

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

DISCLAIMER: I have no “news fit to print” regarding that joint session of Congress last night. Any fair assessment would require some time for serious contemplation. Some things that are no surprise can still be shocking.

So Many NGOs, So Much to Do. My research on climate, ecological, and political-economic chaos over the past couple of decades, has resulted in my crossing paths with many non-governmental organizations that are trying to respond to one aspect or another of the growing convergence of a range of interconnected crises. All over the world, we see growing instabilities, excesses, and diverse forms of overshooting the capacity of the Earth System to carry the load of our trash in its many forms.

The mess that industrial-consumer ‘civilization’ has made of our own habitat, planet Earth, has grown beyond the limits imposed by the Earth by its finite size. A diverse set of organizations whose mission is to treat problems that some see as causes and others see as consequences of the complex system of extraction and abuse, work hard to fix such problems.

But the global system is very large and sometimes seems to behave like a water balloon; squeeze it here and it pops out there. Various components of the living planet, whose health, like our own, is declining now, despite the ‘advances’ of modern medicine and technological inventions.

One non-governmental organization, with which I have been working for a while now, recognizes the fragmentary mix of efforts at climate action, ecological restoration, carbon emissions reduction, population control, and a range of environmental protection efforts. The [Stable Planet Alliance](#) is working to build a powerful network of organizations and people to coordinate and amplify a diversity of climate and ecological actions to implement the principle that Bill Moyers expressed several years ago, “Only organized people can overcome organized money.” If you are interested in contributing to that effort, log onto the website, review the information, and send an email to info@StablePlanetAlliance.org | We are way overdue to step out of our intellectual and practical silos and build toward a global mobilization of people to force institutions to act in the interests of everyone.

And the beat goes on. Meanwhile, as the Musk's marauders decimate multiple elements of the federal government, trashing people and programs alike in the false claim to be 'improving efficiency,' the Dem's sit on their hands and complain... Far more deeply than many realize, this is a test of not only democratically established institutions, but of modern society itself.

The culture of indiscriminate rage and retribution would seem to have no bounds. What makes some people so vicious and mean? What makes the semi-violent takeover and destruction of legislatively authorized agencies and programs and jobs so easily tolerated? Well, of course, the right-wing Republican rhetoric on "waste, fraud, and abuse" is as prevalent as ever. Never mind the fact that more officials of the first Trump administration have been sent to jail than any other. Musk, just like Trump, put his inherited wealth to work taking over various businesses to gain more power. Government 'efficiency' you say? It would be laughable if it did not so tragically damage so many lives. The rage and retribution is directed at anyone who would dare to challenge the autocratic attempt, its anti-constitutional acts, and the corruption of public institutions. All of it is aimed at taking down any operation that helps the people instead of serving the wealthy.

Some would say it's the habit of tolerating the vindictive practices and mindset that have become 'normalized' by nothing more than repetition of MAGA propaganda. Outrage that its actions might even be questioned amplifies the assertion. The mass media contribute to the chaos in their adoption of the language that is largely borrowed from the propaganda of the perpetrators themselves. To talk of Musk's demolition tactics as if they were actually 'efficiency' measures, is to become propagandists instead of journalists.

As I learned early on as a teenage member of a demolition and reconstruction crew, it is a lot easier and faster to demolish than to build. Creation is slow, but destruction is often very fast.

By reporting on what is happening as if it were actually something normally desirable—cutting costs—the cover story frames the demolition crew as 'efficiency experts' improving government operations rather than executing the destruction we see directly. The con becomes reality rather than the illusion perpetrated by the con. The legitimization of the emergent autocracy by the mass media's corporatist language borrowed from the very purveyors of the story, lends credence to what would otherwise be dismissed as complete fabrications.

But we do not live in a world that can still be called 'normal.' In other words, the media is reporting as fact the story told by the insurrection instigator who was voted into office not to form another more effective coup, but instead to do something to make life more bearable for the average American. The voters bought into the lies. Well, as they say, 'how is that working out?' The insurrectionist in chief has now sent out privateers to plunder the wealth of the nation, such as it is.

None of this is the "New Great Transformation," I have been hoping for our society, quite the opposite. It is certainly new, at least in its extremity. And it is huge, that is, great in size and impact. This autocratic attempt is transformative in all the worst ways possible. Be careful what you wish for.

