What Comes Next

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Tuesday, October 20th

Struggling

Honestly? I'm struggling a bit, folks. This week, I am attending an online, international "software unification" meeting every morning starting at 8:00. Getting across town in the 7:00 hour is very difficult — the traffic on I-94 tends to turn a fifteen-minute drive into a forty five-minute drive. And I knew that I was going to be sleep-deprived, trying to get up that early, despite my best efforts to shift everyone onto a slightly earlier schedule, and so that commute would be more of a hazard than usual. So I resolved last week to attend these meetings from home. I've been wanting to spend less time around certain co-workers who don't take masks very seriously, anyway.

On Sunday night I set up a little minimalist home office space in the basement, next to the fireplace, although we still have never tried to use this fireplace, as there is no grating for it. There's a large windowsill here, and I've put my new work laptop on it, along with a pile of cables and adapters, and set up my split keyboard and trackball on the small table that Grace and I used to use for podcasting. The halves of the keyboard are widely separated, and on the table right in front of my face I've placed my old SAD therapy light. It makes me look like I'm doing a cheesy telling-ghost-stories-around-a-campfire lighting effect, so I can't turn on my camera in the meetings, but that's OK.

Last night everyone was reasonably quiet by 1 a.m., the babies having run around screaming until they were actually tired, and Grace took Malachi and slept on the couch, in the hopes that I'd be able to sleep better. So I got the lights out. About 1:30 or 2:00 Elanor did another brief round of rage-screaming the unfairness of being a little girl who has to sleep, or something. I had some mostly-unbroken sleep after that. Then at 6:00 I was woken up by Veronica, who I think was just going to bed. Then at 7:00, the sound of the coffee maker, which is a very soft sound, woke me again. Then at 7:20, my alarm woke me again.

I don't know how much sleep that was, but I know it wasn't enough. But it was

an improvement over Sunday night. Malachi had decided he wanted to spend much of Sunday night kicking me.

This week, coffee doesn't seem to be doing much other than making me high-strung, so I'm drinking decaf this morning, just to maintain a hot beverage routine (and decaf does have *some* caffeine in it). To help us get going earlier, Grace and I broke down and bought a coffee maker with a timed start function and a stainless steel thermal carafe which (we hope) the kids can't break. The coffee it makes isn't as good as the stuff we make in a press pot or via the pour-over technique, but we can stumble out of bed and fill our cups and drink it without having to do much of anything, like confront the state of the kitchen, or try to find the coffee scoop.

I never seem to get any deep sleep unless I sleep much later, and then I will sleep much more heavily for a couple of hours. I don't know if that is really true, but it's how it seems to me. And then, in the morning, it doesn't really seem to matter how much coffee I drink — my brain just stubbornly refuses to boot up until some time in the afternoon.

An Owl in Daylight

This has actually tended to be a problem in every job I've ever held; if my body was on the job at 8:00 a.m., or 7:00 a.m. as it sometimes had to be when I was a consultant working in Dearborn, my brain wasn't there with it. So for much of the workday, I was on the job only in the technical sense that I was present. I could do basic things, like answer e-mail messages, or sit in meetings, but I couldn't *program* or *write* anything of significance — I couldn't remember anything about what I was doing, or design protocols, or state machines, or algorithms, in my head — basically, I couldn't build or maintain the castles in the air that are my stock-in-trade. If I had some some simple formatting or mindless code clean-up I could do, I'd do that. I'd stare into space a lot.

Then as the afternoon went on, and I felt myself coming online, I would start diving into some of the concentrated work that earns me my salary, doing the software design and implementation. I'd usually have my head fully in the game by 4 p.m. At 5 or 6, other people would start to leave, which made it much easier to concentrate. And once I got going, I wouldn't want to just stop midway through a piece of code or a piece of writing, so I'd work until 8 p.m., or 9, or 10. Or, sometimes, 2 a.m.

