

A Deplorable Fever

Today is Tuesday, June 6th, 2017.

I realize readers might see it as a bit of a humble-brag when I write “I’ve been busy” when so many lack work, but — I’ve been busy. I also realize it’s no fun to read people’s complaints, but — I’ve also been sick, exhausted, and disheartened.

A couple of weekends ago, I took a few days off work to try, a bit frantically and a bit ineffectively, to get work done on the house in Saginaw. I spent a long five-day weekend bouncing between Ypsilanti, Saginaw, and Ikea, bringing loads from the house and building shelves in our basement.

In our years in the Saginaw house, I found some specific uses for specific rooms, but I never found a way to really get my things organized. So many books never made it onto shelves, and so many things that might have been useful for home-schooling never came out of storage. There were so many square feet, but so little usable space.

The Office

The wood-paneled office/studio/bathroom suite is a perfect example. In this suite, the small studio room has cabinets of drawers, behind wooden doors, and a few bookshelves built into the walls. When we moved in, I spent a lot of time sanding and refinishing the shelves. It’s really a beautiful room, with all that wood — like a meditation chamber. The cabinet/shelf combination is very clever, and when the sun comes in, it just glows. The larger office room has two wide, shallow closets built in to one wall.

With better climate control, the little suite would be suitable for a teenager, or a mother-in-law. The smaller attic room was being used by a disabled adult as a bedroom, living in the home with his mother. A single bed fits in the small attic room nicely, along with a few books. Not much else will fit. I used the room to record, but since it is a small wooden box, you need a lot of acoustic panels and foam to cut down on reflections. Without the panels and foam, it really sounds like I am recording inside a wooden box. This woody sound might be desirable on some acoustic guitar tracks, but it is generally not wanted on vocals.

While it’s a beautiful space, the room is very poorly insulated, and leaks heat in

or out like a sieve. It's almost never a comfortable temperature in there. The drawers are not boxed in properly, or insulated, and so anything you store in them is exposed to the crawlspace, which may as well be open to the outside. That isn't good for papers or electronics. I had to keep the things in these drawers sealed in airtight plastic bags. Guitar strings kept in the drawers corrode. Papers grow mildew.

The insulation and weather-proofing was something that could be fixed, and might not even be that costly to fix. It needs someone who knows how to work with older houses in a way that takes into account their original eclectic design and construction. But because of my declining and irregular income during the years we lived there, and the difficulty finding decent contractors, we weren't able to put work into that project. I'm not really a handyman. I don't know how to insulate the insides of walls, and I specially don't know how to do it without trapping moisture, which could quickly lead to rot inside the walls.

Using the Rooms

The studio room would have been great for a teenager's bedroom, or a guest bedroom (for more adventurous guests). But it is not a flexible space, which, it turns out, is what I needed, more than anything. The lack of flexibility was carved into the shape of the room. If you place anything in front of those cabinet doors, you can't open them without rearranging furniture. The room is built into the attic, so the ceiling slopes down steeply. It was possible to put a small table in that room, for recording two seated speakers. It was possible to put up some mic stands so I could stand in the middle of the room (where the ceiling was higher) and record guitar and vocals. But there wasn't really space to keep both setups in place, and no place to store the microphones and table and other equipment when I wasn't using it. And so it was very hard to *use* the room when I needed it.

In the office room, if you wanted to be able to open the very wide closet doors, you couldn't put a desk or a table in that section of the room. There was also a bathroom door that opened into the room. So a third of the floor space in that room had to clear just to be able to access the bathroom and the closets. I used one closet to hold a build server, and Ethernet switch, and my clothes, and the other to hold my bins containing cables, and a few boxes. These things completely filled the closets. They held only a very small fraction of the things I actually needed to store.

In both the studio room and office, with little room for tables and shelves, most of what I was working on, or with, would wind up in piles on the floor. I knew it wasn't a good idea to keep guitars in there, so I kept my acoustic guitars, which I knew were sensitive to changes in humidity, downstairs. But I did keep a few electric guitars in there, hung from the walls in those awkward angled corners, to keep them where I could easily pick them up and play them, and because there wasn't another place for them. This wasn't really a good idea — the necks

and fretboards would dry out in winter, and the strings would corrode quickly from the humidity in summer, and so they needed constant adjustment.

There was barely any wall space where one could place bookshelves. If I set up a desk, the desk faced a steeply sloping attic wall, which felt confining and didn't allow me to rest my eyes by looking out a window. I couldn't put much on the desk. And I couldn't put up a whiteboard, in any place where I'd be able to reach it — there just wasn't flat wall space available. So, it was never very comfortable to work in that office, in an ergonomic sense.

Never Not Uncomfortable

To make the temperature in the suite bearable during the summer months, I placed a portable air conditioner on wheels in the bathroom, running its vent hose to the bathroom window. This made the already small bathroom nearly impossible to use.

In the winter, the office was fifty degrees or colder all the time, and I'd have to wear three layers, a hat, and fingerless gloves. My finger joints would ache and my nose would drip from the cold air.