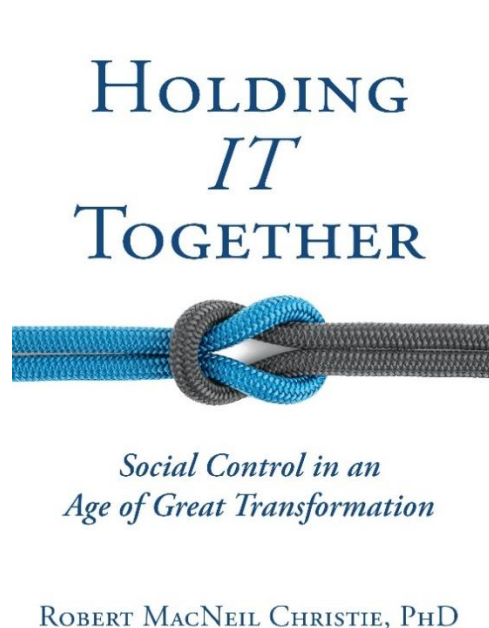
Strangely, I have predicted that a new great transformation of the societies of industrial modernity is inevitable, and that if we humans don't take control it will devolve in all the ways we would not want. Well, an extreme form of transformation is now upon us, driving us even more rapidly into chaos, collapse, and defeat. The only way out of the ensuing spiral downward is to disrupt and defeat the autocratic attempt now pursued by the incumbent Fake President...

Here is the Pitch for my Book Again: You need to read it almost as much as you need to read Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny*.

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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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 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 as well as from independent bookstores via Bookshop.org. It is now also available at a discount directly from the publisher, BearClawPress.com

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. 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/>

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LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

What It Takes to Achieve an Ecological Civilization. That is a much bigger question than we might think before we try to answer it. So far, even at this late stage in the life of industrial civilization, very few have seriously contemplated what a complete answer to the question of how to realize the New Great Transformation of society that is now necessary. [Jeremy Lent](#) is one of the few who has considered what would be involved, which includes using Nature's design principles to form ecological communities, and most importantly what must be done to get there from here.

All you have to do is consider how a modern society would have to be re-configured for it to be grounded in low energy use. Contrary to the convenient assumption of most who have even discussed it, replacing the existing fossil-fuel based high energy consumption economy with "renewable energy" sources—solar, wind, and even nuclear power generation—is nowhere near all that is required. What almost all commentators and analysts still fail to consider is the necessity to severely reduce energy consumption itself.

No matter what we do to slow the heating of the planet will require energy inputs. And, the bigger the project, the greater energy inputs required. Have you ever seen a truck on the highway hauling one of those giant wind-turbine blades? The manufacturing process to produce one consumes a lot of energy. A decade ago, I read an article analyzing the energy inputs and output of solar panels, which came to a disturbing conclusion.

The author concluded that in order for the solar panel to have a net energy gain (manufacturing, shipping, installation, etc., minus the total energy output of the panel) over the lifetime of the panel, the panel would have to be produced very near the point of its use. Now, solar panels have become more efficient since then, but the energy gain is still not all that much. I have not seen such an analysis for those giant wind farms, but the problem is much the same. Big is not better, an idea that is contrary to industrial-consumer culture.

The only reason nuclear energy production is considered "clean" is that the fission process itself does not emit carbon into the atmosphere, although it does generate a lot of heat. However, the energy that goes into the process of extracting materials, designing and building a nuclear power plant, cooling the reactors, etc., even the new supposedly safer, nuclear facilities such as the ones Bill Gates is promoting, is huge. And the problem of transporting and storing nuclear waste remains unresolved. The costs to society far outweigh the energy gain.

On top of all that, energy production itself and the waste it entails, is far from the entire problem. Each approach to the imaginary "energy transition" of mainstream environmentalism involves enormous consumption of not only energy but materials as well. The new energy optimists would have you believe that 'we' can provide energy, food, and a comfortable life for the already over-populated world by just implementing their energy-intensive energy strategy and producing just as much (now somehow 'green') consumer products as before.

Even if all their claims were true, the Earth System has a finite supply of material resources that cannot be increased. The idea of sending rocket ships to the moon to 'harvest' mineral falls into

the category of science fiction. In everyday life, confidence in oneself is a big factor in achieving success. But in an emergency, the confidence based on ordinary experience can be deadly. As I have mentioned before, numerous studies of who survives a catastrophic disaster, and who does not, demonstrate that any effective response to an emergency requires dropping your ordinary assumptions and dealing directly with the parameters at hand.

