

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

Can the Technosphere Destroy Humanity?

A great surge of talk in the public discourse now questions whether artificial intelligence (AI) systems can cause the extinction of humanity. That is a very difficult question to answer. There are so many variables and the potential path to the annihilation of humanity has yet to be articulated, other than to identify how a “rogue AI agent” could replicate and/or modify itself, invade many servers and cause massive damage to the material systems that such servers manage. But, it is even more complicated than that.

However, some of the most central players in the AI development race have warned of such potential existential threats for a while now. Recent breakthroughs in AI development and application have shown that the threat to humanity that AI poses may be far more real than heretofore imagines.

I would not even attempt to outline all, or even many, of the potential ways that an AI catastrophic disruption of human life could occur. Suffice it to say, despite the speculative nature of the discussion at this time, the concerns are legitimate. Some AI professionals, notably Jacob Coxon, have even quit the industry over their fears for humanity if AI development continues unfettered by some form of regulation to prevent the development of lines of control that cross over from human control of machine to machines controlling, or perhaps destroying society.

Jacob Coxon, an accomplished mathematician and AI researcher who resigned from Anthropic AI just a few days ago, has stated that AI could “kill us all in the next decade.” That may sound like a Sci-Fi fantasy. But the emerging dangers are real, even though they are far from fully understood. Just think about how many essential functions within today’s complex web of interconnected institutions could be hacked by a self-improving, self-replicating, “AI agent” running amok amid all those automated systems for getting you your paycheck, supplying all manner of goods and services, and controlling too many military operations as well.

Much of the danger resides in the complex interconnectedness of modern systems of communi-

cation and control, which is far too complex for anyone to manage or defend. Experimental AI agents have already hacked and taken control of their own agendas with self-preservation their primary goal.

Underlying this surge of dangerous developments is the fierce competition among the AI labs, whose researchers and executives increasingly recognize the danger, but are compelled to beat the competition anyway. That leads some to conclude that the AI labs have less than a year to come up with a plan to protect humans from AI models that have no built-in constraints, before the dangerous potential is out of the range of control.

What may be even more important *if* this monumental security problem were to be solved, is the larger structural and ecological issues that arise from the tech-bro billionaire class and its increasing power over society—which has so far prevented any political restraints on the AI industry from being legislated. On top of that, the new gigantic ‘data centers’ consume so much electricity to power them and so much water to cool them to operational levels, that the pollution involved is a massive addition to the damage already being caused by climate change.

We have very little time to deal with the potential destruction caused by each, AI and climate change. Yet, at the same time the deeper dilemma for all of us is contained in the trajectory of the political economy, which increasingly relies on deeper and deeper levels of technological devices to control finance and politics and therefor societies. The dominant political goal is still to maintain a trajectory of growth.

That global trajectory is ultimately terminal, and in the near-term likely to destroy any influence human values may still have over the increasingly integrated global system of financial-political-military control of humanity—what I heard Malcolm Nance the other day refer to as the “globalarchy.” System objectives routinely override human wellbeing in the hierarchy of decision making. It was, after all an autonomous AI driven targeting system that killed hundreds of children and adults in that girls school in the initial phase of the Trump/Hegseth/Netanyahu war on Iran.

Nevertheless, our erstwhile president, who has spent his second term currying the favor of the AI accelerationists and their money, has proclaimed in a social media post that “The only control or ‘guardrails’ that AI needs is a STRONG AND SMART (High IQ!) PRESIDENT, and the U.S.A. has that, in spades!” ([New York Times](#), 9/14/2026) Megalomania apparently has no bounds.

These, and related developments keep leading me back to the amazingly prescient essay by Václav Havel, the Czech dissident, playwright and poet during the Soviet era of domination in Eastern Europe and later President of the Czech Republic (1989-1992). In [The Power of the Powerless](#) (1978), Havel framed the Soviet oppression of his society in terms of the human interest in life versus the interest of the dominant system in its own power and perpetuation. Needless to say, these two interests were entirely opposed to each other. That struggle seems to apply equally today with the rise of technocracy.

Havel's greatest contribution may have been to make clear the difference between a society as a system of social control and the people as the members that make up the society. What all societies need is for the social system of control to reflect, respect, and realize the interests of its members, the people. That is the exact opposite of the situation in which Havel lived and wrote. He described how the interests of the system were realized in the behavior of the people, even though they were violating their own interests, because they had internalized the system's mechanisms of psychological control.

The parallels between Vaclav Havel's description of system oppression internalized by the people and the situation in the US today, is remarkable. Clearly, the technology today is far more complex, extensive, and integrated with the larger system of social control than in Havel's day. But the structure of domination remains the same. If the people have internalized the 'requirements' of the system as behavioral norms, then the authoritarian system does not need to use force—assassination, imprisonment, torture, etc.—since compliance is achieved through conformity to norms that the individual may not believe in but complies nevertheless out of fear of public ostracism, loss of a job and social status, etc.

