

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

Special Guest Commentary by Award winning Climate Writer/Activist

I am happy that [Erin Remblance](#), who recently received an award as “Thought Leader of the Year” for 2022, by [Illuminem.com](#), has agreed to write a Guest Commentary for this issue of the HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter. Erin’s articles were the most read in Environmental Sustainability and Degrowth. Erin lives with her family in Sydney, Australia. See her commentary in the LOOK UP! section below.

Waiting for Political Perversity to Go Away. The world desperately needs the wealthy nations of the Global North to ‘de-grow’ their economies in order to drastically cut the carbon emissions that are already wreaking havoc on regional weather patterns and ecosystems. By ‘degrowth’ we do not mean forcing economies into recession, as some critics insist. Instead, degrowth is the process by which wealthy societies can drastically reduce their consumption of energy and materials by redirecting their activities away from the current obsession with consumerism and absolute growth of high-energy-use economic activity.

That means initiating economic policies that no longer focus on capital accumulation by the few and economic crumbs for the many. It means setting economic policies founded on the principle that the top priority of economies must be to assure the wellbeing of everyone. That means ‘industrial policy,’ not free corporate markets. In Erin Remblance’s commentary today, she explains the difficult obstacle that our current ‘cultural infrastructure’ poses by stifling public discussion of how to create a wellbeing economy.

Meanwhile, politics as usual becomes ever more insular and self-referencing as if the people and the planet did not even exist. In the US, MAGA-Republican neo-fascists practice their rhetoric of fear and hatred while the Democrats revel in their success in ‘growing the economy’ by the expansion of employment (517,000 new jobs) in the most recent report. While it is hard to be negative about staving off recession by job creation, economic growth for growth’s sake within the existing cultural infrastructure, in effect denies the immediate existential threat of climate chaos and ecological collapse, and also excludes the possibility of economic wellbeing as the criteria of economic policy.

As Timothy Snyder makes so clear, totalitarian tendencies don't just go away. They have to be sent packing. That means citizens must learn and practice the principles of protecting democracy he outlines in his great little book, [On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century](#), which I featured in Vol.1, No.10 (11/2/2022) of this newsletter. Snyder is probably the foremost authority on the causes and consequences of the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe. In this time of increasing peril from the extremists touting white nationalism, nativism, and outright racism in the U.S., and in the other wealthy nations of the world, every concerned citizen should read *On Tyranny*. The current autocratic attempts follow so closely the 'playbook' of the fascists and Nazis of the twentieth century in Europe that it is downright scary. In contrast, democracy and a wellbeing economy go together.

The growing power of authoritarians in Congress is not unrelated to repeated instances of police brutality and murder of innocent unarmed civilians, their victims so disproportionately young Black men. The culture of violence is endemic in America, and it is amplified in police culture. It is particularly perverse in the special operations units, sometimes called 'jump-out units,' and in the case of Memphis, threateningly named the 'Scorpion' unit.

A lot of confusion has been expressed among political and cultural commentators, in part because the five officers who beat [Tyree Nichols](#) to death were Black. I was not surprised, although this sort of thing is always shocking. Jump-out units are typically comprised of young aggressive officers allowed to roam the streets in unmarked cars and plain clothes with little adult supervision, who 'jump out' of their cars, ostensibly to catch criminals in the act in poor neighborhoods where vulnerable people of color reside, having insufficient resources to move out of 'high-crime' areas.

Since law enforcement institutions were racially 'integrated,' they have provided an opportunity for young people of color to begin a career with a living wage. The 'cultural infrastructure' of law enforcement is an amplified version of the dominant culture of predatory relations of the powerful with nature and other humans, so why should we expect young Black officers to be any less [violent](#) than white ones in dealing with the subject populations of the underclass? It is about power and violence.

In addition to the monumental task of overcoming the violent tendencies in the American culture, we must understand that police practice from all the way back to the runaway-slave patrols, has been to select the most violence-prone recruits on the assumption that aggressiveness was a necessity in law enforcement. In that context, "Protect and Serve" becomes a very bad joke. Any young black man who deviates from the 'yes sir' subservience becomes the cultural equivalent of a runaway slave. What frustrates me about policing in America is that when a drug-crazed car thief with a stolen gun kills an officer, it is always the good officers who are respected in the community for their fairness and compassion.

Until we overcome the predatory dominant culture of industrial modernity, which is essentially exploitive and persecutory, we will not be able to achieve 'the good life' as Erin Remblance describes it in today's guest commentary, for anyone, rich or poor. Nor will be able to resolve our conflict with Nature and ourselves.

Publishing Plan v. 2.0. As previously mentioned, because of its density and length, I have decided to recast my book, *At the Edge of Illusion: Facing the New Great Transformation*, in a new more accessible form. It will consist of a three part series. Each part will be expressed more effectively in relation to how we must revise our concept of what it means to be humans on a planet that can no longer support our

globalized industrial-consumer economy and our predatory way of living. The new format will lead from how we arrived at our current unsustainable global political economy, to the social illusions that still constrain us today, then to how we can make the changes we need for humanity to survive and thrive on the planet. The first volume, *Holding It Together: Social Control in a New Era of Great Transformation*, is now undergoing a final edit and will be published as soon as possible.

