

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

Delusion of Grandeur Amidst the Bloody Rubble

I really had not imagined the scope and perversely decadent cruelty that could be foisted upon a population of victims of forced starvation and mass murder as a weapons of a largely one-sided war—a war that has been started and paused by one or the other side for almost seventy years since the formation of the Israeli State in 1947. The grandiose “plans” for a “Gaza Riviera,” to replace the Palestine people as they are forced into “voluntary” expulsion, were just so brazen that even the earlier hints of such a development seemed at the time to deserve a dismissal on the grounds of implausibility. I dug around and found the full proposal at [Middle East Eye](#).

It was quite revealing of the technocratic authoritarian skills at constructing a plausible sounding plan, if the reader is politically naïve. It even proposes stipends and ‘temporary housing,’ for those Palestinians who refuse to be removed. Given the total dehumanization of the Palestinians by both the US and Israeli administrations, I remain quite skeptical of the ‘humanitarian’ tone of the autocratic plan. It is, after all, a plan for global financial elites to profit from creating luxury resorts, industrial parks and infrastructure for international trade. When in the US did developers ever make good on their promises for compensation to the displaced by their operations? Almost never. Definitely never for Trump.

Well, I was wrong about the implausibility of such a scheme. Not only the ultimate dismissal of a human population in such a dehumanizing way as to be beyond imagination, operated as an attempted distraction from the underlying goal of expulsion, replacement, and genocide for real estate profit, but done in a manner that visualized a string of phallic cities of commercial, not human dimensions, AI-modulated of course. The images proffered reminded me of the techno-fantasy urbanisms of a Flash Gordon comic strip from the 1940s. (See Today’s Feature Image.)

Well, I hate to assert the age old question, “What is this world coming to?” But it seems I must. The other day, the Washington Post released a story describing the proposal for this abomination in a leak from ‘The Whitehouse.’ The idea of turning the blood-stained rubble of a land devastated by military action against Palestinians, which killed more civilians than any other modern war (as a proportion of total deaths), may be exiting for a real estate developer without a soul. But it is an outrage for most of the rest of humanity. Despite the offensiveness of such a

proposal for anyone who can see the humanity in any group of people, it may serve the interests of all of us to take a closer look at what the strategy underlying this bizarre proposal might be.

For those who would conquer the world, an image of a “shining city on the hill”—with or without the hill—may be a metaphor for a glorified instance of domination of both ‘lesser’ humans and Nature itself. We know that Netanyahu is driven to continue the war, any war, to keep himself in office. We also know that his extremist Zionists of the theocratic fascist right who keep him in office is explicitly the annihilation/extermination of the Palestinian people. They openly say so. The two make a perfect storm of violence unlimited, while media censorship presents a more innocent image for the Israeli people, who are both influenced by the propaganda and outraged by Netanyahu’s indifference to the goal of freeing the hostages and his use of the hostage issue as a political pawn.

Of course, we should all know that violence in the extreme, right up to indiscriminate murder, torture and massacres, and even genocide, is not rare. From Hitler and Mussolini to Pol Pot in Cambodia, to Pinochet in Chile, and now, Putin devastating Ukraine and Netanyahu demolishing the Gaza Strip while extremist settlers murder Palestinians while burning down their homes. The list goes on as Trump tries to jump on board. The Jewish people have an extreme historical burden as one of the most victimized of any. Yet, no leader if he aspires to be a ‘strong man,’ and in Netanyahu’s case and perhaps Trump’s as well, the strong motive for staying out of jail, motivates his brutality to what that strange term suggests, “ethnic cleansing.”

And in ‘wartime,’ such behavior is ‘justified’ as intended to protect the “right to exist” as a nation. Defense is one thing; intentional as well as indiscriminate slaughter of persons for being who they are is quite another. Typically, the authoritarian ruler works hard to convince “his” people that he is only protecting them, when, as Trump has, he mobilizes the military to “fight crime” in cities where crime has been declining for some time, in order to ‘normalize’ the idea that the ‘strong man’ will keep them safe by taking away citizens’ and others’ rights to live and be left alone. Certainly, Hamas terrorists committed horrific acts of barbarism, and now IDF soldiers do too, on a much larger scale, bolstered by US armaments. But dehumanization of a population to the point of inflicting violence to maximize terror and death is no answer to anything except to the *will to power*. Dehumanization and blood-fest are the deep dangers of the fascist wave today.