Then, I'd leave work feeling pretty good about having gotten something done, but I'd be too wired to go to sleep immediately. When I worked in downtown Ann Arbor and biked in, sometimes I'd ride over to the old Fleetwood Diner to get a plate of hippie hash (an omelet with hash browns, vegetables, and feta cheese). If I had my car, sometimes I'd drive to Meijer and just walk around the store for an hour or so until I felt calm enough to sleep, then go home and crash.

Then, much too early, I'd drag myself out of bed late, feeling terrible, and get in

to work late. Again.

Maybe there'd be another awkward confrontation with co-workers or with my supervisor, and it would send me into a spiral of feeling like a failure at the basics of having a job, and worrying that the job was going sour and I'd better start looking for a new one — despite having succeeded completely at the work itself, which for me was only the ever interesting part of having a job.

So, for decades, it's been this constant dichotomy: feeling great about getting work done: work I'm very satisfied with, code that works well. In fact, getting done, as an individual, what it usually takes a whole team to accomplish.

And also, feeling anxious that I'm the odd man out, the weirdo in the office, the loser who is never at his desk at 8:00 a.m. with a smile on his face.

It was the same way for me back in high school. I worked in the evenings after school, at a grocery store, until 10 or 11. I'd get home after my shift, and everyone in the house would go to bed. I'd stay up and watch Letterman. Then I'd start thinking about doing my homework, writing my papers or whatever. Or, I'd work on my own personal writing or programming projects. I'd get to bed about 2:00 a.m. And the alarm would be set for 6:30.

Feeling S.A.D.

I've never been able to determine of the SAD light works much for me, although I know that the hardest time of the year, for me, is starting now, culminating in the absolute worst time, which is around Christmas, which I dread all year. It's more bearable if it's quiet, and I can get up and go to sleep when I want, and sleep as much as I want. That isn't really an option with seven kids at home. Although, I'll be able to take a decent number of vacation days this year, which should make things a bit easier.

I've got my headphones on and I'm listening to music that always makes me feel better — some of the most exuberant, ecstatic music I know. I'm listening to Yes's song "Starship Trooper."

> *Speak to me of summer*
> *Long winters longer than time can remember*
> *Setting up of other roads*
> *To travel on in old accustomed ways*
> *I still remember the talks by the water*
> *The proud sons and daughters*
> *That in the knowledge of the land*
> *Spoke to me in sweet accustomed ways*

Speak to me of summer, so I can make it through the dark days.

2001: A Grace Odyssey

Nineteen years ago today, Grace and I were married.

If I've ever done one single thing right in my life, it was that.

It's been our tradition to have at least a brief date out, even if we can only manage to get away for an hour or two, to get sushi, or *something.* We're still locked down, though, and not going into restaurants in person, and only occasionally getting takeout food, and only takeout food that is packaged up hot and served hot. So, I don't think we're going to do much of anything to celebrate.

I have hopes that next year will be better.

Garden News

The garden is mostly going to bed (ha, ha) for the year. The tomato plants are starting to show some frost damage, but there are still some green tomatoes coming along. Last weekend I was happy to have a sunny afternoon to spend, and I harvested more things: lime thyme, several kinds of oregano (to go into the freezer), sage, chives, some more leeks, and a few more peppers. There were quite a few groundcherries. We took a box of goodies to our friends the Martins.

The arugula had re-seeded itself, and so there were a number of small arugula plants sprouting up all around the outside of the fire ring where it was planted. I pulled those whole plants up, before they froze, and Grace assembled a delicious salad. Some of the older arugula plants seem to have gone to seed a second time, so we have more seed heads to harvest. There was also a little more sorrel, and a lot of anise hyssop. There were still a few bright flowers on it, and one or two fat bumblebees slowly braving the cold to drink the licorice-flavored nectar. Strangely, although we never saw it go to seed, our single watercress plant, in one of the concrete blocks that make up the garden bed's border, managed to propagate itself into little rosettes of small, tender watercress leaves, scattered here and there across the garden bed. So, I pulled those up, too.