In the summer, I'd be dripping sweat instead of snot, stripped down to shorts. It was never not uncomfortable. But I did my working-from-home jobs there, for five years. My desks were doors placed on plastic sawhorses and the office was always a cluttered mess, the floor piled with junk in boxes that I could find no other space for, but I made it work. And it is also the place I recorded and mixed and mastered my music and podcast and video projects during those years. It was a very attractive room. But I never did figure out how to make it work *comfortably* and *well* as an office and studio.

The New House

The new house features a big finished (more-or-less) walk-out basement. Most of it isn't nearly as attractive. There's no beautiful "man-cave" pine paneling, and no beautifully refinished pine floors. The floor is some kind of ugly adhesive flexible tile glued down over slightly uneven concrete. There's some kind of minor (I hope) water problem behind one of the walls. But the rooms are simple rectangular volumes with full-height ceilings. There is good lighting in most of the basement. There is wall space where we can place shelving.

Already, it is allowing me to actually put in a lot of shelving, and to start storing and organize things as I *never* could in our Saginaw house. I'm able to start opening up boxes and sorting and disposing of things that I've had in storage since the death of my mother in 2007. And it isn't unbearably hot or unbearably cold. I miss the beauty of my man-cave, but it's hard for me to overstate how nice it is to write or work on music in a room that isn't unbearably hot or unbearably cold.

The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Three Mondays ago, having taken a few days off work so I could have a long weekend to work on the house, I spent the day in the office/studio, taking apart the network wiring, the computers, and the piles of junk. I sorted things into boxes: office supplies, guitar parts and music items, electronic devices such as Ethernet switches, and dozens of loose wires and cables. There were so many cables that I finally gave up sorting them and just piled them into a box labeled “unsorted cables.” I found my missing Heil PR-40 microphone. I found many cables that I had needed, couldn’t find, and so bought again. It was like an archaeological dig. There were piles and piles of papers. Some of them went back years, although my experience buying the new house has taught me that I should be cautious about disposing of — well, pretty much anything, really, that might have some connection to my income or expenses or taxes.

I made a great deal of progress. The studio room is now completely empty. The closets are completely empty. I threw away bags and bags of trash and bins of paper recycling. But there’s still a fair amount to sort — piles and piles of fiddly little things. Guitar picks, USB memory sticks, post-it notes, notebook pages, photographs, drawings, diagrams, wires, breadboards, and screws. So many things that really shouldn’t just be thrown away — although I might get to that point, and just start sweeping everything that remains into the trash. Whether I actually sort it all or not, when that stage is done I’ll be able to take the last few things out of the rooms — the plastic sawhorses and doors that form my desks, and a couple of garage-sale chairs that need repair. I’m hoping to get that finished this coming weekend.

That Monday, despite pounding glasses of water, and an iced coffee, and despite the fact that it wasn’t that warm in the upstairs, I was sweating like crazy all afternoon, and felt dizzy. My back ached, which I attributed to carrying heavy boxes and being 49 years old and far too sedentary. But then *everything* started to ache. In the car on the way home, so much hurt inside my rib cage, pain signals coming from various vague places, that I began to wonder if I was having some kind of mild heart attack, or some kind of problem with my kidneys or liver. Even my fingers and toes hurt.

It wasn’t until I got home that I found that Elanor had been coughing and feverish, and Grace was feverish, too. So this was pretty clearly some sort of a virus. Little Elanor slept it off in just a couple of days. Grace and I did not.

I had barely any cough, just a fever each day. My head was packed, but I couldn’t get anything out. The strangest symptom was that my *eyes* were oozing gobs of yellow-green mucus. There was nothing I could blow out of my sinuses, but it was coming out of my eyes. That had never, ever happened to me before. My head throbbed horribly. Sitting or standing or even turning my head would result in stabbing pains through the back of my head.

No Fun at All

This was no fun at all, and it lasted a long time. My fever never shot up high enough to make me think I should urgently see a doctor, and I was able to hydrate myself, but I had that fever *every single day*. And it is still with me, although it is getting much better. The weekend before last, we had Elanor's baptism at the Cathedral in Saginaw. Elanor's godmother Julie came in from out of town to accompany us. I'm afraid we were not great hosts. I just hope we didn't give it to her.

I had to drive a carload of kids, wear my suit, get through the long, long day with a pounding head and fever and dizziness, and drive a carload of kids back home. Grace was in the same boat in the other car. We got through it, one miserable minute at a time, and our youngest Potts was baptized, but it was an ordeal. I started trying to use over-the-counter nighttime cold remedies, which helped a bit. Aleve also helped the fever and joint pain.

Over the last week, the pressure in my head gradually began to ease. I managed to blow out a whole lot of blackened dried-up blood from my sinuses. There had been some kind of epic battle up in there, apparently taking place mostly while I was sleeping. I think it killed all the cilia in my mucous membranes, and they had to grow back. As the swelling went down inside my sinuses and air could get through again, I could hear these shockingly loud popping and grinding sounds coming from inside my head. It sounded like the ice breaking up on Lake Superior in springtime.

