

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

Does the Beat Go On? Well, I am afraid it does, and it is not the beat that we should want to be the rhythm of our lives. It is, after all, out of sync with Nature and the natural trajectory of human evolution. Despite all the “green” talk, the global extractive industrial-consumer system of elite profit and global waste plunders ahead, blind to its terminal path.

The greater the global climate/ecological emergency grows, the more so-called “world leaders” seem bent on escalating armed conflicts. Last week, the Israeli “Iron Dome” defense system kept most of the Iranian drones and missiles from hitting their targets in retaliation for Israel’s assassination of one of their top military leaders in Jordan. Putin proceeds with his genocidal demolition as the smarter Ukrainians target his war manufacturing facilities and naval assets; Putin continues blowing up hospitals, schools, and apartment buildings. Other ‘hot spots’ such as Sudan, proxies escalate actions with munitions supplied by major powers. Every retaliation breeds a larger retaliation.

Fears of expanded armed conflict in the Middle East are certainly real. The U.S. has not effectively acted to pressure for de-escalation, and became an enabler of genocide. Biden’s “iron clad” support for the Netanyahu war of annihilation without qualification inherently escalates the violence and engenders images of a lapdog, I am sad to say.

Nor has the US or other major nations taken seriously the threat to humanity posed by continued carbon pollution and escalating extraction and industrial processing that damage and destabilize the world’s ecosystems, and the health of all living beings. Green talk and carbon trading to no ecological benefit actually stifle real climate action. Increased economic growth for huge corporate profits remains the dominant theme. Even many committed environmentalists cannot escape the linear paradigm of ‘green growth’ and the illusion of “decoupling” that sacred cow, economic growth, from environmental damage.

On her *Planet Critical* platform this week, climate corruption critic and very thoughtful writer [Rachel Donald](#) (a genuine public intellectual) raised the deeper question of how state violence permeates international relations and domestic political control as well. In particular, more and more ‘authorities’ are arresting peaceful climate protestors as ‘environmental terrorists,’ and inflicting violence upon them in the process. State terror is driven and supported by the perpetual domination of political discourse by the fossil-fuel corporations.

Rachel’s essay caused a flurry of comments with challenges back and forth among her readers, related to degrowth optimism and pessimism, some going way off course in relation to her thought-provoking ideas about violence and the nation state in history and now. My impression is that even among citizens who recognize the threat of climate chaos, the thought of transforming society in ways that cut into their “lifestyle”—which is based on retaining the dying system—are deemed undoable, but not out of physical or even economic impossibility. Nevertheless, about 65% of Americans consider climate change a concerning threat.

As I said to the lawyer forming the new publishing company that will publish *Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation*, the Launch Date is a moving target. Our award-winning book designer, Nick Zelinger has produced a very impressive book cover design, and he is now working on the book’s interior design. The tentative publication target date is now May 30, 2024, after the pre-publication reviews are in. By publishing the book with a new independent press, we control almost everything, which of course takes more work—and we are learning a great deal about the rapidly changing publishing business. Where is ol’ Ben Franklin when we need him?

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available as a **free** download from [Kindle Unlimited](#). The regular Kindle eBook price is \$6.99. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](#). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on its Amazon page. 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 a Problem and When Does It Become a Predicament? (Or, vice versa.) I have been engaged in conversations with some very smart people lately; it is part of what keeps me going in this era when the main fight seems to be between despair and denial. Someone said that a *problem* is some difficulty for which there is a solution, but a *predicament* is a problem without a solution.

Well, that's cute enough, I suppose. But it does not reach far enough into the human mind or its material context to be satisfying at all. The point of a predicament is that we have to reach past the old 'solutions' and create new responses that relate to the nature of the predicament, thereby, we hope, converting it into a problem. If we don't act creatively, the predicament can collapse into chaos.

Just because a solution is not evident at the moment, or seems unlikely to be found, is no excuse to abandon hope of searching for answers. The predicament may in fact be that we have failed to frame the problem in terms that allow for a solution. For example, in response to a discussion of economic degrowth, almost in relation to Rachel Donald's essay on state violence, one commentator argued that as envisioned by Jason Hickel, degrowth is "a fantasy." Well, it is certainly a long road from here to there, but contrary to the assumptions of that kind of dismissive thinking, what is possible and what is likely are two very different things. And when it comes to human behavior, the unlikely often turns out to be possible if not in the minds of the naysayer. If we were to judge future possibility from past limits, well, no social change would ever occur.

Digging out of the catastrophic convergence of climate/ecological/economic destabilizations inherently calls for some very major forms of *creativity*. In my soon-to-be-released book, *Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation*, I talk about Colonel John "30 second" Boyd, believed to be the greatest fighter pilot who ever lived. He never made general because he was too creative. Boyd had a standing challenge to every other fighter pilot that they could not shoot him down in a mock dog fight in thirty seconds—which is a very long time in aerial combat. Nobody ever did.

Boyd had learned all the maneuvers just like the rest. But he applied his theory of the dynamics of creation and destruction—and most likely, incredibly fast reaction times—to air combat, which always gave him the edge. It was a form of practicing system dynamics based on the understanding that every microsecond, the situation changes and no matter how well skilled, formal training cannot provide the creative response needed to stay on top of that fact. Boyd's work resulted in the U.S. Marine corps writing a new manual on maneuver warfare. The same principles apply to social change, and no formula or theory of economics or any other pseudo-science can outperform human dynamic thinking.

None of the many works I have read on climate change or climate action have even scratched the surface of speculating no less theorizing on how to make the comprehensive changes to the social order—the organization of the many institutions of society itself—that will be required to destroy-and-create complex societal relations in order to come out with a low energy-using ecological society that manages its economy in the interests of human wellbeing and our habitat, rather than in favor of further capital accumulation by the super-wealthy.

