

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

New News Just Keeps Getting Worse.

According to a new study released by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), four key parts of the Earth's climate system are dangerously destabilizing. Here is the essence of the [findings](#):

“Researchers analysed the interconnections of four major tipping elements: the Greenland ice sheet, the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (AMOC), the Amazon rainforest and the South American monsoon system. All four show signs of diminished resilience, raising the risk of abrupt and potentially irreversible changes.”

That is a very big deal. When one of the most prestigious research institutes in the world makes such a statement, it is prudent to pay attention, especially to the human implications of their findings. Each of these elements in the global climate system is becoming more unstable. All complex adaptive systems are able to maintain their stability only within a certain range of parameters; beyond that, cascading chaos is likely to be triggered rapidly. Adaptation can go only so far. Beyond that is the ‘tipping point’ into turmoil. The disruption and destabilization of these very large Earth sub-systems will affect weather all over the world—in different ways and with differing intensities over time from one region to another. The consequences are many and complex. Because we may not be able to predict their exact unfolding is no reason to dismiss the certainty of their happening.

One fact that is mentioned occasionally, but largely ignored in the public discourse on climate change, is the potential impact of disrupting local-regional weather patterns on harvesting crops, which thereby threatens mass food insecurity. These four systems directly affect the food security of billions of people around the world. It is no wonder that some analysts are predicting the loss of even half of the world population by 2050, and maybe more. Right now, the supply of increasingly less nutritious products of industrial agriculture would be enough to feed the world, if properly distributed. But the likelihood of optimal distribution of the global food supply seems weaker than ever as political conflict over control of international trade among nations grows as global climate patterns deviate from their past stability.

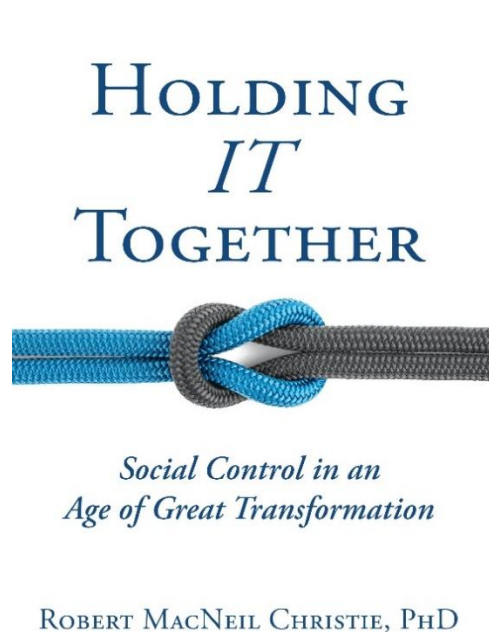
Even if optimally distributed, food crops have to succeed to be harvested and allocated. Under the growing destabilization of these key components of the climate system, and the consequent unpredictable weather and water supplies, local-regional farmers as well as big industrial agriculture, are increasingly likely to experience large scale production failures.

What are “we” going to do about this growing existential threat to the subsistence of the world’s population? Apparently, not much. Many non-governmental organizations are heroically trying to feed various populations already subject to severe food scarcity, malnutrition, and starvation in the most severe pockets of food insecurity in the world. But their important work becomes rather hopeless in the context of the looming threat that four key global systems that support life on Earth approach cascading chaos.

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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](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

Are we Really Living an Illusion?

Given the growing societal as well as ecological, economic, and political chaos all around us, it seems reasonable to ask the question, are we kidding ourselves with our persistent culture of industrial-consumer modernism? Collective irrationality is a serious risk. I recently read one book and am reading the other, of two books that by their titles would seem to take opposite positions on this question of the juxtaposition of human madness and wisdom.

The first is titled, [*The Wisdom of Crowds*](#), by James Surowiecki, who argues, based on a significant array of evidence from diverse situations, that the wisdom of a (diverse) group can be far superior to that of a lone, even super smart individual, or a set of similar experts. There is, or can be, a 'collective intelligence' that can be a very valuable asset for all of us.

The second book, which I have only begun reading, is [*The Delusions of Crowds: Why People GO MAD in Groups*](#), by William J. Bernstein, who presents a range of historical instances of collective delusion. Of course, there is a great difference between the intelligence of a diverse group focused on solving a complex problem, and a mad mob bent on attacking the fans of the other soccer team or a lynch mob driven by race hate and dehumanization of the other. So, what gives?