I'm still not back at 100% yet. I'm back at perhaps 75%. Things seem to still be moving in the right direction, and I'm grateful for that. Fortunately, through all this, while both Grace and I have been sick, we have somehow managed not to both be at our worst at the same time. So we've been able to trade off to some extent, with one of us at a time able to make dinner when the other couldn't do anything but go to bed early and moan.

A Fever of Deplorables

As Washington continues to burn down, fall over, and sink into the swamp, with Trump's grotesque narcissism and full-press corruption infecting everything it touches, I've been increasingly jittery about politics as, I think, most of us have been. I've been compulsively tweeting, and yet for the most part almost no one is answering. Feeling isolated and desperate, I've increasingly felt the need to talk to people about our current political nightmare and dilemma. But the only people who seem to want to talk back are those who want to keep re-litigating the election. Specifically, Clinton supporters who want to continue to cast blame on progressives who did not vote for Clinton.

The Corrections

In their view, the only thing that needs to be corrected next time is the voting practices of people to their left. They believe these folks didn't vote "correctly." They seem to think that teaching them to vote correctly can be accomplished, primarily, by mocking them, or recycling stale memes about Clinton's e-mails. Oh, they also seem to think that it will help if they tell voters to their left that the only reason they didn't vote for Clinton is that they either already were misogynists, or they unwittingly swallowed a lot of misogynistic anti-Clinton propaganda, promulgated by the far right, which they now have internalized (because they can't be trusted to evaluate propaganda critically).

In this world view, there can exist no legitimate left-wing critique of Clinton. Anyone who voted for a third party candidate, or deliberately sat out the election because they did not feel that their values were represented in the race, is politically naïve, a dupe of the right wing, or a useless idealist who refuses to see the world as it is and act responsibly within it.

The Professional Left's Response

This world view was summed up pretty well by Driftglass of the Professional Left Podcast. Post-election, he made these comments:

The ones who are saying "See? See? This is what you get for nominating a neo-con neo-liberal war-hawk..." Yeah. Whatever. I'm sure that makes you feel better... I'm going to make sure that as far as I'm concerned you're shouting into a rain barrel, because I don't need to listen to it. I'm not obliged to listen to that opinion.

No, of course he isn't. But he and his wife and co-host, Blue Gal, seemed genuinely shocked that Trump won. And if it isn't obvious, if you were shocked — well, you weren't really paying attention to the mood of the electorate outside your bubble.

Putting the "Ass" in "Driftglass"

Driftglass goes on:

If you were, as of yesterday, a Republican of conscience who was horrified by the fact that this guy was [at] the top of your party's ticket, and you spoke out about it and you're angry about it and you said "I can't do it — I cannot do it — I just can't," then we might disagree about a bunch of other things, but you're on my team. Because we are in very bad times now. That doesn't mean I'm not going to mock you, and when you step out of line I'm going to say terrible things about your propensity to backslide, but you're on my team.

I'll just briefly note the way in which he arrogates to himself the authority to do decide who is "in line" and who has "backslid," even among people who *do not vote for Democrats*, policing the boundaries of the *other* tribe, which displays an incredible, incurious, authoritarian egocentrism. He may as well be lecturing Russians about voting for Putin. But ignoring that for now, he continues:

If you are a liberal who just couldn't quite get your ass out of bed because, "you know, really, what's the difference between the two?" Or "you know, Hillary is so bad at these things and you know what?" then you're not on my team. And, to quote Michael Corleone, to Fredo, "I don't wanna know ya... I don't want to have anything to do with you... I don't want to hear you when you come to visit our mother; give me a day's notice so I can get the hell out of town. I have no interest [in] you, you're not in my family anymore." This was your character test, and you failed. And maybe the next time there's a big 'ole national character test you can step up and behave like a grown-up. But until then, I don't know ya, and I don't wanna know ya. I'm not gonna get mad, I'm not gonna yell, I'm not gonna blame; I just don't wanna know ya or anything about you. Go away. That's all I have to say.

And he's apparently stuck to that. Yep, Driftglass has decided that he has more in common with "never-Trump" Republicans than he does with actual progressives who haven't been willing to support the Democratic party's ever-rightward, ever-moneyward, ever-more-corporate drift. Because bipartisan neoliberalism is, in his world, apparently not a thing worthy of concern, and apparently the idea that a candidate with a "D" after her name could be insufficiently progressive — well, that simply isn't a thing worthy of discussing, in his world.

Driftglass spends his time watching the Sunday shows. He believes the shows are important, in some sense; that they tell us where the bounds of the national debate are.

But that's true only if you believe the debate is confined to working politicians, the military, and the folks who do the rounds of these TV shows and newspaper columns — folks you might call part of the "cosmopolitan elite." He's very good at mocking "wingnut welfare," where right-wing pundits can apparently always find a job, in a think tank, or magazine column, or on television.

He's been very insightful about pointing out how Rachel Maddow can only say certain things, because she's employed by MSNBC, and speaking ill of her fellow pundits would be a quick way to lose her nice job.