Here is the societal predicament that we need to turn into a community problem with a solution. The rational-legal system of order that is controlled by the global financial elite is driving the planet into chaos and climate/ecological collapse. Most social relations—and

livelihoods—are deeply dependent upon that system, both economically and culturally. Failure to radically transform that system into one serves human wellbeing will lead to total collapse. Therefore, a transformation that produces ecological communities is a non-negotiable necessity, not a mere cultural or individual choice. The predicament disappears IF sufficient numbers of people mobilize to change society in radical ways. That means eliminating the dominator culture and all its institutional expressions. We have models for that, which are unknown to most folks. Here is a quote from *Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation*, which points to an important cultural resource for ‘the rest of us’:

John Brown Childs (2023) uses the term “[Transcommunality](#)” to describe a method for overcoming the fragmentation of modern humanity and coalesce diverse peoples into a viable alliance for change. Childs offers two simple formulations to illustrate the contrast between the oppressive monoculture of the modern global political economy and the potential for people to resist and achieve the societal changes necessary to create an ecological civilization.

HOMOGENIZATION + FRAGMENTATION = SUBORDINATION

This simple formula represents the culture of domination that has ruled society for hundreds of years, even longer. On the other hand, an inclusive model respects diversity and empathy, allowing it to work.

HETEROGENEITY + COOPERATION = RESISTANCE AND FREEDOM

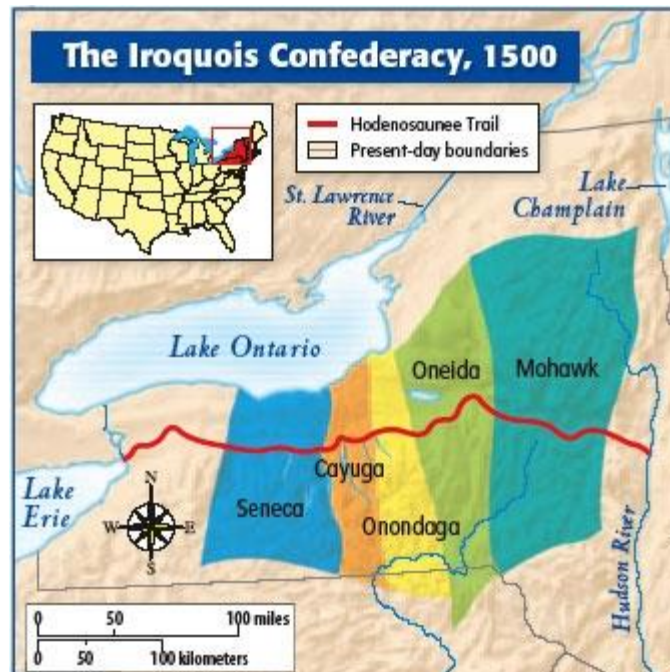
Trans-communal cooperation transcends lines of social identity such as race, class, or gender, by recognizing a higher value in humanizing ‘the other.’ Creativity blossoms under such conditions, enriching coordination in and among groups seeking wellbeing for all. It is interesting to note a parallel here with evolutionary biology. Diversity is a key to the enhancement of life through biological evolution.

(See Ruth DeFries, *What Would Nature Do? A Guide for Our Uncertain Times* 2021.) It is a key resource necessary for generating the creativity needed for enacting social change.

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:

***Direct democracies are almost always located geographically.
There is a tendency in representative democracies for
representation to become more abstract than direct. In other
words, representation is a formality and decisions are made on the
basis of economic and other pressures at the collective (national)
level. The Iroquois nations lived in direct contact with one another,
and understood each other’s concerns.***



Modern industrial societies operate on “rational-legal” criteria for the operations and authority of institutions, which are quite removed from the direct experience of the everyday lives, hopes, and fears of others. Laws and their enforcement are characteristics of the system, not so much its members. Alienation ensues.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

John Brown Childs is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He has dug deep into the history of what one might consider naturally formed democracies. He also plumbed the depths of his own heritage and found the remarkable political organization of the Iroquois Confederacy, which was indigenous to a significant section of what we now call New England.

John Brown Childs. 2003. *Transcommunalism: From the Politics of Conversion to the Ethics of Respect*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Haudenosaunee, the term that refers to the political organization of the Iroquois confederation of nations—including the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Mohawk, and Oneida—is based on principles of diversity and respect that some of the “founding fathers” of the new American nation found valuable. Haudenosaunee is a framework of understanding and mutual aid that is directly opposite from the culture of separation and domination that pervades the culture of industrial modernism. That is why it is so important for envisioning a new social formation to

not only counter the damage done by industrial modernism but to also develop a new ecological civilization.

Quotable Quotes

People continue to search for meaning in social relationships because it is our evolutionary heritage to engage with each other. The global corporate industrial-consumer political economy would rather keep us apart as anxious individual consumers seeking status among unknown others. One result is that we typically listen to music while doing something else. Also, we often eat while driving or reading our social media feeds, unlike our ancestors who ate together as a social event.

We've been so atomized over the last 50, 100 years and told that the real human is the one who can stand alone. The real human, to me, seems like the one who can support his neighbors and work with them.

~ Brian Eno, legendary musician and producer, interviewed by David Marchese, in the *New York Times*

Brian Eno speaks an evolutionary truth... A big part of our species fitness for survival has always been our ability to cooperate to overcome environmental challenges. Today, the ideology of the dominator culture of "industrial civilization" insists that we are first and foremost individuals in competition with each other. Yes, it's that old "divide and conquer." But it also damages the evolutionary heritage of humans, which is grounded in the active cooperation and mutual aid and empathy.

See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe, say hello to a neighbor or stranger, check out my blog posts at The Hopeful Realist.com and read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto](#).