

The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter:
Looking at the World Today as if Facts Matter

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Here we explore the latest facts, actions, and perspectives on the New Great Transformation of the Earth System, as it unfolds before our eyes. We apply the Hopeful Realism we all need to work through the greatest predicament in human history.

Latest News from the Hopeful Realist

What Next? The devastating flooding of much of Libya a few days ago may be the most destructive in recent history, with initial estimates of 11,300 dead and countless living victims left with nothing. In Marrakesh, Morocco and in the remote regions of the Atlas Mountains too, several thousand died from an earthquake, rare for the region. We might ask whether it is really just about ‘natural’ disasters.

Certainly, the amount of rainfall in a very short period, resulting from the mega-storm that hit the area killing thousands in the city of Derna, Libya, was unprecedented. It was a severe firestorm that hit Lahaina on the Maui coast; with the primary driving factor ‘climate-change.’ However, these disasters were the consequence of a catastrophic convergence of both human and environmental crises.

Ever since the assassination of Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi, the brash Libyan dictator, by rebel forces in 2011, rival militia groups have fought each other for control of the nation, each holding control of one region or another for a time, yet with no central authority emerging since. Amid political struggles, hardly anyone looked after the public interest.

A dozen years later, little had been done to improve the lot of the Libyan people or the infrastructure that was deteriorating with no real government operating in the interests of public safety. In the exact opposite way, the devastation in Maui had certain institutional sources as well.

The Maui fires resulted in part from the agricultural practices that together with invasive species, offered lots of fuel to add to the flames fed by high winds, whatever the exact source of ignition—some claim it was a downed power line. One might say that the Maui fires leading to the destruction of Lahaina were partly due to development overrunning a lush landscape combined with recent dry weather. In contrast, the Libyan floods were in part the result of

underdevelopment, or, failure to maintain the developments—two dams—that sequestered and supplied water in that dry desert environment.

In both cases, two kinds of human causation contributed to the destruction. First, extreme weather events resulting in part from the changes in climate brought on by the global industrial-consumer economy of growth, were bound to cause significant damage. Second, human infrastructure, in one case overdeveloped and in the other case not maintained or repaired, also contributed significantly to the death and destruction.

So, the horrendous Libyan floods with their massive rivers of mud destroying buildings and burying their occupants, had two ‘unnatural’ sources. First, anthropogenic global heating and second, anthropogenic societal chaos. In a very similar manner, the horrendous firestorm that swept over Lahaina killing many before they could escape and totally destroying the old capital of the Hawaiian nation was caused first by the same anthropogenic global heating and second by the anthropogenic disturbance of the local natural landscape.

These are just two cases of an increasingly frequent pattern of destruction, which, whatever the particulars, result from the same human failures. The importance of these two different but similar extremely destructive ‘weather events,’ in addition to the human suffering in each, is that they both could have been avoided if industrial modernism had only taken into account of Nature and harmonized with its requirements. But that is not in the ‘DNA’ of industrial modernism, which is driven by the dominator culture of extraction and predation. Overcoming that culture is the most important task set before humanity in the twenty-first century.

The SAME Updated Update of the Publishing Plan stands. (With one changed word. Guess what it is.) The first volume of *The Edge of Illusion Trilogy* is complete. Preparations for publishing ***Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation*** in the next few months are underway. The tentative publication date is January 10, 2024, maybe sooner. Traditional publishers take from eighteen months to two years, sometimes even more, from signing a contract to an actual publication date. By publishing the book independently, we can do it in 6 months or less.

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available for free download from [Kindle Unlimited](#). The regular eBook price is now back to normal, at \$6.99. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](#). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on Amazon. On Amazon, do so by clicking the button on the lower left of the book’s Amazon page below “Customer Reviews,” and say a few words about what you think about the issues and how I frame them.

Note: Past issues of this Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/hopeful-realist-newsletter/>

LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

What is Missing in the Conversation about our Earth System Emergency? William Ripple, the Oregon State University ecologist initiated the World Scientists' Warning in 2017, which was signed by about 15,000 scientists from about 160 nations around the world by 2019. Ripple, who followed up with the **World Scientists' [Warning of a Climate Emergency 2022](#)**, proclaimed, "The science data are in!" In other words, a great deal of scientific research in climate science, evolutionary biology, Earth System science, human ecology, and related fields has been accomplished in recent decades, yielding a definitive understanding of the accelerating dangers of climate chaos.

The results are remarkably clear. If planet Earth is to provide a livable habitat for humans and many other species during the rest of this century and beyond, humans will have to make massive changes in our deployment and use of fossil-fuel energy and a wide range of specific technologies, all of which are energized by fossil fuels. The *Warning* discussed "31 planetary [vital signs](#) (including greenhouse gases and temperature, rising sea levels, energy use, ice mass, ocean heat content, Amazon rainforest loss rate, etc), and recent changes to them. Of these, 18 are reaching critical levels."