But he seems less able to understand that years of watching this narrow range of debate, from A to B, have left *him* believing that the bounds of this debate match the range of the opinions of most of the American Electorate, and those with views outside outside this range — including, I want to point out, *much of the traditional Democratic constituency, including generations of anti-war voters, environmental voters, anti-racist voters, and traditional progressives of many*

kinds, including those who support rebuilding and expanding on the New Deal or Great Society agendas — just aren't worth paying any attention to, and deserve only angry dismissal from the tribe: "See ya, wouldn't want to be ya!"

No There, There

The working poor *do not watch* the Sunday shows; nor should they. They know, correctly, that there is nothing there for them.

There's nothing *really* there for Driftglass, either, who, even though he claims to have *been* poor, and to have *worked* providing services for the poor, has discarded solidarity with the poor like a chrysalis, to emerge as a beautiful butterfly, his wings stamped with Clinton's campaign logo, to hover over them and mock their aspirations. Even though he's not *really* even a true member of the professional-managerial class, because he's previously criticized corrupt *Democrats*, and his years of blog posts and podcasts contain lots of receipts. He might be tolerated, even courted, at various progressive events such as Netroots Nation conferences, but the liberal establishment will *never, ever* consider him to one of them, no matter how he contorts his ethics and walks back his previous stances. He wants to live in both worlds, but his response to the election shows you where his aspirations and loyalties *actually* lie. In other words, he's the one who failed the big 'ole national "character test," because when it came time to either punch up, or punch down, he decided to punch down, and then doubled down on punching down.

And he apparently thinks that no grown-up should expect a candidate to actually offer them any alleviation of their material conditions and immiseration to hope for, or to vote for. And he apparently thinks that lashing out at people who didn't find Clinton's brand of identity politics and her record appealing will somehow motivate them to vote his way, rather than simply further alienating them from politics altogether. Honestly, with Clinton supporters like this to demotivate voters, who even needs Trump supporters?

The Professional Left World View

This world view is also summed up in a tweet by Frank Conniff, formerly of television's Mystery Science Theater 3000, who wastes no opportunity to comfort the comfortable and afflict the afflicted. In response to an argument where a Twitter member told him

That makes me wonder if you know what neoliberalism is. Hint: it's neither new nor liberal

Conniff responded:

I do know what neoliberalism is — it's a catchphrase invented by misogynists.

Conniff said this in reference to the campaign of a Democrat whose campaign logo was a red arrow, pointing to the right, telegraphing the Democratic party's intent, for anyone who cared to look with open eyes.

I listened to the Professional Left podcast for several years, and while I didn't agree with Driftglass and Blue Gal on everything, I often found myself greatly appreciating their takes on corruption in government, especially their Chicago-area government. They rightly regarded the corruption of government as a *moral* issue. I admired that. I also contributed, in a small way, to the show, submitting audio clips for Driftglass's "Science Fiction University" segment. Because he and I have another thing in common — we both grew up reading science fiction, and share a deep conviction that the best science fiction illuminates the *present* and is inherently political.

I can't really bring myself to listen to the Professional Left podcast any more, not after Driftglass dismissed me from his circle forever, or at least until I "grow up" (hey, it could happen! I'm not quite fifty yet, hope springs eternal...)

I have not been able to resist listening in on a few recent shows. Here are some more words of wisdom from Brother Driftglass (for I don't think of him as beyond redemption, even if he thinks I am):

"If you stood with me, on this day, then you're my brother, or my sister. And if you didn't, then you're not. It's pretty much that simple."

Driftglass, I'm still your brother, and one day *you* will grow up enough to realize that. As for Blue Gal, I'm still *her* brother too, and I never heard *her* banish me repeatedly from her circles of solidarity. She seems to understand the value of solidarity even with those whose tactics differ from hers. Perhaps you could learn from her.

Tribalism

Anyway, Driftglass's angry takes are pretty much textbook examples of tribalism, dear reader, something the left loves to accuse the right of doing. It's the epitome of treating politics as sports. Which is always bad: it's behind a paywall, but if you can, see this article from Harpers in 2006:

<https://harpers.org/archive/2006/02/crap-shoot/>

This tribalism is why people on the left can't work together on — well, pretty much anything. Especially not when this is what they think of the white working class. Driftglass again:

"Do not buy into the bullshit that the DNC needs to work harder to cater to the 'feelings' of the white working class. The white working class needs to get the fuck over it."

So, there you have it. Let that be a lesson for you, white working class! Get the fuck over it!

Janine Garofolo echoed a similar sentiment on David Feldman’s podcast, in a long interview. I’m not going to dig it up now, because I’m tired. And sick. And I’d have to transcribe the audio. But maybe I’ll put it in the Director’s Cut of this blog post one day.

In a Dark Place

I’m in a strange and dark place. Hell, *nationally* we’re in a strange and dark place. I don’t feel that I can make any sense of my high school classmates, who tend to be Trump supporters talking mostly about one of two subjects: either about the horrors of abortion, or how global warming is a hoax.

I also don’t feel that I can make much more sense of my college classmates, who tend to be Clinton supporters, without reservation, or at least with no reservations they are willing to admit to beyond “well, no candidate is perfect.”

