

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

What Nature Does.

Ruth DeFries, is an evolutionary ecologist and a recipient of the MacArthur “Genius Award.” She wrote a book called *What Would Nature Do? A Guide for Our Uncertain Times*. Not only is DeFries an eloquent writer, what she writes is extremely important for our human future. (I’m pretty sure I recommended this book in my *Books and Other Sources...*” section a year or so ago.) She argues that humans have gotten off the track of what life is all about, and that there are vast numbers of examples in Nature of the approach we ought to be taking in forging ahead.

By redirecting societies away from the disastrous terminal path we are on, and taking a bunch of hints from the complex adaptive systems that compose the natural world, we could build ecological societies grounded in the goal of enhancing the wellbeing of human groups and all the other species that make up the whole Earth System—which some call *Gaia*.

I often wonder how long it will take and how many and how severe the catastrophic reactions of Nature to the destructive effects of the complex global political economy of endless growth must be, before we wake up to the fact that the only “fix” to the mess we have created. We need a total transformation of the global political economy, which the global elites built without a thought as to its fundamental incompatibility with the Natural Systems it plunders, and upon which we all depend for our lives.

The extreme flooding especially in Texas this past few days, shocked so many people because so-called “natural disasters” have always fallen within a certain range of danger and destruction. But that is primarily because we still operate within the language of human control over Nature. (See Robert Cauneau’s quote here below today.) We are the proverbial fish in linguistic water. We all grew up by learning the language of industrial modernism, wherein little room is allowed for understandings of Nature with us within it instead of over it. We are not “stewards” of Nature, nor should we ever have been. We are *part* of Nature, whether we recognize it or not.

What Nature does is operate as it always has on planet Earth. In particular, living systems in Nature are complex adaptive systems; they are physical-chemical-biological-ecological facts. Each operates and exists within a larger complex system of such systems, having gradually over

millennia evolved and adapted to each other as mutual environments that constitute the conditions necessary for each other's existence.

Mutuality, harmony, and complementary opposites constitute the essence of living systems. Each human, for example has within it more living critters other than itself, than the number of cells that are itself. We are us in a far more inclusive way than almost anyone but someone like Ruth DeFries understands.

Many humans have a basic sense of our interdependence with one another, and perhaps a lesser sense of our interdependence with other living systems. But, despite the dominator cultures of the extractive political economies in which we live, we also know deep down that we are part of the natural world, not just when we go to visit in a national park on our vacations. We stand in wonder, yet we do not make the mental connection with our daily consciousness, since that is dominated by the frameworks of language in which we live on the job or in the shopping mall, suburb, or city.

In the words of the 1960s, we have a lot of 'consciousness raising' to do in order to visualize the actions we need to take collectively, actions that are quite contrary to the interests of the so-called "one percent." Nevertheless, despite the intellectual and emotional relativism of modernity, you just cannot mess with Mother Nature for long without paying the price in floods, drought, extreme storms or unlivable heat, crop failures, and ultimately societal chaos and collapse. There is only one alternative: A New Great Transformation of human societies in line with the necessities of shaping an ecological civilization truly integrated with Nature.

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**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*. And Jason Stanley's *How Fascism Works*.

***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 either physically or via [Bookshop.org](#), where you can designate your favorite 'brick and mortar bookshop for profit sharin. 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. 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) 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

David Suzuki is Right, ...and Wrong.

It is the same old dilemma that has plagued the evolution of the climate crisis from early on. We know that all the best data and climate models portend great loss and suffering for humans and almost all other species as temperatures and climate chaos reach intolerable levels. If we have paid attention to the vast accumulation of scientific evidence, we know that massive reduction in the destruction caused by industrial modernity is necessary to avoid societal collapse amid the breakdown of the stability of the entire Earth System.

But when we hear David Suzuki, one of the world's most respected environmental scientists say that it is too late, we are taken aback. He is not the first to say that we cannot stop the juggernaut of climate chaos and all the positive feedback loops that have the effect of accelerating the destabilization of the Earth System more and more as we move deeper into the unknown. After all, we have not even been able to slow the growth of carbon emissions in the decades that nations have talked about commitments to do so. But Suzuki has been an important leader in shaping a viable human response.

Some politicians proclaim policy motives strictly as a means to power. They care little or not at all about the policy motive itself; it is strictly a narrative means to the end of gaining power. If we are to act rationally in responding to politicians, we must be on the lookout for true motives behind the veil of presentation.

But, for the most part we do not recognize the speech of politicians as performative instead of informative. Do they inform us about their values, beliefs, and intentions? Not so much. Oh, some do of course. Jamie Raskin comes to mind. He is also a constitutional scholar and explains the importance of constitutional principles for our daily lives and for how the Constitution is meant to constrain the worst impulses of politicians.

Some research has shown that among the most successful politicians and corporate executives, a greater proportion have narcissistic and sociopathic personalities than are found in the general population. Why? I suspect that is because climbing the corporate or political ladder is aided by having excessive motivation and skills in social-psychological manipulation, which are common traits of narcissists and sociopaths (BTW, the terms, sociopath and psychopath, have virtually identical meanings as used by psychologists and sociologists.)

