotion with was worse.

I mean it would be devastating for many programs, foreign policy of governments, the existence, indigenous institutions, international institutions. So I mean just thinking about such an obvious point, I haven't seen how history true that would be a terrible thing to contemplate, but so maybe the problem's even worse.

Those things are obvious. And the last 20, they're obvious because it's only been in the last 20 years that we've been able to do testing experiments because during the Cold War those few

don't the culture war or anything, the world was divided between Russian America capitals and communism.

You couldn't do democracy promotion or development stuff or security to work because you had the manage to the people on your side and not the other side.

It was impossible to do liberal internationalists universities imagists because politic as a court have got in the way since only since then that the terribleness of our desires to help improve things have been revealed to be purely projections of our antis es. And the worst thing being, even if we are nice, even if we don't intend to support colonial hierarchies and reproducing qualities, we sort of are.

And maybe the worst thing is that even though we've opened that door, we haven't opened it properly because we sort of think that if we're doing development eight making it worse, it's because their own contexts are so bad. It's like it's down to them. If I knew that was true as well because obvious, not obvious why would we need to look at it as that? Why can't we see it? But the problem is like hundred years, hundreds of years of colonialism and new qualities and extraction of resources that are, that's the problem.

The problem isn't these societies that have conflicts in other department. The problem is an international system it produces. So I think once you open the door to a reality that's even more real than the reality of resilience, it draws us along the path of you're being entirely problematic.

Yeah. So what can you do? I'm just a messenger. It seems to me that these things have been obvious that if you think how much our heads have changed from 20 years ago at the end of the Cold War related to make excuses 20 years ago, 20 years, they really wanted to do liberal work.

They wanted to go and save the world and bring development and peace and all the rest of it. I'm telling them there nevertheless, that's what the world sort of world, that's how we had international development, international relations with been. People don't think that today or less people think that people realize that there's a closure that all the time we thought we were doing good.

Not only were we doing bad, but we couldn't even see that we were the problem not them. And the more that happens the more no it's not because it becomes utterly corrosive to realize that everything you would talk is problematic. So more positive questions,

Thinking of best ways of proceedings and that they're also cruel optimism. What would you think is a good responsible alternative to not kiddos ourselves and listen to those messages?

David Chandler:
So it's difficult because our heads are our heads and I'm not really sure that the earth is telling us stuck. I know, I'm not sure that our contemporary heads are any better than our modernist

colonial heads. I wish it was true that something positive could come out of the end of everything that we thought was true. But my guess is that all kind of really happens.

Just another set of illusions, another set of problems just seems to be how it works. I think at the moment we're going through a bit of a crisis of the end of modernist dreams of progress and universal enlightenment and knowledge. We could just store up over here and more and more and then just take out or apply it somewhere. So that's like a crisis.

But I think we'll come to terms with our contemporary condition. But I don't think it's necessarily positive or truer or anything. I'm not sure. I mean theses difficult questions, I mean it's difficult enough. This is beginning to ask. All right questions. I don't have any submissions or Andy, did you have a question?

Speaker 7:
Couple for later around in my head. Thank you. Thank you David. I was listening to the cbc, our Canadian equivalent to BBC radio this morning on the drive into Guelph and they interviewed Matt Galloway who was interviewing a couple of people.

One of them was a climate youth climate activist, sir UBC, who's off to the cop meeting. Another one was a UBC professor. And it was an interesting, the question that he asked both of them was how do you maintain your optimism in the face of just such overwhelming evidence that we're headed for disaster? And it is fascinating to listen to them then, but even more fascinating in light of what you've been talking about because both of them insisted on being optimistic that it is a struggle every day they wake up, but they just are convinced that it is better to be optimistic and to keep fighting some kind of good fight.

And so therefore the sea activist BC is going off to Egypt and this professor is still going to do their research. And so I guess I want to prob you a bit more on how you characterize people's reasons for being optimistic.

And if I heard you correctly, it is about kind of us and our illusions of us wanting to appear to be doing good even when there's evidence to the contrary. But aren't there, I mean just like, isn't there something more than that going on with people perhaps not illusion that the fact that sometimes there are these kind of black swan situations where sometimes things look impossible, but then the unexpected happens, right?

There are these slim chances when something happens and like 99 out of a hundred times it doesn't. But then there's that you win the lottery, right? There's that. That there's the real chance. There's also to take a different kind of example. I mean people, people do persist in doing bad things all the time, even though they doesn't help them like smoking the classic we've trampled.

So I guess I just want to probe you a bit more on your characterization of why people continue because I think it's a little bit glib just to say we're happy to live with our illusions. I think there might be other reasons going on.