My Clinton-supporting friends are apparently fully comfortable with her militarism and corporatism, her racism, and her vote for intervention in Iraq. They seem to be perfectly willing to let go of Yemen, and Syria, and Libya, and the arms deals with the Saudis, and the “tough on crime” comments about “superpredators,” and her coziness with Goldman Sachs, and her comfort level with fracking, and her apparent satisfaction with killings by drone.

They’re willing to let go welfare reform, which gave huge tax cuts to businesses and beat up the working poor. They’re willing to let go the build-up of the prison-industrial complex. They’re willing to let go Clinton’s support of No Child Left Behind, and her seat on the board of Wal-Mart, and her destruction of Honduras. To me, it’s not about the e-mails; it’s about the impunity to violate security rules and apparent contentment to take the records of the Presidency out of reach of FOIA. But to them, it’s a meme: they love to re-post the “but her e-mails” meme in response to any criticism I might make of Trump. Since I didn’t vote for Clinton, I’m not *allowed* to criticize Trump.

That last criticism is, although it seems perfectly reasonable and self-evident to me, apparently “out of bounds” — because they think that the “e-mails” attack is an attack from the right, and so it isn’t legitimate for anyone to her left to attack her on her carelessness with government documents and her willingness to continue practices pioneered by the Bush administration — see <https://www.dailykos.com/story/2016/3/5/1496408/-A-Helpful-Guide-to-Criticizing-Hillary-Clinton-From-the-Left>. Apparently any criticism of the Clinton Foundation is also considered out-of-bounds when it comes from the left.

The people willing to vote for Clinton are people for whom, apparently, none of this was disqualifying, because Trump is an *openly* sexist bigot and misogynist and a rapist and racist, as though you could put their two records on opposite sides of a balance beam and decide that one was clearly worse.

Oh, and her racism isn't really racism because it's couched in more polite words. And because they pretty much agree with everything about it, as it represents, pretty much, the standard liberal analysis of Black Lives Matter and any other black leadership that becomes demanding; the Clintons *still* live in a perpetual "Sister Souljah" moment.

Balanced in the Scales and Found Wanting

Trump doesn't have a record in politics, and so, you know what? One of the two candidates clearly did have a record that was worse. And it wasn't Trump.

In 2017, toddlers are drowning in the Mediterranean because Libya is a failed state. Clinton destroyed Libya, and breezily joked about it:

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton shared a laugh with a television news reporter moments after hearing deposed Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi had been killed.

"We came, we saw, he died," she joked when told of news reports of Qaddafi's death by an aide in between formal interviews.

ISIS is creating chaos and death in the Middle East in part because Clinton's policies led to the rise of ISIS.

One of these two candidates was extremely ethically challenged and crass; the other was a known war criminal who openly praised Henry Kissinger.

And I was supposed to choose the war criminal because of Trump's various "isms." But all Clinton's "isms" — all the identity politics markers — supposedly outweighed her record as a war criminal. Guys, it was a chance to break the glass ceiling!

Yeah, that has a lot of meaning to white working class women. But I'm sure my objections to Clinton are all really just because of my internalized misogyny, because liberals know best! Since I wasn't willing to vote for the war criminal, I was the sexist, the middle-aged "Bernie Bro."

And this so-called "analysis," of course, completely disparaged the opinions of the large number of young people, including young women, who supported Sanders and his hopeful economic message over the pantsuited crowd; and it was promulgated largely by the Washington Post, who decreed that Sanders was "un-electable" and worked tirelessly to make him so via a series of increasingly unhinged editorials. See: <https://harpers.org/archive/2016/11/swat-team-2/>

I'll Be Over Here with the Useful Idiots

An article on Common Dreams summed it up pretty well: <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/09/01/courting-right-smearing-left-ethos-clinton-campaign>

Last month, adding to the archive of left-punching, conservative writer and ardent Clinton supporter James Kirchick enthusiastically denounced those he called “the Hillary Clinton-loathing, Donald Trump-loving useful idiots of the left.”

“In this weirdest year,” Kirchick wrote, “there may be no weirder phenomenon than the rise of the progressive Donald Trump supporter.”

Among those apparently deserving of the label “progressive Trump fan” are Glenn Greenwald, Rania Khalek, Zaid Jilani, Julian Assange, Jill Stein, and Katrina vanden Heuvel, all of whom, according to Kirchick, are “captive to a crude and one-dimensional anti-Americanism.”

Uh-huh. I’m anti-American.

The one sin that unites these progressive commentators, journalists, and political figures with Trump is, in other words, that they all dare to question the morality of America’s use of force abroad.

That’s me, or at least that’s one set of my reservations about Clinton. And so I don’t feel like I *have* a political party, any more like I feel like I *have* a clear class identity. It’s a little unnerving. But then, I’ve never had a conventional family; I’ve never had conventional friends; I’ve never been much of a “joiner” (I’ve always had the same problem Groucho Marx had, of not wanting to join any club that would want me as a member). I’ve become mostly accustomed to the fact that insisting on even *trying* to be an ethical person in an unethical world is to make oneself a perpetual outsider, like the Christians that are “in the world but not of it.” As an outsider from childhood, I’ve always known this wasn’t going to be easy for me.