Well, the evidence is clear that humans are capable of a wide range of behavior, not necessarily driven by verified information. On the one hand, a diverse group focused on solving complex problem frequently produces a better outcome than an individual or a group of similar experts. On the other hand, we have plenty of evidence of the madness of crowds under certain conditions, regardless of the education or wealth of its members. As sociologists have known for a long time now, collective behavior is about the group, not its members alone. We seem to be talking here about two different very human phenomena.

Contagion seems to have a lot to do with the difference between collective intelligence and collective delusion. Today, we have lots of examples of each. But do not waste your time trying to convince a group of conspiracy theorists that the evidence proves them wrong. It is not about facts; it is about collective identity, interaction, and belief.

Human irrationality and often the brutality that may accompany it, seem unbounded, just as human compassion can be deep and unyielding. Both derive from emotions applied to situations. The emotional foundations of bloody hysteria in a doomsday cult are just as real as a group effort to rescue the victims of a major earthquake or to run into a burning building to save a child. We humans are capable of a wide range of emotions and both circumstance and interpersonal histories play a big part in how they evolve and play out.

In the present historical context, the wisdom and delusions of crowds both play important roles in the political trajectory and human prospects for a bright or dismal future. We have little time and we have only the opportunities we create to take rational and compassionate collective actions that contribute to the human project rather than add to the chaos we see all around us. We must deploy the wisdom of which we are capable to avoid the damage of delusion.

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Today's Featured Image:

A brawl breaks out in the Italian parliament. Madness can break out in almost any setting. The question has never been answered, why did a crowd of self-defined 'patriots' storm the Capitol building of the nation they claimed to love. Some social psychologists would say that it is all about their definition of the situation and the communication processes that drove them to believe that somehow their country, as well as the election had been 'stolen' from them.'



Photo Credit: CNN

Next-door neighbors can live in separate universes. It is true that situations can be defined in diverse ways within separate "universes of discourse," those communication frameworks in which we live. That of course can lead to extreme differences in perception, because perception is always framed by how we characterize our past experiences and how they were defined in relationship to our prior beliefs and the people most significant to us. It can all be strongly influenced by the emotional content of the communication channels in which a person regularly participates. Most of the "news" today reaches people via some quite partisan channels where 'fact checking' is not a factor, but emotional impact is.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

Contagion can be a subtle, complex, or overpowering process. Interaction in groups always involves some level of interpersonal or group influence. Jury deliberations, family dinners,

professional task groups, a clandestine special operations team. None are as simply organized as you might think. The potential power of groups is clear. How that power can be deployed can involve many factors.

James Surowiecki. 2004. *The Wisdom of Crowds*. New York: Anchor Books.

While some groups or crowds may seem to go mad, others constitute the epitome of rational behavior. Surowiecki teases out all the important facts of collective wisdom, leading the reader to wonder how many practical societal purposes that wisdom might serve. Big societal change has usually involved collective action.

Quotable Quotes

The Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) is one of the most respected sources of climate research in the world. Their most recent report is compelling and very disturbing, if only because its findings are as certain as they are scary. We have heard many different warnings about the potential for tipping points toward climate chaos, beyond which we cannot recover. But it is very hard to predict exactly when a particular tipping point may trigger a cascade of collapse in a system or a set of interconnected systems. Nevertheless, some observations make it very clear that we are approaching severe danger points in the global climate. Niklas Boers and his colleagues at PIK provide the latest.

We now have convincing observational evidence that multiple Earth system components are destabilising. These systems may be approaching critical thresholds that, if crossed, could trigger abrupt and irreversible changes with severe consequences."

~ Niklas Boers, from PIK and the Technical University of Munich. <https://www.pik-potsdam.de/en/news/latest-news/four-major-earth-system-components-are-losing-stability>

These are huge global systems. Everything we know about large complex systems tells us that when they destabilize to the extent that a cascading collapse ensues, there will be little humans can do to stop them. Yet, the sooner we step out of our industrial-consumer cultural bubble, the greater the chance of taking at least partly effective collective 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](http://TheHopefulRealist.com), read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto.](#), and, buy my new book, [Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#).