

LOOK UP! The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter: ***Looking at the World Today as if Facts Matter***

Robert MacNeil Christie, PhD

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

On the Disassembly of a Nation. Where to begin... Well, I will not fill this space and more by detailing the many DOGE autocratic actions designed to take down most of the federal government, thinly disguised as ‘cost-cutting measures.’ The perpetrators’ prior statements in various venues have made clear for some time that democracy, however weak or disabled it has become, is not the form of government the new techno-bro autocrats intend to establish. These guys really do fancy themselves as ‘masters of the universe.’ Delusional, yes, but that does not mean they are unable to demolish the nation, then pick up the pieces and pocket the spoils.

But all that is all over the news, well, mostly all over MSNBC and downplayed on the major networks as much as it is denied by Fox and its Fascist Friends. The myriad methods of disrupting ‘normal’ society, as well as normal international relations, is, after all, part and parcel of the classic fascist playbook for taking over a republic. Destabilize every institution; challenge the courts, infuse every bureaucratic hierarchy with the fanatical and the faithful followers, no matter the absence of competency. Who needs competency in running an institution one is sworn to destroy?

Even with my critical perspective on the neo-authoritarians, I never imagined watching surveillance-camera footage of a young woman with, as far as she knew, a valid student visa, snatched off the street by unidentified masked men in black and kidnapped in an unmarked car.

But here’s the thing. While each incident, whether endangering air travel by impetuously firing air traffic controllers and their support staff with reckless abandon, or taking people right off the street without a sniff of constitutionally guaranteed due process, has its individual source of outrage, far more than mere individual acts of intolerable oppression is going on.

This is a direct attack on the very structure of society as well as the American democratic culture, such as it is. We can complain all we want, and with full justification, about the diverse defects of American quasi-democracy, but all that is trivial by comparison with the attempt to directly deconstruct the very fabric of the nation’s social contract.

The actions now being taken by Musk’s tech-boy marauders are as clear an autocratic attempt as has ever been seen. If they are able to take it apart, breaking the will of its members and leaders to do their institutional work, they will be able to put it back together in a very different way.

Then we will have a neo-fascist techno-bro oligarchy, unlike the partial (informal) one we have now.

The thing about both Trump and Musk is that they enjoy creating chaos; they revel in destruction. They know next to nothing about operating an effective organization or how the complexities of international relations play out. They are ignorant of ‘normal’ social relations because they are clearly unable to function in human relationships other than by inflicting the brute force of power. And that very approach is exactly what they believe in.

We can marvel at how so many were duped by Trump’s seemingly obvious lies about bringing back a nostalgic imaginary past, uncluttered by the realities of racism, conquest, or imperial violence. Like all fascists, they are [erasing history](#), as Jason Stanley explains in his recent book by that name. The extent to which Trump’s agents have erased any reference to the messiness of what they envision as American bastion of pure white exceptionalism. It would be laughable if it were not so ruthlessly traitorous.

Here is that 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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# 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](http://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. Also, copies can be bought at a nice discount from the list price at Bear Claw Press.

Otherwise, please buy, read, and offer a customer rating-review for ***Holding IT Together*** on [Goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/41851338-holding-it-together) 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/>

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## ***LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary***

**The Normal that Never Was.** How some things coincide is sometimes remarkable. I had long admired Gabor Maté, the Canadian physician and psychiatrist who had been rescued from the Holocaust as an infant, and became one of the world's greatest experts on addiction and trauma. I had long intended to read his book, [In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction](#). His insights into the societal causes of personal trauma and addiction came through clearly in some interviews and lectures I saw; I wanted more.

But there is so much to read, so little time. Like Riane Eisler's [The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future](#), which sat on my shelf for years, then suddenly realized that I must read it now, I knew I needed to read more by Gabor Maté too long before I actually did. When I finally read Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade*, it was a revelation on the role of the dominator culture in Western Civilization and its implications for everyday life and politics today. Now that I've started reading Gabor Maté's latest book, a similar thing is happening. And, it is directly related to that same dominator culture.

Intellectual symbiosis can be fun. But in this case it is getting personal. When I heard about Maté's latest book, I had a feeling I should read it now and I bought it. Just as I was beginning to read [The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture](#), I found myself in my own medical semi-emergency. *The Myth of Normal* is focused, as the subtitle suggests, on the societal sources of much illness and the related sources of failure in medicine as a profession,

despite its major technical innovations and achievements in some dimensions. Regarding the so-called ‘diseases of modernity,’ high blood pressure, stress, heart disease, obesity, ulcers, diabetes, etc., modern medicine tends to treat the symptoms and often fails miserably dealing with the causes. That is improving, but far too slowly.