We cut back the enormous rhubarb plant. We've got a lot of green onions of various types: Egyptian walking onions, and the more common bunching onions. I harvested a lot of those and Veronica chopped them up, and we filled a gallon bag, which went into the freezer. I will probably be able to harvest some more, since they keep coming along. It looks like we may get one sad, tiny eggplant. There are still a number of leeks coming along, slowly getting larger, which we will harvest later. We'll have a small Thanksgiving and instead of a turkey, roast a couple of chickens, with lovage and leeks, and I will braise more leeks, because they are one of my favorite things to eat. We're still getting celery.

I've dried a number of fennel seed heads, and have been picking the seeds off of them, which is slow and tedious, but we'll have a quantity of fennel seeds, along with a surprising amount of dill seed. I am hoping to plant more bronze fennel

next year and harvest the seeds in a more organized way, before they drop. The bronze fennel does not form nice bulbs, but we've never really managed to use the bulbs properly anyway; we always get them too late, and they are as tough as tree roots.

There is more mint drying in the garage, waiting to be crumbled and bagged up. We'll have a lot of mint tea. The mint plants themselves are slowing down, but they should spring back to life next year.

Overall, while not every type of plant was a success, the gardens have been very successful, a great source of inspiration as well as delicious foods. As I've mentioned, I'm particularly obsessed with the herbs of various kinds, especially thyme, oregano, parsley, rosemary, and the other Mediterranean herbs. Many of those should come back next year. Some, we'll get again as starts. I also want to start setting aside money for next year's gardens, as soon as I am able, and set up a small table saw and workshop area to make things like custom structures to support the tomato plants, since the cages were such a disaster, and some custom rabbit-resistant fencing. And I'd like to try to start some things indoors early, especially leeks, peppers, and some other slow-growing plants.

Thursday, October 22nd

I've now made it through four of my early-morning meetings and while I am still tired and getting to bed too late for this, my sleep has normalized a bit. It has been mostly dark and rainy all week.

Yesterday I went into the office in the afternoon, to work on my presentation for tomorrow morning, which wound up taking many hours, so I didn't leave until about 9:30 p.m. So, it was a thirteen-plus hour work day, but I got together a presentation I'm pretty happy with. I only have fifteen minutes allocated, so it's going to be a challenge to get through it; despite my best efforts at editing it down, it is a PowerPoint presentation with thirty-three pages — or should I call them slides?

My boss also took the opportunity to pick a fight, which I was not very happy about. Since I started this job in 2015, he's been encouraging me to try to network with other software engineers within the global company, which is broken into a number of divisions across the country and overseas. I've never met any of them in person. There have been very few opportunities to get to know these folks and share information with them. The last "software unification" discussion was in 2017, with a contentious conference call, and ended in a bunch of acrimonious e-mails. So I have been very excited about the chance to find out what these teams are doing, and see if we can collaborate at all, sharing designs or code. Therefore, I took the opportunity to write a presentation seriously, and wanted to come up with something decent by the deadline, which was yesterday evening.

Meanwhile we've been waiting a couple of weeks on a vendor in California to get back to us with a firmware update, and yesterday afternoon they got back to us. Busy writing my presentation, I sent an e-mail apologetically saying that I would not be able to get to it yesterday, and would have to take a look today. My boss became angry, saying that this project was a higher priority and he wanted to be able to test the new firmware right away. I told him that we wouldn't be able to do that anyway, since I still hadn't received any documentation on the changes, despite asking for it, and so hadn't been able to update my application to support the changes. It devolved into him berating me again about how the project was late.

Which I already am all too aware of, of course.

I pointed out that one of the things I'd learned, in the morning meetings, was that every other business unit in the company that is building software projects generally has teams of three to ten people to do approximately the same amount and kind of work that I've been doing since 2015, almost entirely by myself.

He shot back instantly "but are they profitable?"

Reader, it's not my job to know whether other business units within my company are profitable, or even whether our business unit is profitable. It's my boss's job, and his boss's job.

