

LOOK UP! 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

It is hard to believe that this issue begins the fourth volume, and fourth year of producing this newsletter. Looking back, it is also difficult to believe how little progress has been made on dealing the rapidly growing climate/ecological emergency that threatens so much human and other life. The ‘climate moderates’ tout the rapid growth of ‘renewable energy,’ the Tesla, and even the failed ‘carbon markets,’ yet carbon pollution is worse than ever and complex interacting ecological disturbances accelerate the heating of the planet and all its damaging consequences. Who are they kidding? Far too many.

To my surprise and delight, an early reader to my new Substack platform, [***Illusions Transformed***](#) volunteered to sign up for an annual paid subscription. He had actually read *Holding IT Together*, and took it quite seriously. I had not even yet contemplated offering the paid membership option. But, now I have.

In my second Substack post I reported on a recent estimate that the global population will likely plummet from its current approximately 8 billion souls by way over half. It is hard to put a precise number on it, since it will depend on the extent and kind of catastrophic climate events, which are clearly coming but in what exact configuration we cannot predict. This sort of ‘forecast’ is very hard to accept, but I cannot ignore the data.

In complex adaptive systems, such as the Earth System—or you or me—the interrelations of the many component subsystems are so complex that outcomes of severe system disturbances can be expected but are too complex to predict exactly. Adaptive system components adjust the system to neutralize small disturbances, but only to a certain point; beyond that an infection can become terminal.

Given the recent and projected trends in climate chaos, a collapse of the human population of the extent suggested by increasingly precise trend data, is entirely plausible, even likely. It’s all laid out in Richard Crim’s [***The Crisis Report***](#), which I featured as a source in my last newsletter. What is so difficult for so many to accept is that the Earth System, which has been so stable for so many thousands of years, could be thrown out of balance so quickly and crash the human population so fast. The new data—especially the accelerating release of methane from melting permafrost and other organic sources—took my breath away. But then, what we are seeing is exactly how complex adaptive living systems act when their subsystems reach tipping points of instability, which are beyond the system’s capacity to adapt.

My last blog post on my website, www.thehopefulrealist.com, drew an unusually high number of readers. I thought about that and concluded that because it described my feelings of incongruity at the stroke of midnight as people all over the world celebrated the New Year as if all was rosy and as light as the fireworks, it may have touched a nerve. Who knows?

Do New Year's Resolutions Make any Sense? It's all about you; or is it? Last week's [blog post](#), as I mentioned above, gained quite a lot of attention, at least in comparison with most others. I had reposted it on Face Book, LinkedIn, and a couple of other social media sites, where it also drew much more attention and commentary than any others had. In it, I asked whether the illusion will prevail. We *do* still live in the Illusion of a perpetual Industrial Civilization...

It is hard to dissuade someone from retaining a strongly held illusion or a long-held belief in a myth. That is probably one of the core reasons so little progress on climate action has been achieved. The other, of course, is that the increasingly hierarchic structure of global power has every interest in perpetuating the status quo and its steady profits in the near term by maintaining the fiction that 'we have this under control,' when carbon emissions are higher than ever and the 'progress' of international agreements and commitments is itself an illusion. The Earth System will not be healed by high-minded talk and no action—nothing is under control.

The belief persists in the population that the source of the climate crisis—if the idea is accepted at all—lies in the actions of individuals. We don't recycle enough. We should eat less meat. We should buy an electric car and install solar panels on our roofs. We should have fewer children. We should do all sorts of things.

There is just enough truth in most of these admonitions by keep people feeling that it is all our fault for consuming too much or consuming the wrong things. Even those who believe this find it extremely difficult to stop. Who wants to be called a "climate terrorist"?

At the same time, the core belief in economic growth as the solution to everything still prevails, especially in the mass media and among almost all politicians. These expressed beliefs are well funded, if ill-founded.

So, what's the point in making a New Year's Resolution to somehow make a smaller consumer 'footprint' upon the Earth? Are you going to argue with that minimum-wage produce stocker at the supermarket? S/he has no power either.