David Chandler:
 So I think that for many people, so they are optimistic but not in a traditional development type. Yesterday was talking about giant growth, such coy jazz grave trained by William Connolly in St. Bennett.

There's like William Connolly, maybe there's an optimist in there. There's a sort of recognition of the disastrous of the world. There's also an understanding that we thinking sort of relational, imminent ways of creativity. As you say accidents.

Charles Graham says that the end of the world isn't the end of everything, it's just the end of our particular imaginary of the world. William Connolly would argue we need to be Sears into the future with a sense of a generosity. But there's always going to be created whether might not be the fact that we've sub partied black or whatever. So there's a lot of that.

Now my personal beauty is I don't like, it's not for me personally. If I was to bring my own normative person into the room, I think that's really wrong for these live privileged white professors to do that, to have that optimism in those ways. So like I say, we should be trained this series with this generosity stuff.

And I sort of think when I sort of try and find books, I settle I think of a door note and I think of a door note struggle against nihilism Door would say that those people with their optimism, they're actually more nihilistic because they're trying to sell us to be optimistic with these prophetic terrible things.

This privileged ideas of hope. It's like palliative. Palliative politics is another thing of some of my colleagues too. The live in world dying well that we should be optimistic, autonomous, say this is worse if this is what being positive, if this is what resilience is if this is the alternative give me a thorough going mind that says we have to end this whatever this is before we can even begin to start think about something so normative. I would be much more of a door and make sort of theorizing from outside.

Now that's not myself in the promise of the world. So I'm not saying this for everyone, I'm just sort of sharing my inner thinking and then to also experimenting.

What would it mean to be thinking? What would it mean to be trying to theorize from the outside to be optimistic through an ending of the world? Not an optimistic, that's what I sort of mean. But what we call optimism is so great is because it's still saving a world even if we talk about other world's possible.

So I'd rather be experiment with trying to think about what it might need to be thoroughly critical. I'm not arguing that anyone else should do that, although it's going to work or whatever. But that's just what I can as an academic. If I was a policy person simply in development, obviously I wouldn't work actually something else, but that would be sort of bad faith.

That's why I wouldn't do that. That's something so everyone's got, but I'm an academic and that's sort of bad thing. I don't necessarily really believe in the values of, so I faith how we live. Cruel optimism is how we live.

There's no way solution to cruel. optimism We have to learn to live and therefore we have to tell ourselves stories about how we might do that. That's the point of the Lord's book.

Speaker 8:
Yes. Thank you David. That was great. I guess with the way you were talking about resilience, it seems like it's just a theocratization that it's just there's evil in the world, God's still good and we can use it. So continue as we're doing.

So the way that that that sort of impacts me I guess is I got this image of the phoenix. The phoenix dies burns in its own ashes and it's reborn again from those ashes. And that sort of resilience is the sort of endless loops I guess.

And that the problem is cruel optimism or you just mentioned the word hope and I guess I was thinking that it's the problem hope because of the future orientated nature of hope that people aren't do changing things now because there is a possibility in the future at some point that it will just change.

Is that it? So the cruel optimism creates it paralyzes us to stay the same and actually what we need is helplessness and hopelessness because that that's going to be instigating of change.

David Chandler:
Good points. I guess the world is paralyzing us, the world. What we haven't mentioned the elephant in the room is that the world understood as a world of politics have left and right class so ridiculously over that you saying an ancient person from my last century. But it seems the scientists are telling us that without a world of politics of humans engaged, the world begins to disappear.

The idea of us as humans, as subjects will transforming something is quite ridiculous because the world is just a mass of things that's so overwhelming. It's possible that modernity was made by humans in struggle, that it's fair enough to say the time and space and all the other modernist frameworks that we invented for ourselves may not be like object, be true in some sense, but they were a framework through which we created ourselves as humans and a world that is amenable to humans.

Now we live in an inhuman world. We like to think it's because of climate change. And I'm not saying that climate change doesn't exist or something like that, but there's also other factors that lead to an inhuman world and the limitations of being human.

So the failure of the rights of human slash the project if my personal view think that has been a failure to that project, that failure has a legacy, has real effects, that the effects are the world makes us powerlessness, removes us makes the world entirely immune to our action upon it. So they're sort of that in the background.

So what I've done I is sort of saying, I think in my reading I'm not like that Adon is saying that we don't have to give up and equally we don't have to be optimistic in this sort of privileged and cast our ways that the struggle to end the world can be an enabling and creative one.