What it takes to achieve an ecological civilization is way “outside the box” of ordinary thinking. We are in a new reality in which the reorganization of society is necessary for us to operate on far less energy and materials than what is over-consumed today. Because of the very extractive nature of the current global political economy—driven by the imperative of capital accumulation—that very same political economy must be transformed or replaced in order to achieve anything close to an economy that operates in harmony with the ecosystems upon which we will always depend.

We humans are part of Nature, despite the imaginary framing of our existence as separate and in control of it all. That fiction has been pervasive in the culture of industrial modernity since before the industrial revolution. It remains a fiction and can no longer be treated as reality. We have already passed the capacity of the Earth System to carry the load of our extremely excessive over-production, over-consumption and over-waste. Our only viable option now is to constrain the consumption of energy and materials to a level not seen since before the industrial revolution. Once recognized, that will be the greatest culture shock humanity has ever experienced.

The discomfort such a New Great Transformation will entail is no greater than the shock of trying to figure out how to transform the political economy of waste into a frugal society brought into harmony with Nature. Just look around you. Think about the flow of energy and materials that are necessary to sustain society as it is. That system is impossible to sustain, even as those who tout what they are doing as “sustainable” this or that. To overcome this predicament will require completely restructuring the way society operates.

The good news is that the vast technical knowledge that we possess can be applied to creating new low energy and materials consumption economies using some very old and some new low-energy tools to sustain an economy that uses far less materials and energy than we are used to. The bad news is that we have so far to go to ‘change the mindset’ of those who cling to the industrial-consumer culture, despite its necessity.

Today’s Featured Image:

What would an ecological civilization look like? Well, I Googled “images of an ecological civilization.” The image below is typical of what I found, which reflects the imaginary concept from the perspective of our industrial-consumer civilization. Most such images include ‘futuristic’ high-rise buildings with solar panels and/or wind turbines interspersed with lots of greenery and often a high-speed rail liner passing through. What’s wrong with that?



--Image credit: <https://media.easy-peasy.ai/>

All the superficial elements of an 'industrial-modernist' vision of a 'green' future are prominently displayed. Look more closely and you will see that it makes little sense, operationally. It does not represent a complex living human system, just some elements thrown together.

The problem with AI is that it lacks human intelligence, which as neuroscience, anthropology, and complex systems science demonstrate, involves complex interactional elements. This image indicates none of the complexity of human life, just a bunch of components stuck together—a reflection of the failure of linear thinking in a non-linear world. Radical culture change is necessary for survival.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

Most of us have a hard time imagining the fall modern civilization, unless it is a Hollywood fantasy ginned up by an unlikely event such as an asteroid plummeting toward Earth, or aliens invading from outer space, calling upon our hero to overcome the threat. We have trouble envisioning our stable modern society, if not our own life, doing anything but continue on. We do seem to be able to imagine all manner of conspiracies from dark political forces we can't quite identify. But what about the collapse of our social order due to the untenable situation it has put itself in? Self-justifying propaganda by power elites certainly plays a big part, but there is more.

John Jost, *A Theory of System Justification*, Harvard University Press, 2020.

John Jost explains why so often people will defend a social system that causes injustice, destruction, and misery, even their own suffering. People often defend the status quo because doing so gives them the security of being certain that things are much more stable than they may actually be. Also, seeking social acceptance leads people to not buck the 'conventional wisdom' that assures them that 'there is nothing to see here,' or 'we have this under control,' when in fact nothing could be further from reality. That is a very big factor in the increasingly hierarchical systems of authority today, resulting in very high levels of stress and anxiety. Hence, the proliferation of conspiracy theories and political extremism, allowing the false certainties they entail.

Quotable Quotes

Rachel Donald always has something important to say, not just because she is very smart, but because she cares. In the context of the MAGA demolition of any federal program that has a mission of building a kinder, more compassionate society, and the dearth of public discussion of achieving an ecological civilization, I thought this expression of our predicament fits the bill today.

*We don't need bigger, better and faster.
We need deeper, kinder and slower.
Deeper relationships.
Kinder interactions.
Slower-paced lives that value personhood over power.*

~ Rachel Donald

If you want to hear Rachel interview some of the most important experts and activists who are working on any of the multiple converging crises today, listen/watch her podcasts on [PlanetCritical.com](https://planetcritical.com)

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