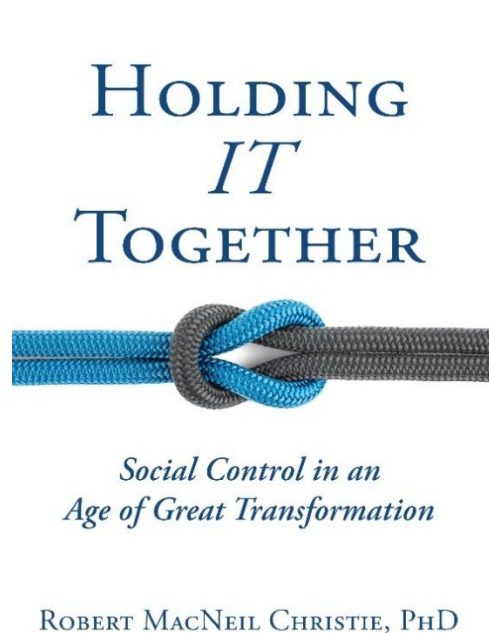
As ‘modern’ governments authorize the ruthless killing of broad categories of *Others*, they draw our attention away from the underlying threat to humanity that they represent: the continued oligarchic plunder of planet and people, all in the interests of capital accumulation for the ultra-rich and the agents who do their bidding, whether with AR-15s, commodity monopolization, or real estate deals. Only by bringing back the *real world* into political decisions and actions, can we escape the neoliberal economic centrist paradigm and build an ecological civilization.

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**Here is that Pitch for my latest 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 sharing from online sales. 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?



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](http://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](http://Amazon.com) as well as from independent bookstores via [Bookshop.org](http://Bookshop.org). It is now also available at a discount directly from the publisher, [BearClawPress.com](http://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](http://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 Emergency We Don't See Coming.

You have to agree, modern life is full of distractions. I have heard many complaints about the excessive “screen time” that so many teens and children spend. Of course, your aggressive young (or old in many cases) professional or executive could be equally accused. But that is merely the tip of the sociological iceberg. I remember the big issue for sociologists when I first took some ‘soc’ classes several decades ago, was the “loss of community in modern America.”

As a mini-antidote to screen addiction and its stealth abstractions, I sometimes leave my smart phone where I cannot get to it in time to answer if it rings. Well, if it is important, the caller would certainly leave a message. If I recognize the number or the phone displays the name of the caller, I can *choose* to call back, or not. A minor exercise in human agency.

Various community studies were done back in my youth, most of which revealed the growing isolation of individuals and the simultaneous decline of rural communities, particularly in the 1950s. But that was then and this is now. The world has changed so much since then. The fifties were the peak of the period some call the “Great Acceleration,” when after the growth of the huge World War II economy, the civilian economy experienced a great “post-war boom.” The big shift was from war to commerce.

The explosion of economic opportunities for (mostly white) Americans in that time tended to compensate for the loss of traditional community, largely because of the social mobility that was driven by new economic opportunities. With all that growth, social relations began a long shift from focus on family and community to focus on work, work relationships, and professional or financial alliances. The new suburbs became a (weak) substitute for the direct personal relations of the past. Relationships among neighbors were clearly more superficial and founded in similar economic status rather than long-term interpersonal relations over generations. Everyone was on the move.

After the “counter-culture” revolution of the 1960s, which was far more limited than imagined by the average hippie or new left radical of the time, who eventually got a job, society became ever more focused on work and consumption. Personal relationships became more fragile for many. Economic security waned as workers’ unions were politically suppressed and declined. Everything was in flux and often depended on the latest corporate quarterly report or the latest ‘war of choice.’