My eBook **HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto** is still available for free download from [Kindle Unlimited](#). After a bit of procrastination, the price will soon go to normal. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](#). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on Amazon. On Amazon, 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: 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, by Erin Remblance

How Does Degrowth Apply to our Minds?

As an Australian, it troubles me that if the whole world lived like us, we would need [4.5 planet Earths](#). Thanks to countries like mine, and others in the global north, worldwide we are living as if we have 1.75 planet Earths, a figure that has increased from 1 (that is, living within our means) since [1970](#). What this boils down to is that those of us in the global north are taking from both countries in the global south and future generations to fuel our lifestyles today. The '[Earth Overshoot](#)' research is supported by the work of the late Earth System Scientist, Professor Will Steffen, who brought to our attention [The Great Acceleration](#), whereby "[a]fter 1950 we can see that major Earth System changes became directly linked to changes largely related to the global economic system." Three per cent economic growth each year might sound small, but it means that within 24 years we will consume twice as many resources as today, and within 100 years 19 times as many. As economist Kenneth Boulding said: "[a]nyone who believes that exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist."

For this reason, I am a big proponent of degrowth in wealthy nations in order to fit back within [planetary boundaries](#). For anyone not familiar with the term, degrowth is a planned, democratic reduction in material and energy use in high income nations while improving the wellbeing of people in those nations. It is more than this though, while very often the focus of degrowth is on how life can be better in a smaller economy, [Federico Demaria and Serge Latouche](#) argue that "[t]he point of degrowth is to escape from a society that is absorbed by the fetishism of growth.... It implies decolonization of the imaginary and the implementation of other possible worlds". In this respect, the former definition of degrowth applies only to over-consuming nations, while the latter definition applies to all nations, and to all people. It is this second definition of degrowth to which this essay relates.

The concept of degrowth is powerful because it is clear that we need systemic change to avoid ecological collapse: business as usual with a "[green tinge](#)" isn't going to be enough. It is also true that individual change drives cultural change which can be the key to unlocking political change leading to

systemic change. On this point, I find it fascinating to consider how “[growth has entered our minds and souls](#)”, and how an awareness of these “[mental infrastructures of growth](#)” might free us from growthism and help unlock the cultural changes that will bring about the necessary systemic changes.

With this in mind, here are a few points to consider in relation to how growth may be enshrined in the psychological structure of our collective minds, largely based on the work of [Harald Welzer](#):

- Our dreams for the future are centred around it being better than today, in a sense of “more” (e.g. a bigger house, a larger salary, more travel).
- We see ourselves as something to continually develop and optimise, our lives are seen as a process of creating biographies or filling CVs.
- While we used to see work as drudgery and something we did until we had met our needs, now we view it as noble, esteemed even, to be sought out and with no end. Sadly, this cultural 180° turnaround becomes a [regret](#) of many as they are dying.
- Similarly, society views ‘hard-work’ as virtuous and thus ‘hard-work’ entitles those who undertake it to whatever their heart desires without limit, their purchases being the fruits of their labour.
- We typically live by the rhythms of the industrial workday via a standardised worldwide time regime, unaware that there is a natural rhythm of time (for example, consider that in 2023 there will be 13 moons).
- It is a collective belief that we should be able to own parcels of land, excluding others from that land. An example of this is that home (and correspondingly land) ownership in Australia is described as the ‘[Great Australian Dream](#)’.

In various ways, these - and probably many more aspects of our modern day lives - relate back to the surpluses created by industrialisation (enabling the future to have more than today, a concept that is “[historically quite recent](#)”), the enclosure of the commons (the very foundation of growth-dependent [capitalism](#)) and the subsequent imperative to work to have our needs met (rather than simply being able to directly meeting our needs). Our ability to recognise and unpick these ‘mental infrastructures’ - that is, the worldview that influences all of our actions - will be key to throwing off the shackles of growth and unlocking a culture of sufficiency, whereby we recognise when we have ‘enough’ in a material sense and from then on prioritise non-material ‘[satisfiers](#)’, which very often bring us much more joy and contentment.

Unpicking the dominant, growth-infused worldview will mean closely analysing the stories we have been told, and bravely and courageously assessing whether all of this growth really does bring us “[the good life](#)”. We will likely find that we can achieve “a good life”, that is harmony with ourselves, our community and the physical world, by living simpler but more meaningful lives. Perhaps we will even come to realise the very wise words of English writer, Alan Watts: “The meaning of life is just to be alive. It is so plain and so obvious and so simple. And yet, everybody rushes around in a great panic as if it were necessary to achieve something beyond themselves.” The way that growth manifests in our minds, our thoughts, our dreams and our souls is really important to consider, because if we can create a culture of sufficiency, we will have found the key to systemic change and to avoid ecological catastrophe. I’m sure we can all agree that this is a worthy task indeed.