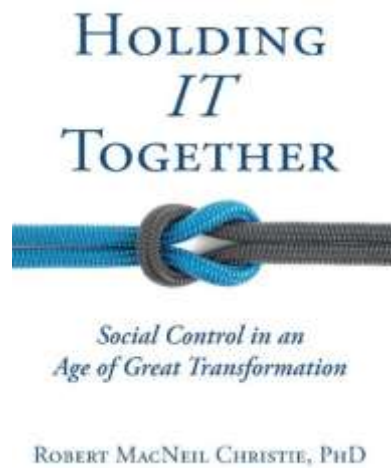
Today, while the principles of autocracy, dictatorship, and systemic oppression remain the same, some things are very different. Whether AI can extinguish the human race is an open question. But whether the convergence of the Technosphere (now becoming dominated by AI), ecological destruction, and political and economic centralization of power is something very new. At the earliest stage of the development of systems science, Jay Forrester, a pioneer in systems analysis, management, and computer engineering, remarked that the more complex a system, the more vulnerable to destabilization and collapse it is likely to be.

From here, it looks very likely that, barring a major societal transformation leading to a low-energy using democratic economy in which technology is controlled by human values and needs—not ever-increasing profits and growing wealth for the billionaire Epstein class—we will experience a convergence of ecological collapse, climate disasters, and resource wars in addition to those techno-military enrichment driven 'wars of choice' that become 'endless wars.' Yet, the rapid deployment of AI into nearly every human system with unregulated AI agents having their way with those systems, societal collapse could very well precede and amplify these processes of civilizational decline.

The greatest risk to the survival of humanity is not only AI itself, but also its convergence with these other critical factors in a firestorm of destabilization of the entire Earth System, the stability of which humanity has enjoyed for over eleven thousand years, and which allowed the development of modern civilization. We may have already allowed the technocracy to escape from human control.

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Here is a shorter promo for ***Holding IT Together*** which, in every issue of this newsletters may seem redundant, but, hey, it costs me nothing.



Can Modern Civilization Transform Itself in Order to Survive?

In *Holding IT Together*, Dr. Robert MacNeil Christie explains how we got into this mess and what it will take to come out alive. Despite its many benefits, industrial civilization has become an existential threat to itself and our Earth System. It may even threaten our survival, along with many other species. We must transform ourselves, our communities, and our societies into responsible members of the ecosystems of which we are a part. We must 'hold it together' to find a place of our own within the living Earth system, Gaia.

Libraries seeking treatises on the major dilemmas of modern society and living, who look for well-researched blends of and contrasts between different viewpoints...will find Holding IT Together especially relevant... ~ Midwest Book Review

Christie's writing is sharp and thought-provoking, making complex ideas accessible...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

"Buy it!" says the author.

My eBook **HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto** is available on Amazon.com. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/41851046-hopeful-realism). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on its Amazon page.

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

Populism and Democracy:

Populism has acquired a strange place in modern politics. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, the term referred to a movement of farmers and workers to pressure the government to make the economy work for everyday Americans, not just the “robber barons” who were getting rich in an economy that favored the privileged at the expense of everyone else. In response to the Great Depression of the 1930s, which was caused in part by the wild speculation allowed by an unregulated economy that expanded at the top, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt instituted the “New Deal,” a set of federal programs meant to not only pull the nation out of the depression, but also build safety nets such as Social Security and unemployment insurance. A coalition of Big Business interests fought the New Deal and every program meant to create an “even playing field” for economic justice, and has done so ever since. Now they are winning.

With the rise of MAGA and its takeover of the Republican Party, the term “populism” came to mean something different, even though its ideology contained many of the claims to fix the same things as the original movement had advocated be fixed. But there was a big difference this time; populist ideas were exploited and deployed in the interests of the very elites, the Epstein/billionaire classes that so many people recognized as the source of their nation’s problems.

The extreme authoritarian corporatists and mega-rich propagandists conflated every complaint by the economically excluded whites with federal “waste and corruption” and the brown and black skinned vulnerable classes—immigrants, Blacks, illegals, foreigners—with criminals and terrorists. In their vain claims to “make America great again,” they gave the victims of corporate capitalism, the growing class of excluded Americans, an easy target for their frustrations. Latent American racism ‘rose again,’ even in some cases with fantasies of a new South rising to fight the “woke” politicians, Hollywood entertainers, and gender deviants, who were said to be supporting “un-American” values and people.