Given the almost certain fact that climate disruptions will bring massive crop failures in diverse locations around the world in the next few years—never mind the increasingly intense droughts, wildfires, and floods—and that many supply chains will be disrupted as well, individual action to reduce our personal carbon 'footprint' becomes nothing more than an imaginary 'solution' the primary functions of which is to alleviate the guilt that comes from recognizing that we too are 'part of the problem,' and to distract us from the real systemic source of our emergency.

A few 'enlightened' moderns recycling more of their overconsumption is not a real solution although rolling back the production of all those single-use plastics would be a big help. Nor are efforts at population control going to reduce industrial-consumer overshoot of ecological limits any time soon. That renders such efforts in the short time running up to the impending

population collapse resulting from agricultural collapse and mass starvation. Besides, it is the overconsumption of the populations of the Global North—draining the materials and energy from the Global South while expecting them to somehow join in—that drives continued carbon emissions more than anything. And, of course, it is the ecological destruction caused by the over-extraction, over-production, over-consumption, and over-waste driven by the global political economy of perpetual economic growth that is the *cause* of it all.

But, on the other hand, *cause* is a concept that a core part of the linear thinking of industrial civilization; it is not adequate to explain the complex interrelations involved in the institutionalized system that is the structure of human overshoot of the Earth System's capacity to absorb the waste and pollution of the misguided human project.

The new human project that we must initiate in order to avoid the worst consequences of the current one is to dismantle the global political economy of waste and ecological corruption and simultaneously build an ecological civilization to replace it. That will be an extremely arduous task—if we are even up to it, not that there is another option—and it will inevitably occur in the context of global chaos and loss of life already 'in the pipeline,' because we failed to recognize the reality decades ago when sufficient knowledge already existed but was institutionally ignored. Ram Das was right: *Be here now!* We must face head on the extremely difficult reality before us or the doomsayers will be vindicated. Really, is failure what you want?

Old News: *Holding IT Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation* can be purchased directly from the publisher, [Bear Claw Press](#), or from your favorite independent bookstore via [Bookshop.org](#). Of course, you can also buy it on [Amazon.com](#), but try ordering it in person by walking into your favorite local bookstore. Independent bookstores are valuable social places where that direct human contact, which is lost to your flat-panel screen, can still be found, along with the tactile feel of books as real objects of pleasure and enlightenment.

I know that putting the advert below for *Holding IT Together* in every issue of this newsletters may seem redundant, but, hey, it costs me nothing. I don't charge myself a penny. So, it is a free reminder to buy and read the book. How could I turn that down?

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HOLDING *IT* TOGETHER



*Social Control in an
Age of Great Transformation*

ROBERT MACNEIL CHRISTIE, PhD

Published July 26, 2024, and the product of decades of research and reflection, [Holding IT Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#) explains the global changes that have resulted in the catastrophic convergence of the crises of climate, ecosystems, economies, and politics, and the societal chaos, which we now see intensifying every day. In it, I also describe the deep changes that are necessary in order to effectively head off societal collapse so we can more comfortably shape the New Great Transformation of our institutions and our ways of living necessary in a world of less intensive energy consumption. We *will* transition away from fossil fuels, like it or not, and the sooner and more intentionally the better. Later would be catastrophic. Petroleum products provided great affluence for some for a while, yet are already causing chaos and environmental destruction for everyone.

[“Buy it!”](#) says the author.

Here are excerpts from some prominent editorial reviews:

A dense and sweeping call to change the direction of human society before it’s too late. Still, his core message is strikingly direct and forceful. It’s hard to imagine any reader not being convinced that just such a massive change is necessary. ~ **Kirkus Reviews**

Christie embeds history surrounding social deconstruction and construction with the kinds of modern references that readers will relish...[He] offers an unprecedented opportunity for readers to apply the basics of economic understanding to the major issues facing humanity’s survival today... Hope is embedded throughout his approach. ~ **Midwest Book Review**

Both a wake-up call and a guide, this book calls for decisive action toward a sustainable, equitable future, making it an essential resource for policymakers, activists, and concerned citizens alike. ~ **The Prairies Book Review**

With the publication of [Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#), by Bear Claw Press, I seek a wide span of possible readers. After all, the book’s content has important implications for the lives of everyone.