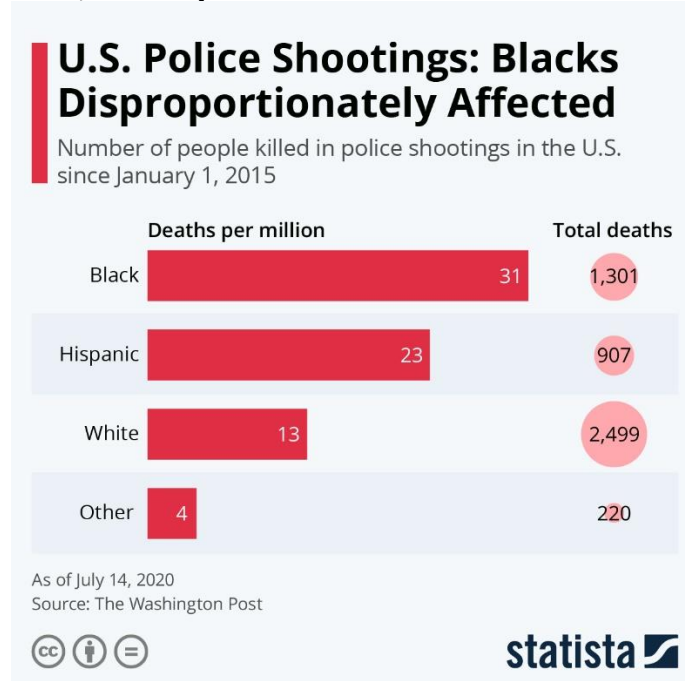
More writings by Erin Remblance can be found [here](#).

For more Hopeful Realist discussions of this and related matters, go to:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/the-hopeful-realist-blog/>

Today's Featured Image:

It's not just the gun culture, which reflects a deeper culture of domination, exploitation, and separation from each other and our world.



***We Live in a World of Violent Oppression.
U.S. Police Shootings of Black Folks are extremely disproportionate to their share of the population.***

The history of oppression of Black folks in American lives on in various ways. Police violence is the most visible form of oppression. It is institutionalized in police culture, policies, and practice.

Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation

Donella Meadows led the research team at MIT that produced the classic study, *The Limits to Growth*, published in 1972. Although the book was quite popular for awhile, its findings were reviled by economists and policy makers alike. The basic findings, which predicted that at the rate things were going, the world would begin to run out of resources by the first couple of decades of the twenty-first century. Well, the critics were dead wrong.

That is exactly what is happening now. Whether oil, minerals, or other materials, each year getting access to the remaining stocks is more difficult and costly. Meadows' book on systems thinking, published after her death, offers easy access to the kind of thought that is far more powerful in understanding the world and ourselves than the simple 'cause and effect' linear thought that prevailed thorough most of the industrial era. Linear thinking enabled science and technology to control some aspects of the world until it failed to take into account the complex self-organizing systems in which we all live.

Meadows, Donella. 2008. *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*. Edited by Diana Wright. White River Junction, Vt: Chelsea Green.

If humans are ever to dig out from the mess that the ideology of endless economic growth has caused, we must not only recognize the absurdity of perpetual growth on a finite planet. We must also begin to think in systems to create policies and practices that can counter the damage done by that ideology. Donella Meadows was a leader of major consequence in creating an alternative worldview that is consistent with the fundamental facts of life within the Earth System.

Quotable Quotes

I usually offer just one 'quotable quote.' I like to use one that captures the main themes of the issue in which they are to appear. That was difficult this time. But I narrowed it down from a dozen from my 25-page list of my favorite quotes to just two. Together, I think that they capture the essence of the 'personal troubles and public issues,' as C. Wright Mills used to refer to the full scope of the difficulties of modern life. We carry our 'cultural infrastructure' in our heads as it plays out in both personal and public spheres. The overwhelming evidence that things are just not working out the way we expected, fails for many to cause us to change our minds about what really matters. Times have changed so much, yet we are trapped within a fundamental paradigm that no longer works, if it ever did.

White people are trapped in a history they don't understand...

~ James Baldwin

I believe all suffering is caused by ignorance. People inflict pain on others in the selfish pursuit of their happiness or satisfaction. Yet true happiness comes from a sense of peace and contentment, which in turn must be achieved through the cultivation of altruism, of love and compassion, and elimination of ignorance, selfishness, and greed.

~ Dalai Lama

The culture of industrial consumerism has distorted the 'pursuit of happiness' in the extreme; it has alienated us from each other, our world, and ourselves. We now have lots of evidence of the sources of true happiness. A wellbeing economy would help a great deal. Yet, we go on as directed by the propagandists of the political economy of growth. The dominant culture of predatory extraction and domination worked for 'pioneers' and conquistadors, if not for those peoples and lands they plundered and killed. It has reached its limits and approaches collapse.

In some ways, today's culture of violence toward others and toward our own habitat is a reflection and even continuation of the culture that enabled both the accumulation of great wealth and the plunder of

the peoples and life-giving materials and ecosystems of the living Earth System. We can only find peace and happiness by overcoming our own culture and historical ignorance, by learning from the combination of indigenous wisdom and the facts of science.

See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe and read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto](#).