And I don't know, I don't want be able to question, they might think that Marx had a similar perspective. Marx wasn't into celebrating workers and cultures and identities and stuff. All we were saying was that we haven't going to be human yet if we don't end the world, we'll never know what it might mean to be human or something like that. So there's other ways of thinking about these things.

However because there's been such a failure of the modernist projects, it doesn't seem possible to just start again in another modernist poll. That would be ridiculous. No one's been by that. So it's a little bit more tricky.

Second time round maybe the climate change, you know, I'm not sure, I'm not a sort of an eco determinist either a Marxist, eco determinist or an ecological, but this is the end literally in a climate change way. So there's whole range of background conditions, which are favorable. I think these are big questions. See, my job is just raising some of these questions. I'm not qualified to have a crystal ball.

So I think this is more than not, just think in an ecologically deterministic way. It's not nature that's trying to gas. I think we've already killed ourselves in such sort of over-determined way. It's difficult to pick ourselves up unfortunately. Hopefully I'm wrong. But normally I'm a big fan of hoping to be wrong with the word that I do. I wouldn't like my dark vision of the pain to be true. That would be depressing.

For my colleagues that know, me will find the supremely ironic because I in many ways identify with a lot of what you're saying, but I can't help but feel like this negative pessimistic view is being constructed. And I mean I'm thinking about scholars or I'm not sure he's a scholar, but someone like Matt Ridley who seems to have market solutions for everything and would take issue with what you're saying about that this is all going off the cliff and would say, what are you talking about that we can't adapt to things like climate change.

He's not denying climate change. He's saying that in fact we're pretty good at building resilience and that we that problems of flooding are ones of development that are solvable provided there's the will and provided people are you know unleashed from the strictures of government and are able to innovate and find and finds solutions. So I'm not sure I'm wanting to necessarily an advocate of that position. I'm wanting you to respond to what the optimists would say.

David Chandler:
No, no, no. We're close. It's a good question. It's a good question anyway. So I'm happy to accept even if it's not what you heard. No, that's a good question. So to my own mind, I think it's quite possible that there's like, loads of technological developmental type things. If you look at the history of humanity and stuff, that's generally how it works. From mouth onwards. Everyone's saying we are doing, we're doing, we're we do are pretty invented. I see no reason to think that we're doing from a climate change perspective, the reason why I think we are doomed, it's from a political perspective, from a political failure of our modernist project.

Now that project can fail as well as having acknowledged because that project was a project of a human centered transformative approach to things and opens understanding of the future that seems to have failed.

It's been manifested in failed disasters. I don't know socialists and communisms history to my mind like the problem, not climate change and technical things. That's mainly because I'm a political theist and nothing about climate change, technical things. I was giving a presence, the political theory presentation, I was talking about discourses of resilience, how their self understanding works, bring in a little bit of pragmatic sort of relational, pure optimism for just have a discussion about those things and what fans of resilience we've already given up on in those ways.

My understanding is how we think of resilience is as a relational process of adaptation. It's all the XX has already rejected sort of high modernist technical approach. That's why resilience is a nice space. So working because what are the consequences? Once you give up on the modernity, all you have is the end of queue.

Well it's inevitable. So that's what I'm looking at. So because I'm imagining to myself in my head, well it's going to be a big developmental just in my imagine, a big developmental resilience sort of community.

And I'm trying to say to them, maybe you need to think the consequences of this, your positionality, your understanding of students account.

That's because maybe we need to rethink it because then our contemporary condition, it seems resilience is based a number. It's all I'm sort of doing. So it could well be the they'll do something that much. I know the person's talking about this. Thank you.

Craig Johnson:
<laugh>. Pretty sure this is the question I'm going to ask.

David Chandler:
Well was maybe my first question was closer to what I thought you were going to.

Craig Johnson:
We've taken up all the good questions here.

David Chandler:

You guys have some rivalry there.

Craig Johnson:

Very, very friendly. Too friendly. David, thank you for your talk. I guess one question that immediately sprang to mind in hearing your discussion, resilience was the distinction between what you're calling coercive or bad resilience and these other forms of good or grassroots or forms of resilience that recognize feedback and relationships.

And whenever I encounter writing about resilience, and I think we were talking about the way in which resilience is characterized in the natural sciences, I think of that buzz hauling panarchy loop where you've got these systems kind of reaching their tipping points, tipping over and then recovering it going over and over again.

And a question for me is often I think you shared this question is where is the agency, where is agency in those systems that are somehow responding to external stimuli, From your talk though, I came away with the question of where, where's the authority?

And I'm not sure if I'm getting this right or not, but it seemed to me that coercive resilience or bad resilience is detrimental and destructive because it's rooted in a form of authority that is both consciously trying to avoid the problem that it sees as a problem, but also because it's doing so through coercive measures.