If you are a researcher or teacher and would be interested in sending me a short review (two or three paragraphs), or would consider it for use in a class you teach, please go to the BearClawPress.com website, click on the [Review/Exam Copies](#) tab (upper right) fill in the information, and I will send you a [pdf](#) or [ePub](#) copy free.

Otherwise, please buy, read, and offer a customer rating-review for ***Holding IT Together*** on [Goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com) or Amazon.com. Without a significant number of customer reviews, good or bad, the Amazon algorithm will ignore a book into oblivion, regardless of its quality.

Some have estimated that Amazon.com sells around seventy percent of all books sold. Nevertheless, I hope many who buy ***Holding IT Together*** will do so at their local independent bookstore. Of course, both paper and eBook versions are available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) as well as from independent bookstores via [Bookshop.org](https://www.bookshop.org). It is now also available at a discount directly from the publisher, [BearClawPress.com](https://www.bearclawpress.com)

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available as a **free** download from [Kindle Unlimited](https://www.kindleunlimited.com). The regular Kindle eBook price is \$6.99. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](https://www.goodreads.com). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on its Amazon page. You can 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: As always, 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

The Obstacle of American Individualism. Individualism has been touted as the driver of American 'exceptionalism' for what seems like forever. As a cultural 'feature,' individualism is stronger in the U.S. than anywhere else, even as it spreads across the globe. The idea of individualism is so deeply ingrained in the consciousness and beliefs of the U.S. population that most people believe that the billionaires actually earn the millions of dollars in a day that it takes them many years to earn. Why are these guys so valuable, and to whom?

All sorts of science, from evolutionary biology and archeology to neuro science and the social psychology of everyday life, confirm that humans are a 'social animal.' That is, we evolved successfully because we lived for so long in small groups where cooperation was the key factor in keeping us alive and reasonably well nourished. That is not some ideological statement; it is the best assessment based on scientific discovery and analysis.

Many corporations today struggle to find employees who can 'work well with others,' because cooperation has been devalued in comparison to competitive individualism. Educational research has demonstrated that in most cases, where students work on projects together they learn more and more deeply than by sitting passively listening to a lecture, reading a text, and regurgitating factoids on a multiple choice test. Visual thinkers find it even more difficult to learn than do verbal thinkers without a hands-on element as a key part of the process.

The devaluation of intellect, in which I would include verbal, visual, and experiential leaning, in the U.S. has gotten steadily worse for most of my adult life. Anti-intellectualism is as real as ever. The addition of social separation via electronic devices and so-called social media, has further stunted the potentially 'beautiful minds' of America's youth. I heard a report the other day that the average American reads, if at all, at the fifth grade level. 'Critical thinking' has become just a buzzword with little meaning.

In this context, why are we surprised that a life-long grifter whose racism and criminality are so well documented, and whose only intellectual skill is perpetrating propaganda in the form of endlessly repeated big lies, can be elected President of the United States of America? Bathing in a sea of political sycophants who pander to his every whim, the ignorant but clever demagogue is able to propose and have taken seriously policies meant to destroy the greatest experiment in democracy in history.

The real danger now is that he slowly learned in the first four year debacle that by firing competency and surrounding himself with yes men, he will be able to inflict far more damage to the republic this time. The extent of the damage, even to the extent of establishing a fascist dictatorship in the absence of resistance from institutions over which he has appointed loyalists could be extreme. These 'executives' who have no interest in protecting them—and who have no experience, competence, or talent for such work—have only one motivation: destroy. They would prefer to abolish the agencies they have been appointed to lead.

Extreme individualism even denies that anything like institutions or societies even exist. Remember Margaret Thatcher? Well, it is interesting and very sad that things like the climate crisis are not only harder to solve under the burden of extreme individualism, they are easy to ignore or deny. Science, if anything, is a highly social enterprise. That is why fascists hate it.