Reducing the extraction, processing, and use of fossil fuels (primarily petroleum, mostly in the form of gasoline, gas, and the already no longer cost-competitive coal) within the next decade is essential to help prevent further heating of the planet to constrain the growing surge of extreme weather events around the world. The growing numbers of people who have directly or indirectly experienced extreme drought, floods, hurricanes, crop failures leading to food insecurity and even starvation, now recognize that "climate change" is an existential threat to survival.

And, of course, we have decades of reports from the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), all of which forecasted the ever-escalating evidence of manmade climate destabilization. Nevertheless, the IPCC usually underestimated dangerous trends because all the participating governments had to agree to findings, and the fossil-fuel industry negatively influenced the reports, forcing them to constrain their dire conclusions, based in part on false assumptions of emerging carbon-capture technologies. Yet, clearly, 'the science data are in!'

So, what is missing? Obviously, while lots of governments and corporations have made increasingly serious-sounding 'pledges' and set abstract 'targets' for climate and/or ecological action, extremely little has actually resulted in measurable reductions in polluting practices. Real climate action is often mimicked by 'greenwashing,' and various rationalizations of counterproductive behaviors.

Many have argued that 'decision-makers' simply need to be 'sold' on the efficacy of changing their behavior for both the public good and the bottom line. While embarking on a path toward zero emissions or similar goals may entail some initial costs, it is clear that clean energy production and use is cost-effective in the long run. While that is true, overall reduction in

energy use is necessary to curtail pollution enough by 2030—a mere 7 years away now—to stave off the worst climate chaos. Also, unfortunately, taking the necessary extreme actions is not conducive for generating enthusiasm for its contribution to a cheery next quarterly report. That is a clue to the deeper underlying cause of resistance to the inevitable transformation of the industrial-consumer political economy. The path of inevitability will be very painful, the path of good intentions executed, not so much.

While a collective ‘attitude adjustment’ of the entire population of the Global North is very important, something much deeper and more profound than marketing to change worldviews is involved. Changing peoples’ minds in general is one thing. However, the world’s decision makers do not work in an organizational vacuum. They are not only deep personal participants in the highest levels of the global dominator culture, they also reside in the highest levels of a very complex global political-economic hierarchy, and it took them a great deal of often obsessive determination to get there. To do the right thing would be to remove much of the edifice upon which they stand.

That is why the *structure* of the global political economy is so important in determining how consistently societies fail to initiate real climate action. That is, real material action that directly reduces carbon emissions and curtails extractive destruction of ecosystems does not happen precisely because the structure of power that directs behavior at all levels of the societal hierarchy, prevents deep climate action.

What does that tell us about ‘how to save the planet’? Well, it suggests that while persuasion is important it will never be enough. Marketing inherently addresses the goal of changing individual behavior. But the problem is fundamentally one of changing the structure of decision-making within but especially at the top of the hierarchy of social control.

The most important question now is about how to transform the process of adopting and executing societal policies to curb the destruction of the human habitat, the accomplishment of which lies in direct opposition to the goals and power of the financial-political hierarchy of modern civilization.

For more Hopeful Realist discussions of these and related matters, go to various blog posts at:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/the-hopeful-realist-blog/>

Today’s Featured Image:

The devastation from the flooding in Libya is no simple “Natural Disaster.” It resulted from a combination of human failures to face the relationship between technology, planetary heating, and societal disintegration.



Source: Jamal Alkomaty / AP

Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation

To understand and take action in relation to the deteriorating Earth System, we must begin to grasp how the complex system of societal control operates in ‘advanced’ political economies today. Sheldon Wolin, a renowned political scientist explains the structure of our contemporary political economy in his book:

Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*. Princeton University Press, 2008.

The vast majority of political and economic power resides in the complex institutional structure that has built up over many decades of national political and economic life. The extremists of the right characterize it as “the deep state,” but demonizing the institutional complex by invoking presumptive conspiracy theories adds nothing to our understanding. However, if any real progress is to be made in mitigating the climate/ecological emergency, we must find a way to redirect the momentum of this dominant institutional structure.

Quotable Quotes

The world’s most powerful institutions—mega-corporations to the largest governments—are just not moving significantly to reduce the damage being done by the everyday operations of the global industrial-consumer political economy of growth. It goes against their culture and organizational structure. We must find a way to force them to act in very different ways, to respond to the climate/ecological emergency. No less than the deep transformation of corporate structure is necessary. To do that, massive social mobilization seems essential.

When minority groups reached the critical mass—that is, the critical group size for initiating social change—they were consistently able to overturn the established behavior.

~ <https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/science.aas8827>

Thanks to Erin Remblance for the article in her [Substack.com](https://substack.com) platform where she cites the important study of social change reported in the article from which I took this quote. The lead author of the article in *Science* in which this quote appeared, Damon Centola, has done important work on the capability of social networks to instigate social change, reported in his book, *Change: How to Make Big Things Happen*, which reviews recent research on social networks, and which I featured in the 12/14/2022 edition of this newsletter.

See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe, check out my blog posts at [The Hopeful Realist.com](https://thehopefulrealist.com) and read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto](#).