Of course, 'manipulation' is a behavior found almost everywhere among humans. It is not all bad; we have to assert some level of control over one another in order to coordinate our behavior to make the social world work for ourselves and others. When we say that a person is 'manipulative,' we usually mean that the subject of the statement is someone who has an inordinate tendency to try to control other people over and above the normal acts of control and coordination, which are more a matter of negotiation.

But, in politics it is not just about individual behavior and pathological aspects of political performance. In other words, the pathology of Donald Trump is not just about the guy I just cannot resist calling the Fake President. (If the role of president is seen by its incumbent as strictly a means to his personal power seeking and has no sense of its obligation to uphold and defend the Constitution, then that incumbent must be a 'Fake President—that's how I define it, anyway.)

The thing is, politics and political movements are not just about their leader, however, charismatic or politically powerful he or she might be. The MAGA movement, for example, is driven by an imaginary political worldview with specific theoretical anti-historical idealizations about what America was, is, and ought to be—white men dominating the world. That is why they want to ban books that refer to the realities of slavery in our history and deny discussion or even images of things and people they find offensive.

Extremist political movements that try to control the narrative to exclude any fact that contradicts its ideological premise, are inherently authoritarian and thereby anti-democratic, and opposed to every foundational principle of the Constitution. But a constitution survives only by its lived practice. We used to rely on the fact that despite occasional violations, most politicians stayed within the borders of basic constitutional principles, which thereby upheld the constitution.

Today, we have too many politicians who have accepted the idea that we don't really need the Constitution in order to follow the authoritarian hierarchy they think would be more 'efficient.' Efficient at doing what? Overthrowing the rights of citizens and everyone else in order to force the adoption of their self-serving ideology of power.

So, in the sociological sense, David Suzuki may be even more right than in the biological sense. The current trend toward completion of the autocratic attempt to abandon democracy for a

new brand of fascism may be an even greater reason for Dr. Suzuki to feel that it is too late. The regime is already slowing down our miniscule progress in mounting serious climate and ecological action so much that whatever the political outcome, our ability to 'catch up' to the level of being far behind will be extremely abridged until and unless the current coup is curtailed.

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Today's Featured Image:

The 'unprecedented' becomes normal in abnormal times. We have always had some flooding, especially in lowlands close to rivers. But when "one-hundred year" floods become commonplace, there is nothing normal about the 'new normal.'



Photo Credit: National Weather Service

Trump, of course, decimated FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, along with every other government department, agency, or other unit designed to support ordinary people in any way. But federal response to disasters was always designed for 'normal' disasters such as occasional tornadoes, hurricanes, or earthquakes. Some, far too many, politicians hold on to old ideas about reality that simply do not fit contemporary experience. They exploit the inconsistencies to find a scapegoat among the weak or their political opponents to blame for whatever bad happens.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

I have to admit, I just started reading *No Straight Road Takes You There*. But I am completely confident that I will appreciate the rest of it as much as the first few pages. Rebecca Solnit is a breath of fresh air amidst what can be some pretty stuffy writing on "the left." She is a

distinctly emotionally warm voice expressing progressive values in a very creative and insightful way. Her work comes from a deep caring about all of us.

Rebecca Solnit. 2025. *No Straight Road Takes You There: Essays for Uneven Terrain*.
Chicago: Haymarket Books

What has already struck me about *No Straight Road* is the honesty about uncertainty in human affairs, especially in relation to politics. She makes it clear that a valuable stance is to embrace uncertainty. Of course, looking back, and well, looking around today, so many ideologues, on both the right and left of the political boundary that does little good anyway, are so certain of what is right, what will work, and what just cannot be.

Rebecca Solnit is far too creative to indulge such self-indulgence. That is why she has such wonderful insights. The world is far too complex to be so certain about the future. Solnit's stance, and her creativity are all about possibility, which is far more important than being certain about what nobody can really predict.

Quotable Quotes

I usually offer up a very short quote, two or three lines or so. But this statement, quoted in a Facebook post by Erin Remblance, the insightful Australian climate and economic thinker and human wellbeing advocate, is actually very short for what it conveys. (Erin always has valuable things to say.) This quote is packed very tight with some of the most important elements of the greatest human predicament to arise in any society in history. Read the whole powerful essay on reality, evidence, and language, [here](#). The role of constrictive language in misunderstanding modern reality is crucial.

No reform, no alternative project, no emancipatory policy has any chance of success until individuals become aware of the fact that they are, first and foremost, locked into an imposed language and imagination. The first act of any real transformation as an act of disclosure: making each person realize that they think in terms of words and categories they have not chosen but that have chosen them. It is not brute force that holds us back: it is a manufactured consent, an invisible manipulation, that of the narratives and frameworks we internalize without questioning them. Until this act of conscience takes place, any change remains wishful thinking.

~ Robert Cauneau

We will never take the actions necessary until we overcome the political-economic mythology of the industrial-consumer culture. We have blindly consented to the framing of reality in a very unrealistic way. Read Cauneau's words more than once and consider it all.

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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*](#).