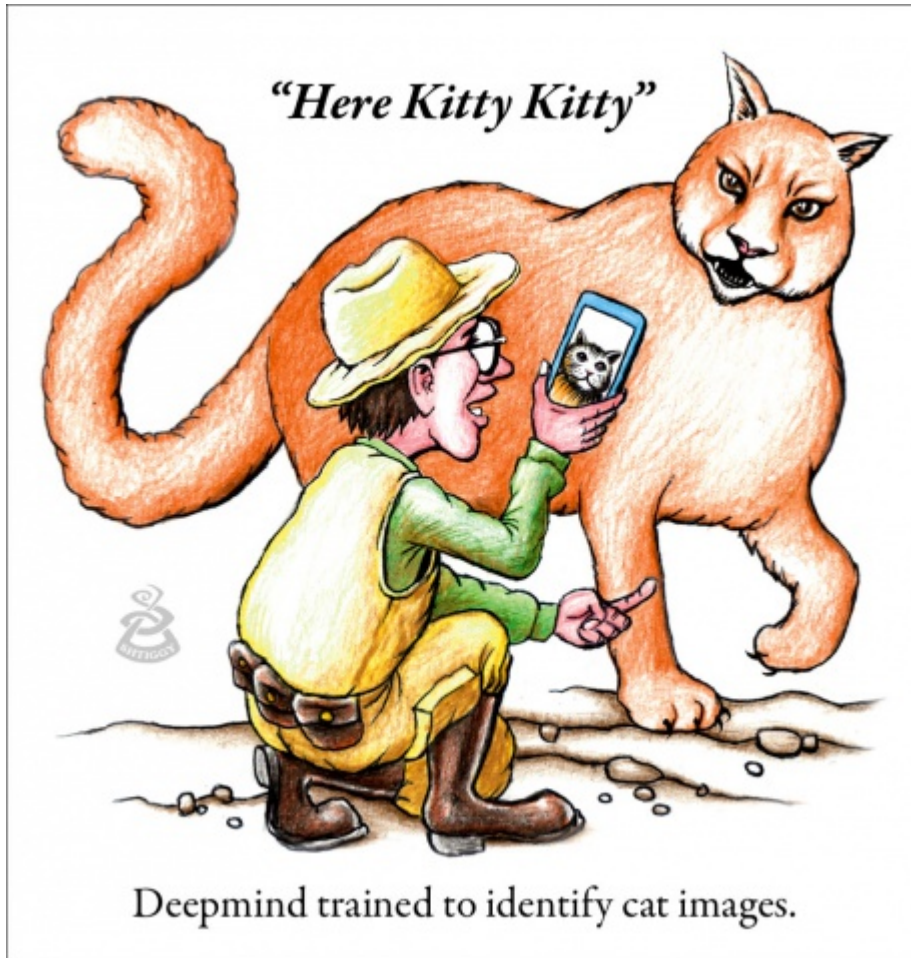


ETC'S IRREVERENT REVIEW OF 2015... AND (POSSIBLY) IRRELEVANT PREVIEW OF 2016

January 26, 2016



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The Year that Ended Dangerously

If El Niño weren't enough, the extraordinary winds that struck Yemen and Mexico's Pacific Coast were matched by record-breaking forest fires in the Indonesian archipelago, droughts, torrential rains and floods from Australia to the British Isles

and heat-waves on the east coast of North America (in winter). Much of this was El Niño, of course, but some of it was climate change – and all of it wound up in Paris with calls for geoengineering ...2015 was the year that ended dangerously.

Editorial

Realpolitik in Paris. ETC Group feels like the Grinch Group that stole Christmas when we complain about Paris. Yes, there was a heightened level of awareness and commitment palpable among governments and civil society and, yes, governments are committed to reporting back every five years creating a space in which many believe it will be self-evident that they need to up their game and commit to bigger and faster GHG cutbacks. As importantly, 2015 was the year in which CSO Climate Change Campaigners worked together better than ever before and often supported one another even when we didn't entirely agree with the tactics. From the World Social Forum in Tunis in March on through the preparatory sessions in Paris and Bonn and then right through Paris again at COP21, folks were trying to understand each other's positions, agreeing on many points even though not everybody spoke out. Sadly, some CSOs and online clicktivism brands felt they owed their followers a victory and resolved to celebrate regardless of reality. False optimism is still lying to your friends – a very high-risk tactic. For industrialized countries at least, climate change continues to be a distant disaster and politicians are still punting the ball down the road an election or two. The *realpolitik* defense – that Paris was the best it could be – needs a reality check.

Realpolitik is only admirable if it creates the political space for an eventual victory. In Paris, we lost time – and ground – that we can't recover.

How so? Almost nobody that was in Paris believes we can keep temperatures in 2100 below 2°C much less 1.5°C. Most everybody recognizes that we will blow past our GHG quota for the 21st century by around 2036 and everything after that will push us somewhere north of 3°C.¹ To justify the difference between government promises on reductions and reality, politicians accepted the myth offered by the fossil fuel industry and other major manufacturers that somewhere around midcentury they will invent geoengineering technologies that can capture CO₂ at the smokestack or the wellhead. Most scientists and many politicians know this is ridiculous. It's like sending our children home on a school bus that has to cross a chasm but the bridge hasn't been built yet and the bus has brakes tested by Volkswagen. When politicians realize they can't suck carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere they will default to another form of geoengineering – Solar Radiation Management (SRM) – another mythical techno-fix that can (wrongly) appear cheap, easy, and can be controlled by a single country or a "coalition of the willing" usurping the planetary thermostat for themselves.

Leading into – and out of – Paris, the call for geoengineering is calamitous and growing as evidenced by 9 books and 1100 news stories on geoengineering in 2015 alone. *Realpolitik*, again, will suggest that we have no choice. But the reality in Paris is that industry bought itself the time it needs to protect its trillions of dollars of assets and politicians will slip past the next election unfettered by climate commitments. Despite everybody's best intentions, the illusion of geoengineering is letting industry off the hook and when the time comes to deploy solar radiation management, the people in charge will not be the poor and marginalized betrayed by their governments in Paris. Paris was a tragic failure. *Realpolitik* is what politicians do when they don't do courage.

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