My boss seemed to be saying "that's all well and good, but if I can't squeeze you to somehow force the other groups we're depending on to work faster, and squeeze you to work faster, to get *this project* — which has been delayed for many months for many reasons, including the difficulties of working with an argumentative team in China, and the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in a three-month loss of your job and income — *across the finish line faster*, there is no reason for you to feel good about anything you've accomplished here to date, including the other projects you *have* gotten across the finish line already, and so you should give up any thoughts of networking with co-workers to share resources."

In other words, "shut up and dance to the tune that *I'm* calling, code monkey."

I did not storm out, or call him an asshole. I just did what I almost always do, which is to squeeze my anger into a ball and put it in the deep freeze inside me. I turned the knob representing my opinion of my boss, which for the first few years of this job was set pretty high, one more notch lower. And then I turned back to my computer and finished my presentation, not saying another word to him for the remainder of the work day.

When I *started*, in 2015, the project I was assigned to, which was critical to the survival of the fledgeling business unit, was already late, in part because even though I had applied to the job a number of months earlier, Human Resources had decided not to send my resume on to my boss. So I'm used to being late; late is, in fact, the normal state of almost all but the simplest software projects, a fundamental consequence of the fact that business cycles and Gantt charts and

PowerPoints have very little relation to the actual process of building software, which, if it is software that is innovative in any way, is almost always an exercise in research and development, rather than simply applying some known practices to a fully-understood problem, and almost always contains many unknowns.

Large companies take elaborate (and expensive) steps to reduce their software projects to a process of applying known practices to fully-understood problems and removing all the unknowns, which also removes any possibility of actual innovation, and adds overhead that only large companies can afford.

At some point, I think we will need to have a reckoning; I hope this is just some of the accumulated stress of a really bad year and a long-delayed project manifesting in *him*, rather than evidence that our working relationship, and this job, has truly gone sour. But we'll see.

I'm headed back into the office today. It's been complicated to set up things to let me work at two different locations. I'm trying to make it so that I don't need to constantly carry more than a few things back and forth; ideally, it wouldn't be more than what I can carry in a laptop bag and one or two bags, so that I don't have to make multiple trips to load the car, and multiple trips to unload the car. There's a lot of stuff. The project I was arguing about yesterday isn't my only project.

Tomorrow I'll speak to the group of 26 (or so) co-workers who are involved in the conference calls. Tomorrow was supposed to be the last day, but the guy who put the meetings together has realized that we have a lot more to talk about, and so is trying to plan to continue the meeting series into next week. I really should sit in on those meetings, but that might trigger more conflict with my boss.

Sunday, October 25th

I didn't manage to get back to this newsletter for a few days. I wound up working quite late on Thursday night. I got to do some of the work I like, and am good at — investigating, along with my co-worker Patrick, now to get a new laser module working with our existing instrument. (It's supposed to be a drop-in replacement, handling commands and responding the same as the old parts, but of course it doesn't really do that, and I've got to get in touch with *their* firmware developer and work with him to figure out how to make it work reliably, which may involve getting him to some of his bugs.)

On Friday, I had my presentation. They put me last in the lineup. I had to rush through my slides, and I did wind up being the one that pushed the meeting past its end time by about ten minutes. It was important to me that I get my points out, though, so I am hoping (and assuming) that folks will forgive me.

Then I had yet another video meeting with a smaller group — some people from my own team in Ann Arbor, and the company CEO, and the manager

that had arranged the week's meetings. After talking about the usual product development topics, we took a little time to talk about what we'd like to see happen, for the various teams doing software engineering to do less redundant, overlapping work. We talked about setting up a U.S.-based small group whose job it is to act as a resource center, set recommended standards and best practices, develop common platforms, and connect developers across business units.

The CEO made it very clear, though, that he expects the team in China to act as that resource, and that he is not interested in hearing other ideas. This is confusing, because he also described that team as acting only as "contract" developers, developing desktop applications in a role supporting the work of other teams. So his vision of their role is already, it seems to me, hopelessly muddled.