But let’s look at the even bigger picture for a minute. If we admit it, our Earth System is rapidly destabilizing. It is wandering out of the comfort zone that humans have enjoyed for over eleven thousand years. That time with consistent patterns of weather and stable ecosystems allowed us to develop agriculture, build surpluses, and evolve social hierarchies to control resources from the top, then further extract materials and energy from the Earth at an increasing rate because of the technologies that the Holocene geological epoch allowed humans to develop.

We have continued down that path until now, when some realize the ultimate end of ‘endless economic growth’ is near. I call that the end of industrial civilization. But while some clearly recognize the inherent ecological dangers building rapidly, few notice that our civilization did not train us to be prepared for such an end to the system that our economic myths allow us to perceive as operating evermore. Bad timing, just when the Earth System destabilization approaches more ecological tipping points, beyond which little can be done to mitigate the

greatest predicament humanity has ever faced. If we do not act now, together, to transform the global political economy of greed and corruption into an ecological civilization, a massive societal collapse is virtually inevitable.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to societal action, aside from the entrenched political-economic hold that the oligarchs have on economic and societal decision-making, is that most people, if they are trained or educated at all, are entirely ill-suited for the kinds of work we must embrace going forward. You don't make a living on planet Earth by interacting with the apps on a smart device—not for long, anyway. And you certainly do not by asking an AI algorithm to give you answers, which for the most part are clichés from the past. The real work ahead as we try to reorganize societies to serve the needs of their members, instead of serving the accumulation of more capital by the ultra-rich, will be in the *real* world, not in “the cloud.”

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Today's Featured Image:

The reputations of big-time real estate developers and designers often hinge on the radically 'modern' vision of their grand development plans. Most never come to fruition. Why? Because they are distinctly unrealistic. This image, and the others that depict the Trumpist vision for Palestine without Palestinians, are starkly anti-Nature in every way I can see.



Photo Credit: [Middle East Eye](#)

The wannabe fascist 'strong man' has no concept of what is needed to make a human settlement useful to the people who inhabit it, nor does he understand the sources of sustenance that human settlements actually require. It is all about grandiose structures and the money that can be made in developing them.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

Money is at the center of what I have written here and elsewhere on the emerging mega-crises of our time. Yet, as Alf Hornborg points out, its nature and role in taking us down the path to terminal danger is both little understood and intentionally ignored, especially by economists and politicians. Not so for Alf Hornborg, Professor Emeritus of Human Ecology at Lund University, Sweden. Hornborg is an anthropologist, and does not look at money as most economists would.

Alf Hornborg. 2024. *Liquidate: How Money is Dissolving the World*. New York: Routledge.

Now, I haven't read much of the book. Routledge has elected to sell the hard-cover edition for a list price of \$180- (!). I imagine it is being marketed as a textbook for some esoteric economic history course at elite universities. You can pay \$126 on Amazon. But the good news is that Hornborg's first chapter is a summary of the whole book. So, if you can wade through some fairly dense narrative, you can learn the basics of its powerful argument, by reading the sample on Amazon.org. Bottom line: money is a fiction portraying all things as objectively equivalent. We have human values that cannot be objectified. But they are objectified by the dominance of money in human decision making. That is the essence of our failure to constrain the control that money exercises over our lives. Fixing this deep predicament would be massively complex, but it will be necessary. Hornborg has some suggestions, but it will not be easy.

Quotable Quotes

Even though I have read only the first chapter that summarizes this remarkable book, I found it a powerful analysis of the world we inhabit today.

The modern translation of all elements of nature and society into abstract exchange-values works like a veil that makes us ignorant about the biophysical aspects of the world economy.

~ Alf Hornborg

It may be difficult to consider most of what we do as 'abstract,' but every document, every word on your screen(s), every email or text message is an abstraction. Every political debate or contract negotiation is too. But the key factor in Hornborg's analysis is the abstraction of exchange values. As we have seen in numerous other analyses of the world political economy today, it is the ignorance (or the ignoring of what we know) of the concrete (ie., *real*, not abstract) biophysical world in which any economy operates, that makes the difference. Whatever decision makers know, they operate as if the economic world has nothing to do with the natural world except for its relation to extractable materials and energy. In the process, human values are ignored, neutralized, or manipulated to achieve abstract monetary goals.

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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*](#).