Never Hillary

The thing is, I was never going to vote for Hillary. I didn’t vote for Obama a second time, and regret voting for him the first time.

If you’d like to re-litigate the election, by all means, let’s re-litigate the election. Let’s examine why so many people didn’t vote, for starters. Non-voters were the biggest single bloc of people who didn’t vote for Clinton. Next, let’s examine why so many Democrats didn’t turn out. They were the second-biggest bloc of people who didn’t vote for Clinton.

Blaming third-party voters is entirely an exercise in “trolleyology.” In the trolley scenario, a majority of folks are apparently comfortable with throwing a switch to run over group B to save group A. But there is a small number of people, myself included, who aren’t willing to reduce lives to numbers and do moral calculus that involves weighing criminals against each other. People like me

are saying “hey, there’s someone strapping people to train tracks and sending trolleys speeding towards them — can we please do something about that?”

You know, us idealists unwilling to grow up and live in the real world.

Mark Fisher in his essay *Exiting the Vampire Castle* wrote:

“Left-wing” Twitter can often be a miserable, dispiriting zone. Earlier this year, there were some high-profile twitterstorms, in which particular left-identifying figures were “called out” and condemned. What these figures had said was sometimes objectionable; but nevertheless, the way in which they were personally vilified and hounded left a horrible residue: the stench of bad conscience and witch-hunting moralism.

See: <http://www.thenorthstar.info/?p=11299>

Fisher reminds us that

Class consciousness is fragile and fleeting. The petit bourgeoisie which dominates the academy and the culture industry has all kinds of subtle deflections and pre-emptions which prevent the topic even coming up, and then, if it does come up, they make one think it is a terrible impertinence, a breach of etiquette, to raise it.

Yep. Meanwhile, poor whites are literally dying:

mortality rates of whites with no more than a high school degree, which were around 30 percent lower than mortality rates of blacks in 1999, grew to be 30 percent higher than blacks by 2015...

See: <https://www.brookings.edu/bpea-articles/mortality-and-morbidity-in-the-21st-century/>

The authors suggest that the increases in deaths of despair are accompanied by a measurable deterioration in economic and social wellbeing, which has become more pronounced for each successive birth cohort. Marriage rates and labor force participation rates fall between successive birth cohorts, while reports of physical pain, and poor health and mental health rise.

But the “white working class needs to get the fuck over it.” That’s the message we need to hear. Not one of solidarity. Because those working-class whites don’t have the right *identities* to be worthy of our compassion this election cycle.

That’s the message we need to hear, that is, if the Democrats want to keep losing.

There’s also the little matter that the professional-managerial class knows that solidarity and alliances between the white and black working classes would pose a *significant* threat to their power. And so the useful idiots of the professional

left play right along and parrot the punching-down propaganda designed to keep them divided.

Why Trump?

I'm not sure it's entirely clear to us yet either what people are responsible for supporting Trump, or the most productive way to try to gain solidarity with these people for the purposes of grass-roots organizing. I've seen think pieces talking about the white working class and why they voted "with their middle fingers." I've seen think pieces explaining that the bulk of Trump voters were not really working-class, economically, at all, and educated, higher-income, middle-class white men went for Trump in large numbers.

All I know for sure is that sisterhood really wasn't powerful, the Democratic turnout was weak, the Democratic party was preaching to the choir, identity politics aren't compelling to most working-class and middle-class whites, and the 2016 election season was long, brutal, and incredibly wearying. I know Michigan Democrats went for Sanders, but Clinton still seemed to take the state for granted. Whatever you think about her e-mails, or Russiagate, and I don't honestly think very much about them at all, I don't think anyone could claim that her identity politics and punching-down strategy helped her.

***Animals* by Pink Floyd**

In this conflicted time I've been listening to a lot of music. I was listening to Radiohead, but its passive voice didn't seem to inspire me much. I found myself drawn to a Pink Floyd album I was aware of but didn't, I think, ever fully listen to, back in the day: *Animals*. I've been listening to this album, pretty much over and over:

If you didn't care what happened to me,
And I didn't care for you,
We would zig zag our way through the boredom and pain
Occasionally glancing up through the rain.
Wondering which of the buggers to blame
And watching for pigs on the wing.

But, unfortunately, I *do* care.

Meanwhile, I'm reading news headlines today that bars in Washington, DC will show former FBI director James Comey's testimony live on their televisions and offer drinks including the "Covfefe Cocktail." We're going to be watching for pigs on the wing, hoping that something damning will come out of that testimony. Of course it will, but that isn't the real question. The question is whether anyone in a position to do something, will do something. Meanwhile we're retreating further into our bubbles, "wondering which of the buggers to blame."

What I mostly see is that the media frenzy about Russia is continuing unabated, but getting us almost nowhere. I believe the truth here is fairly obvious, but yet irrelevant. Trump is mobbed up, deep in the pocket of Russian and Chinese and even Iranian business interests. This situation doesn't even require Russian hacking or election meddling to be completely unethical. But that's largely irrelevant as long as Congress refuses to act on the ethics issues, and they seem to have every incentive not to act.