Science requires proof, and proof must be verified socially—by other scientists, many of whom are more interested in disproving a rival's theory. Yet, one of the cleverest of elements in the scientific method is the standard of proof. Scientists constantly look over each other's shoulders in the attempt to 'prove them wrong.' The result is to establish the facts.

Not only that, but every study and the evidence for its conclusions, must be fully transparent and available for other scientists to examine independently. That is why every autocrat hates science. Real science never bows to politics, although science is often directed by political power, since it is increasingly constrained by the need for funding.

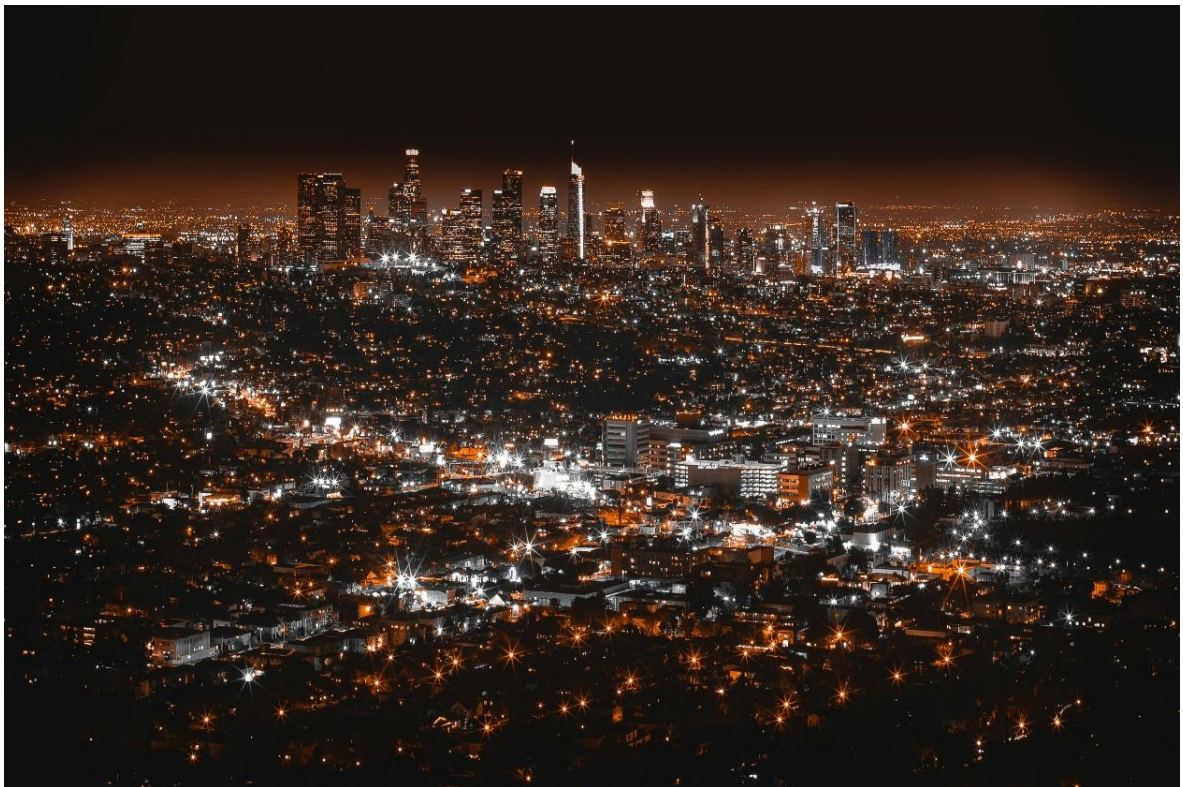
Extreme individualism and ignorance are the enemies of both science and democracy, and therefore human wellbeing. Neither science nor democracy can work in the context of being framed by individual interests or financial domination. Without constraints on these social maladies, any rational policy on climate or ecosystem destruction and recovery from the collapse of industrial modernity into an ecological civilization will be impossible.