The story is a bit different regarding the more mechanical health problems and related medical techniques and tools. The technology and methods of surgery, for example, rely more on a combination of knowledge of both biochemistry and the fine components of anatomy, as well as the physics and microelectronics of industrial design. New minimally invasive technologies, such as laparoscopic surgery, allow minimal blood loss, less damage to soft tissue, and faster recovery. New mechanical methods of repairing bone damage as well as replacement with sophisticated ‘replacement parts’ such as the titanium hip I received several years ago when my right hip joint simply wore out, result in the patient being up and walking, at first with a walker, and in a few days, good as new.

So, with much of my active life behind me—high school football, gymnastics, years of martial arts, as well as years of running and a lifetime of avid bicycle riding with only a few falls— not surprisingly some parts have worn significantly. Everyone at my age seems to have some back problem. Mine flared up rather severely recently. I was having a lot of lumbar pain after too much heavy lifting; I could barely walk. A remarkably talented pain specialist ordered an MRI on both my lumbar and cervical spine, since I had been getting tingling in my arms all the way down to my fingertips.

Well, as it turns out, severe cervical damage was the real threat, since the impingements on the spinal cord could cause permanent paralysis if I were to experience a serious impact (auto accident, etc.)—not an active lifestyle. You need surgery right away, the risks are too high, Dr. Raiten said as he carefully explained the details as I looked at the MRI image. So, off we go to one of the highest ranking spine centers in the country at UCLA, hoping to get in as soon as possible. I have to wonder whether their operations are yet affected by the political demolition derby operated by DOGE.

Well, all this may mean a less frequent publication of this [newsletter](#), my [blog](#), and my [Substack](#) posts for a while. Only time will tell. I’ll keep up as well as I can. The good news for me is that spinal surgery techniques and technology have advanced so much in recent years. Some areas of medicine have reached amazing successes. Surgery is one, along with genetics and vaccines development. In any case, life is inherently risky.

To the extent that the practice of medicine is driven by science instead of old fashion symptom suppression, success is often the result. When surgery succeeds, it is because the technology and the cause, as well as the surgeon’s skill, are so closely aligned to the symptoms and their causes. With high blood pressure and diabetes, the causes are often found outside the body, more related to what Gabor Maté refers to as our “toxic culture.”

***Today’s Featured Image:***

***Sometimes an image can be beautiful and ugly at the same time. Here, the ultimate city is both fascinatingly complex and may be richly diverse, but may also reflect the “toxic culture” of modernity. It is not necessarily the complexity that makes a culture toxic. The social disintegration that results from a growing hierarchy of domination is toxic to human relations.***



*Photo Credit: BBC*

***Unfortunately, the development of industrial civilization contained such toxic elements from the start. However, its trajectory has recently produced ever-increasing inequities, but even more important, the 'immiseration' of the majority of the people as a result of increasing levels of inequality caused by growing tendencies toward authoritarian rule. The Trump-Musk autocratic attempt—the outcome of which we cannot really predict—is taking this dangerous trend to its extreme.***

### ***Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation***

If you have read this far, you probably guessed, this week's featured book is Gabor Maté's latest. *The Myth of Normal* is not normal, precisely because Gabor Maté steps out of the normal way of thinking in writing it. He looks at medical patients as subjects, with lives, experiences, and perspectives, all with some bearing on their health. He needed to hear their stories, not just rudimentary descriptions of their symptoms. That made an immense difference in his understanding of health and disease, and their sources in the modern world.



Gabor Maté, [\*The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture\*](#). New York: Avery Penguin Random House, 2022.

The fact that we do live in a toxic culture goes against the grain of medical and political thought. It is analogous to the current stock market ‘gurus’ who insist that the emerging political-economic chaos is a “buying opportunity.” No, the forces driving the current market chaos are the exact same forces (in overdrive) that have been detrimental to human health and wellbeing for many decades. To understand the modern malaise, one of the best ways is to read *The Myth of Normal*.

### *Quotable Quotes*

Anand Giridharadas offers insights and information on a regular basis on his Substack platform, “The.Ink.” Here, he contrasts concisely the gross divergence of the current hateful politics of racism and division that characterizes the autocratic attempt of the MAGA movement, with the former trend of compassion and social cohesion.

*Goodbye to diversity, equity, and inclusion.  
Hello to disorder, entitlement, and impunity.*

~ Anand Giridharadas

The attack on ‘DEI’ is a classic tactic meant to disturb, disrupt, and divide people on lines of existing difference. Throughout history, those who would overthrow an existing order—those who are disinterested in any kind of reform because they just don’t care about the quality of the society, being only interested in power—use such tactics to destabilize. The term “shock and awe” comes to mind. Even as our Earth System environment destabilizes, their goal is social destabilization in pursuit of usurpation of political power for personal gain. Ultimately, they will inherit little more than the wind. Disgust is the expected reaction. Resistance is the necessary pro-action.

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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\*](#).