And I guess putting on a development studies hat, that automatically makes me sort of think then about what that means for the role of public authority, for the role of the state. And even with the example of Jakarta, like I think about all of that crowdsourcing that goes on. But if lives lost due to flooding is something we want to achieve, then I would think at some point authority or some kind of coordinating mechanism might come into play.

David Chandler:

So good questions. I'm not sure that I'm going to answer it, but I think that modernity was very authority centers, those states top down and those sorts of things. And as you say, the more coercive in modernist forms of resilience are more authority reliant. But to my mind, the logic of resilience is a totally flat one. Like the imaginary is the world releases itself.

So in the imaginary, I'm not saying it's true because it depends on Twitter, certain local authority support and all this other, there's other things. The imaginary is in the future we can create a self-governing community, even living on like a flooded metropolis or whatever. They still won't need external intervention.

Resilience is really about making external intervention unnecessary because we know external intervention just makes problems worse. That's the resilience sort of message then. So I did think that this is just the beginning of creating the new citizen of the future, the new sensitive, aware, self-knowing community where we start with the flooding.

But then we think about medical emergencies, we think about policing as policing, actually exactly the same thing. Broken windows, burglary, violence, attack. People then modulate themselves that don't go in that area or the rest of it. No one's calling the police anymore cause they know that police are just going to make things worse. There's just going to be hard people and whatever sort of thing.

And that's when we export resilience. We're really the imaginary that these marginal communities will, wherever it is that needs our help. We can make them resilient as in self-governing, autonomous as in not needing us, whether they need us to, there's always paradox, even what is it that we give them? When we give them us? It's give them the self thingify, they're living under a volcano or whatever. We give them an internet of things to sell stuff so that they can manage their volcano sync condition, their relationship themselves.

The only point being, the critical one I'm sort of making is that I can't work in a world's web where the status quo is the problem and not the solution. And maybe in a modernist world when we liked ourselves smart, the status quo was pretty good. But in our world of an anthroparchy, we realize that that's not tenable anymore. That we can't really sell that in those ways.

So a lot of people were Brazilian, the neoliberal perspective, bringing the poor for prop of poverty, own poverty. I'm not trying to sell that sort of critique of resilience. That's kind of modernist way thinking about this thing. So I'm trying to draw out what resilience is, how it works, the sort of secular strain within it of inevitable. I'm hoping <inaudible>. I want an angry resilience. You are saying I shouldn't have a career. This is my job. I'm the resilience person. So I have to go to other, find other universities. People have more at stake in the resilience.

Speaker 9:
So thank you for great presentation. So my question would be what makes this specific philosophy of cruel optimism so popular among scholars or among politicians, what it makes so appealing, theoretical and philosophically as opposed to other ways of thinking about these?

David Chandler:
That's a really good question. Long Broad's book coop is hugely, hugely influential. Unfortunately, they died actually the last year and stuff quite sixties. But I think it's not just the cruel optimism, but the law's broad theorizing about effects and thinking through how we think politics and being in the world less in a sort of rationalist reasoning way and the effect of stuff. Yesterday I was doing it talk and was talking about no book about trees and the effect we have the trees, it's like, and love chapters about different trees, how people grew up. The trees over grounds wrote down paper.

Anyway, so the effect is a really important aspect and that contemporary thinking and theorizing, especially on, we're thinking about more environmental climate is and how we sensitize ourselves. So I think belongs work has been spoken to people a lot just because we

think that affected such a rich area of thinking about attachments, how we can use attachments in better ways or how they might be problematic.

And I don't want to say it's just the fads cause I've just been quite positive about it, but I'm not sure for how long that will be. But I was just thinking about what to do in this particular talk. And I just thought cruel opt, it might be any nice experimental way to think about resilience. So for me it's more of a pragmatic sort of istic use. And I think that I've been sort of true toan understanding of cruel optimism. I couldn't swear to that. You have Good question. I'm not sure. What do you think? Why do you think cruel optimism is so, sounds so much impact?

Speaker 9:

Oh, although I think it has to do with enlightenment kind of ideology that human beings are rational and able to find solutions and that we are in charge of everything. And that is like we're the most rational and the most capable.

We have all this technology, we have all the designs and knowledge, you and our disposal that just at our will that we can utilize all this knowledge and find solutions. But I think we are reaching this point of disappointment with the recent developments in international politics, especially with Ukrainian Russian conflict, that people were expecting the sanctions to work on Russia and that this kind of action would somehow deter Russia from further intensifying its attack on Ukraine. But at the end it just made things much.