One of the indicators that a society is heading toward an authoritarian regime is that science is ignored or denigrated, or both. Another is the rise of a cult of a 'great man' who will solve all your problems, remove 'the evil ones'—the vulnerable groups like immigrants and people of

color, chosen to be scapegoat—and somehow thereby make the society ‘great again,’ just like in the mythical and imaginary past. What other reason would politicians have for censoring books that openly discuss the racist past (and its implications for the racist present) of U.S. society?

Today’s Featured Image:

Los Angeles on a relatively clear night, viewed from Griffith Observatory. I have flown over LA many times, both on airline flights and in a small plane. At night in VFR conditions, you can follow the red tail lights heading west on the Santa Monica freeway from just south of downtown all the way up the coast to Santa Barbara. That gives a sense of the immensity of the population as well as infrastructure, all dependent on complex regional networks moving energy, materials, and water. After all, LA is actually a desert, green lawns or not.



--Image credit: [Denys Nevozhai](#)

Talk about ecological overshoot! How in the world can the world’s great cities be sustained as the Great Unraveling continues? We will either initiate a New Great Transformation to an Ecological Civilization or as our political economy collapses into utter chaos. Making Los Angeles

into an ecological city seems beyond human capacity, but we will only know by trying.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

[The Post Carbon Institute](#) has long done research and published articles and commentaries on resilience and building a sustainable world. It operates the website resilience.org, where I have read some very interesting and insightful essays and reports by diverse contributors, and even published two or three essays there myself.

Resilience, however, is a two-edged sword. Can we even muster enough resilience to sustain human life in a world whose ecosystems and environmental conditions move rapidly toward being uninhabitable? That seems increasingly unlikely, even looking out another ten years or so. Asher Miller and Richard Heinberg, who is the founder of the Post Carbon Institute, effectively characterize our present rapidly changing condition, aptly characterizing it as ***The Great Unraveling***, here:

[Asher Miller Richard Heinberg, Welcome to the Great Unraveling:](#)

[Navigating the Polycrisis of Environmental and Social Breakdown](#)

Some have argued that ‘resilience’ emphasizes adaptation to the consequences of an altered climate system over mitigation of the causes of climate chaos. I have always advocated human resilience as a basic source of survival and flourishing. There have always been challenges to safety and security on planet Earth. In the present era, however, in which we seem to be experiencing the end of industrial civilization, I concluded some time ago that the best adaptation is mitigation. I am now more sure of that than ever.

Miller and Heinberg have written a very strong and comprehensive piece on the Great Unraveling, which is well worth reading and contemplating its implications for society and self. However, the result is that they appear to focus on individual adaptation when the only thing that can have the necessary impact on imminent system failure is massive social mobilization to transform the global industrial-consumer political economy into a viable ecological civilization. They have made one extremely important omission, perhaps by not wanting to appear ‘alarmist.’ Well, we have every reason to be alarmed right now about the acceleration of a destabilizing Earth System, which may likely cause a catastrophic reduction in the human population. It may be a good idea to acknowledge that individuals mustering their own resilience is not enough when no amount of personal resilience can take that much heat.

Quotable Quotes

Unfortunately, the illusion of continuation persists. Almost everything I read in relation to one or another approach to finding solutions to the climate/ecological/civilizational crisis fails to consider the necessity, even the inevitability, of industrial modernity and the population it has supported, shrinking. A few years ago Dmitry Orlov published a book called, *Shrinking the Technosphere*. The whole idea of the technosphere, of course, was that industrial modernity consisted of a huge complex of technological, economic, political, and social elements that together made up the integrated system in which we all live today, and that the whole thing is unsustainable. Humanity will have to get by on the basis of a vastly lower-impact system, and very soon.

A lower-impact society is the most impossible scenario for our future – except for all other conceivable scenarios.

~ Jared Diamond

Jared Diamond, of course, is famous for his book, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, in which he reviewed several societies in history and how they eventually collapsed because of their inordinate impact on their environment and their failure to face the changing conditions they had caused. Too often, the elites doubled down on their ecologically destructive behavior. Does that sound familiar?

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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, read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto.](#), and, buy my new book, [*Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation*](#).