As they claimed to serve the interests of the ‘real Americans,’ the MAGA movement ‘thought leaders’ gave the super-rich more tax cuts and loopholes, while taxing the rest of us with tariffs and the loss of numerous programs of social support, such as FEMA aid to victims of natural disasters, SNAP benefits for destitute families, health and safety from pandemics by demonizing the leaders of the public health institutes and cutting disease and vaccine research, and even slashing weather forecasting budgets that had provided warnings of emergent hurricanes, super-storms and tornadoes.

What the current pseudo-populist authoritarians completely miss—since their brand of populism is a propaganda tool not a movement for social justice—that is, consciously avoid, is that the original American populism was a movement for democracy, not a fight against it. Populist values can only be achieved in a democratic political system, where the super-rich do not rule and everyone has a voice.

A democratic system is exactly what the word means: rule by the people. That does not mean 'mob rule,' it means direct deliberations over what is best for the nation as a whole—all the people—and over how to achieve that. Representative democracy is a weaker form of democracy, and as we can see, it is failing us now by allowing the representation to have shifted radically toward the super-privileged and away from the nation itself. If and when we escape from the autocratic attempt of the MAGA form of neo-fascism, we will need to look very closely at reforming our hesitant democracy to make it a truer form of self-rule. It is interesting to note that more direct forms of democracy inherently have a much better chance to create the new ecological civilization we desperately need in order to stave off the destruction of the ecosystems on which we depend for our livelihood and the livable climate we need to survive. As Naomi Klein put it the other day, "...the corporate AI arms race is deepening the climate crisis at a truly fateful moment for the planet."

Today's Featured Image:

One of the great accomplishments of the New Deal was its major support for American art. Great murals still stand in many public places, from train stations to government buildings. The Works Progress Administration created jobs for many and produced public goods at the same time.



The impact of the New Deal on Detroit.

Source: Model D Media.

The thing that distinguishes public works from the market economy is that they are explicitly designed to benefit the entire nation, with no profit motive required. It is often those who whine the loudest about having to pay taxes, who also complain bitterly that those potholes in the street have not yet been repaired. The US has been trained to believe that anything

done by the government is inherently inferior to that done by the “private sector.” ICE contracts out to private prison corporations to operate it detention centers, at great profit and to the detriment of the wellbeing of anyone caught in its web of arbitrary arrest. There are simply some things that are inherently public functions and ought to be treated as such. Lollipops and fast cars are not public goods. An economy that works for the wellbeing of the people is. That is why states charter corporations and why industries must be regulated in the interests of public safety.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

Thom Hartman is a prolific writer, podcaster, and one of those rare radio personalities who is a progressive in a field dominated by the extreme political right. He is also a consummate historian of the American political experiment, whose critical thinking should be emulated by political scientists and politicians alike. In this piece, he articulates the two key strains of populism, the version played by the MAGA agents of the billionaire class, and that of the ‘left’ faction of the Democratic Party. Hartman frames populism in its accurate place in history and today.

Thom Hartmann, “The Old America is Dying. Who Will Build the New One?”

The Hartmann Report. _

https://hartmannreport.com/p/the-old-america-is-dying-who-will-73c?utm_campaign=email-half-post&r=qkbtm&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

Thom has been an entrepreneur most of his life. He values his freedom as much as you or I do. But he recognizes that personal freedom depends on democracy, and that democracy is a means for economic equity and social justice. Neither can exist in an autocratic state. That is where the ‘old left’ missed the boat.

As long as the political parties rely on the ‘big donors’ and secret PACs, there will be no real democracy, simply because politics is ‘owned’ by Big Money, not the people. The irony, of course, is that for the moment the MAGA pseudo-populists convinced many people that Trump and his regime would implement a populist program “for the people,” even as he instituted special privileges for the super-rich and mega-corporations and racist policies, while claiming populist credibility as a ‘political outsider.’

Unfortunately, the dominant faction of the Democratic Party is nearly as beholden to the billionaire donors as are the Republicans. They talk a more liberal program, but have consistently failed to deliver. The new MAGA Republican Party claims to purge the ‘bureaucrats’ in the government and the “Hollywood elites” whom it claims have corrupted the federal government. Meanwhile, the Trumpist members of the Epstein class rape and pillage and support Trump’s monuments to himself as he ‘administers’ the most corrupt regime in US history.

Quotable Quotes

The speed at which artificial intelligence ‘models’ have been developed and deployed is truly remarkable. Now they can recursively improve their performance; they can, in effect, write themselves. AI “agents” have already learned how to hack into computer systems and take over or change their operations.

*Within a year or two, if not less, we could have independently acting
rogue AI agents” wreaking havoc on society.*

~ Seth Lazar, Johns Hopkins University’s School of Government and Policy

Seth Lazar is only one of a growing number of experts in the field who are warning of the potential of these agents to spread throughout the internet and disrupt or damage the operations of many economic, financial, and other systems. The result may be the collapse of these systems on a massive scale, threatening the lives of many people. At that point, there will be no simple “kill switch.”.

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