And there was also certain opportunities that Ukraine, Ukraine is coming up, sovereign, democratic European modern state will kind of benefit the country. But this aspiration to join the European Union, actually things are much worse at the end of the day. And I think because they're questioning about whether there is a rational way out of international conflicts or disasters something, but probably has to do with my human kind of philosophy that humans are smart hard.

David Chandler:

Yeah. Yeah. Guess everything speaks from Ukraine will only, yes.

So I don't think this is where you're going with your argument. And by this I mean there are a whole range of climate deniers and authoritarian regimes or just, I mean China, Russia, I mean the previous regime in Brazil who would just say all of this, of this, we could have told you that this resilient stuff is kind of a liberal fable. But I don't quite hear you.

I don't think you're aligning yourselves with those types. I think you're distinguishing yourself. But maybe if you could defend yourself a little bit <laugh> accusation that you might be dangerously yourself with.

David Chandler:

Good question. A little bit expensive maybe. I'm pleased with that. So it's true that resilience is close to our hearts and it is difficult to criticize resilience without appearing to be climate change denial or other things. Because if resilience was going to be problematic, what other

options do we have? Either a big business sort of industrialized geo-engineering stuff or just give up and where everyone died. Maybe if you risk people might survive.

The need for resilience is, it's huge. So my job as a critical academic is to critique things that other people might not critique or critique things in ways that other people might not critique them. And then the more thorough the critique is, the more critique is based on an understanding at the heart of resilience, the better it is. So I think the key difference would be that when Trump brought away, it's a criticizing resilience as a liberal whatever, wishy washy relational thing, then don't really understand resilience.

So I think our advantage if we weren't so careful, isn't it, understanding it would be a good thing. So I'm sort of on the side of good people in the surely understanding something is what good people do.

I wouldn't want resilience people to not want to understand resilience just because it seemed that the other options were good. That would be what bad, what Donald Trump does. That would be a fake news resilience. If we couldn't like Chris, I like a genuine news, but informed. Yeah. But if we're going to do resilience, we should think about what's at stake in that.

But maybe there isn't an easy second chance once we come up on modernity that maybe for some people who do resilience, they might be better off trying to defend more of a modernist approach if they thought that it's like, I'm just putting stuff out there. That's all. But yeah, I see the problem when I think of the critique of resilience is generally a minority population.

The understanding of resilience. <inaudible>, especially when we're thinking about in social, broader social work, not in consistently work homes. And that cycles.

Craig Johnson:
It's an interesting connection to hope and to history. And you mentioned the futility of recreating the status quo. Status quo is depleting the planet at unprecedented levels. But the hope, I heard that interview this morning too with Mike Calloway and in a sense you kind of listen to these very young climate activists and quite a seasoned environmental politics person talking about the hope that they still bring to the next conference at the parties.

And I wonder whether, I mean, you said something earlier about the modernist project being dead or the modernism being something we tried and we've moved beyond. But what is the cop beating, if not a modernist effort to make sense of the world and then pledge our way into managing it? So it's

David Chandler:
A long run. You agree with me or disagree?

Craig Johnson:
I, I'm agree with you, but I just like that is a form of cruel optimism. Is it not?

David Chandler:

Yeah, I guess many attempts to do things could be as a cruel, optimistic thing so that's true. But I was just thinking of resilience as particularly cruel.

Cause it's so particularly smug in its alternative to alterity. Whereas the conference, there's more of a sort of desperate, I don't think there's a lot of smugness there, so I'm more open to that.

Craig Johnson:

Okay. Well I've heard nothing from the people online, hopefully.

David Chandler:

Yeah, I bet. To ask is anyone online got a question?

Craig Johnson:

Yeah. I'm assuming if they are, they're right.

Craig Johnson

Yeah. Yeah. But if there was, assuming we're not receiving any kind of desperate questions from cyberspace, maybe

David Chandler:

We can turn it off.

Craig Johnson:

No, I think we're still going. We're live as far as I can tell. I, I'm just not sure if they can chat properly, which might be beyond my capability to resolve.

Craig Johnson:

Yeah, we have your contact details. Be in touch. We have a living relational connection with our PhD student here and Harvey. Yeah, that's a blood. But thank you David, it's been a wonderful opportunity.

David Chandler:

Thanks to questions.

Craig Johnson:

Good? Yeah. Anytime. And wonderful to meet you and to hear about your work. Thanks to everyone online in the room for Okay.

David Chandler:

<laugh> alcohol calling. Yes.

Craig Johnson:
Yes. You burned it.

[End of transcript]