What will take down this president, if anything, is not these ethics issues, or even his blatant abuse of power. President Trump will go down if his owners decide it's time for him to go down. He'll take a fall if Wall Street decides he is a losing proposition, or Russia or China decide they don't want to throw good money after bad. That's about it.

Apparently I'm not the only one to re-evaluate *Animals* in light of recent events; it looks like Roger Waters has been using songs from *Animals* to openly criticize Trump: <http://radio.com/2017/01/23/pink-floyd-animals-40/>

I've had to stop reading and responding to just about everything on Facebook (that's not necessarily a bad thing). I've had to back away from Twitter. I've had to stop listening to NPR. Folks around me are complaining that so much is going on, in this administration, but really it isn't — they are getting hardly anything done. And there are actually very few news stories, aside from these constant leaks and staff issues. There are too many cows frantically chewing too little cud.

I'd like to say that getting rid of these inputs was freeing up time to spend with other friends or family. That's not exactly true now. I am working on it, though. I've been getting my home studio back together, with a setup that should make it easy to record an interview-style podcast. So expect to see some more podcast episodes from me in the near future, if that's the kind of thing you look forward to. Although as I'll be shouting into a rain barrel, at least if Driftglass has any say in the matter, maybe it doesn't matter.

So, here's what I've been reading!

The *New Yorker* Backlog

I've had a subscription to the *New Yorker* magazine since last fall, and what with this, that, and the other thing, I got *very* far behind. I'm the first to admit I have a problem with the way I read these magazines. Apparently the right way to do it is to skim through them, looking at articles, perhaps reading the first paragraph or two, in order to decide if you are interested enough to read the rest.

I don't seem to be able to do that. I can skip the opening section on events, because mostly it just makes me frustrated to read about the concerts and film festivals I won't be able to attend, but as for the articles, I pretty much feel

compelled to read every one from start to finish, even if it becomes a slog partway through. And so I've done that. I've caught up on everything. In the last few months I've read all the issues from September or so through the end of May, and I'm almost up to the most recent issue.

That's a lot of text. I have mixed feelings about all this reading. On the one hand, I feel better informed about many things — for example, I was quite interested in the profiles of Rod Dreher and Michael Flynn. It was interesting to learn about the demilitarization of the FARC.

But for every piece like that, I find that I'm dragging myself through articles about thoroughly unlikeable people doing thoroughly unlikeable things with their enormous wealth — for example, a recent article about a custody battle between two unmarried women fighting over a boy they brought to this country in an overseas adoption. I can't find a heroine in that story, just abuse of power, failure of empathy for others, and open contempt for the ways in which we've traditionally protected children through marriage.

I've settled into a pattern. For some reason, I usually read front to back until I get to the story. Then I skip the story, and go to the end, and read the articles in reverse order until I get back to the short story. Then I read the story. Often, the story doesn't strike me as very good. But once in a while, there is a really good one. This story by John Lanchester is one of the best short stories I've ever read. It beautifully defies expectations while maintaining an impressive forward momentum, containing not one wasted word: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/03/signal-john-lanchester>

***Revenger* by Alastair Reynolds**

I've seen this book kicking around the store shelves for a few months ago, and finally picked up a copy. It's good Reynolds, with some of his more horrific body horror elements toned down a bit for a wider audience, but still present to remind you who you are reading. This is the story of two sisters who are fleeing an oppressive home life and go into space. It's basically a seafaring story in space, complete with solar sails and piracy. The setting is a lot like the world of *Serenity*. I almost feel like Reynolds may have borrowed, or at least adapted the plot from a seafaring story I've read before (and no, it isn't *Treasure Island*).

The story does not really need to be set in space; there's nothing in it that wouldn't have worked just as well on sailing ships on Earth's oceans. That makes it, I think, at least by some definitions, space opera instead of science fiction. That's at least partially true of a lot of Reynolds' work, but it seems to be more true of this one. I also don't feel like the characterization is deep enough to make it truly interesting. The world-building does not feel very complete. The plot twists are a pretty predictable. But on the positive side, it moves along pretty quickly and it's a relatively short book. It might make a good introduction to Reynolds for people who don't routinely read big science fiction novels already,

such as younger readers.

Several Children's Books

I get bored pretty easily, reading the same children's books to the kids night after night. They get bored, too, and so I like to vary the reading level, by sometimes reading books targeted at the older kids, and sometimes reading books targeted at the younger ones.

***Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, translated by Oliver Ready**

As a semi-random experiment one night, I pulled out my copy of *Crime and Punishment*, the version translated by Oliver Ready. After explaining a bit about Russian names, we just dove in. And I was a bit startled to discover that the kids love it. I have to stop to explain certain words, but they love the settings and the characters.

Ready's translation really is a big improvement over translations I've read previously. It brings out the pathos and humor of characters like Marmeladov, and Raskolnikov's mother. In fact, this translation has made me realize something about the original that I think I never really understood after reading older translations — it is not, in fact, that heavy a book. And in parts, it seems closer to melodrama and satire than the heavy moral drama I had previously believed it to be. There's just a lot more subtlety ready to be picked out by the active reader. A. N. Wilson says of this new translation "That knife-edge between sentimentality and farce has been so skilfully and delicately captured here. A truly great translation." See: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2014/09/crime-and-punishment-by-fyodor-dostoevsky-book-review/>

***Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* by J. K. Rowling**

We are also continuing to read the fourth Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, in which Rowling at one point writes "...said Sirius seriously." Yes, she really wrote that. She's pretty shameless with the cheap gags now and then. This story features a falling-out between Harry and Ron. I suppose my kids must be able to identify with this, since they are frequently having spats between each other, but honestly, I just want to get through it. These books get longer and longer and past a certain point, they aren't all that much fun to read out loud, because so little happens in the amount of text I can get through in a typical bedtime reading session.

***I Shall Wear Midnight* by Terry Pratchett**

I'm also reading from the next book in Terry Pratchett's Tiffany Aching series, *I Shall Wear Midnight*. These are getting darker and more serious, but they

are not always fun to read aloud. In this one Tiffany seems to be burned out due to the constant trauma of being a watch and, perhaps, is losing her mind a bit. These books have really slow parts. I'm hoping this one picks up soon. The plot summary says that she is supposed to travel to Ankh-Morpork, which ought to liven things up. There's only one more book in the series after this: *The Shepherd's Crown*, the last book Pratchett worked on before his death.

***Doctor Who: The Pirate Planet* by Douglas Adams and James Goss**

I have read the children the first few chapters from another adaptation of a *Doctor Who* serial written by Douglas Adams. Not originally conceived as a novel, the book *Doctor Who: The Pirate Planet* was adapted from multiple drafts of Adams' screenplay by James Goss.

Although one might think the *Doctor Who*, *Dirk Gently*, and *Hitchhiker's* worlds were quite distinct, Adams shifted plots and story elements between these worlds on several occasions. *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* borrows from *Doctor Who* scripts for *Shada* and *City of Death*. The "Key to Time" story element — really a "dismantled MacGuffin," a way to introduce a number of plot coupons <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DismantledMacGuffin> — reads superficially a lot like the search for the parts of the Wikkit Gate in *Life, the Universe, and Everything*. And apparently *that* novel began life as an unproduced screenplay Adams wrote called *Doctor Who and the Krikkitmen*.

Anyway. Is it any good? Well, in the notes at the end of the book, Goss talks about how despite trying to keep every story element he could, at some point he had to cut out some pieces, because it just didn't read well as a novel. I found that encouraging. But the first couple of chapters are, in fact, poorly disguised info-dumps. The kids fell asleep and I could barely slog through them. Things pick up a bit when we meet some characters and I can start to do voices, and pick up a bit more when the Doctor appears.

But as to whether this whole thing is worth reading as a novel — the jury is still deliberating. I don't think I've ever watched the whole "Key to Time" arc, although I'm pretty sure I've seen episodes from that sequence, as back in junior high and high school I occasionally got to watch random Tom Baker episodes of *Doctor Who* on PBS. They had their funny moments, but I mostly remember the melodrama, dumb dialogue, and cheesy, cheesy sets and monsters. So, I'm not sure any of us will find this book enjoyable enough to finish. It may be for the hardcore fan of the Tom Baker *Doctor Who*, or completists who would like to own everything Adams worked on. While I have a soft spot for both, I can't really count myself in either camp.

I'm also reading at a few other books as time and interest dictate. We've nearly finished *Secret of the Marauder Satellite*. I've let *Oliver Twist* languish, as the kids didn't seem to be getting into it, but we might go back to it. I wonder if they might enjoy *Great Expectations* more? And we have more to read from

Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid. I'd also like to start reading *Burn Math Class*, but I think I'll need to dig up a small whiteboard to make that effective.

On My Stack

On my own “to-read” stack, now that I shouldn't need to put in quite so much effort to keep up with the *New Yorker*, is Jeff VanderMeer's new novel *Borne*. I haven't really started it, but reviews suggests that it just might do the things that made *Annihilation* so great, while not doing the things that made the rest of the Southern Reach trilogy disappointing by comparison.

I've picked up new copies of Philip K. Dick's short stories in new printings from Citadel. If you know me, you know I'm all about the uniform editions. Meanwhile, I think I'm actually going to sell my Subterranean Press collection of hardcover editions of these collections on eBay, if I can get a reasonable price for them. They are beautiful, well-made books, and I love to hold well-made books, but these editions strip out the original introductions, prefaces and publication information about each story. This is probably due to copyright issues, but it makes these volumes less readable than the inexpensive paperbacks, and so I will pass them on.

Closing Words

I've been torn recently, wondering if should even attempt to continue this blog. I wondered if I should just announce a hiatus, perhaps until September, and give myself some space not to worry about not coming up with more content. But I should remind myself — even if I feel anxious when I haven't written, or recorded, I always feel better having done so. And so I think it is best to continue, in the hopes that something useful will come out of all this angst.

There's more I should say. We've been watching the tenth series of Doctor Who. I have thoughts. But they will have to wait. Until next time!

Paul R. Potts
Pittsfield Township, Michigan
June 6th and 7th, 2017

This work by Paul R. Potts is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.