The problem from my perspective is that the team in China has been operating as a kind of enforcer, demanding that other business units bring their development efforts into alignment with their recommendations, but this is serving mostly to produce a log of argument, and is a sort of "unfunded mandate," because that team has not, and don't seem willing to, produce clear standards, working sample code, or working, proven combinations of hardware and software designs, or honestly, clear and detailed documentation of any kind.

Management, seems to think that the needed support will simply fall out of Chinese team's work as a side effect, and doesn't need to be created in the form of separte work products with separate initiatives.

Both my boss, my-co-worker, and I all attempted to make it clear that we really didn't think this was working well, or was at all what we had in mind; we spoke of the importance of having developers who had good English skills and who were good working with other people and presenting information, not just doing technical work.

The CEO then told my boss that he felt this was a personal attack against the engineering lead in China.

There's really no walking that back — it's like playing the race card, a flag on the field. I've spent over a year now trying to work with this lead in China, and it's been a terrible experience. My boss has been involved in most of the e-mail exchanges and arguments. The lead's English skills are much worse than those of many of the engineers on his team, other people who I've had no trouble communicating with, at all.

If his assignment is to act as a "contract" developer, he's doing a terrible job — we've had incident after incident of him refusing to do what we asked, telling us it would be too difficult or time-consuming, resulting in weeks and months of delays in getting features implemented, and when we finally do talk him into it, one of his engineers usually gets the new feature done in 24 hours, and the resulting application works much better — because what we're asking for really *is* important, and really *isn't* that hard, and I know these things because I've

been programming for forty-three years, and developing software professionally for thirty.

If his assignment is to promote standards and designs and recommended practices, he's also doing a terrible job. His team has only released on actual controlled document in three years. Other so-called "guidance" has come in the form of jumbled, poorly-written, and often-contradictory e-mail messages. *His* manager doesn't seem to realize what is missing because he doesn't understand software development well enough to know what this sort of guidance and standards must contain to be useful.

None of this has anything to do with his character or who he is as a person — it's a matter of of matching people with demonstrated skill sets and proven track records to do specific kinds of work.

The CEO was, to put it bluntly, telling us that he's going to outsource as much of this software work to a team in China, even if it is a shitty team, and he'll throw the most productive, experienced American employees under the bus rather than hear anything suggesting that this won't work and isn't going well.

My co-worker Patrick, who is considerably younger than I am, was shell-shocked after this meeting, because he hasn't seen this kind of thing before. I wasn't shocked, exactly, because I've seen it in several companies, including large ones like Ford. I've worked with overseas teams before. It *can* go well, and I've seen it go well, but managers have to be clear-eyed about it. Mine are not. They're going to damage the existing teams and demoralize them and generate attrition — bad developers and bad development practices and bad management drive out good developers — and produce poorer products, and damage their reputation.

I'm still the sole software engineer for the group in Ann Arbor, and several products depend on me, so I don't think my job is at risk. In fact, I think the fact that I'm the only engineer here is a *problem*, for several reasons, including the simple and ovious "What if Paul gets hit by a bus?" problem. I'm actually trying to share my work and designs in part to make myself less of a single, critical point of possible failure in several profitable product lines.

But I'm being signaled to, in no uncertain terms, that I'd better pick my battles, and the company won't defend me and my work over the work of the team in China. The CEO will not hear that his pet manager is making the wrong choices, and that pet manager will not hear that his pet engineering lead in China is not the right person for the job.

So it goes.

This job hasn't gone completely sour, exactly, at least not yet. I don't *think* I will face retaliation for raising this issue, at least not yet, although you know what they say — the squeaky wheel gets replaced, or thrown in the junk heap.

I still have a lot of work I'm in the middle of, and I'm enjoying that work. I've been trying to figure out how I can make myself more effective over time, and

how the other developers can collaborate and make *themselves* more effective over time. But I can see more clearly where I stand, now, and start to see how this might play out over time. Basically, the CEO and his manager will get rid of as many of us software engineers as he can, eventually, without necessarily ever clearly understanding what it will cost the company.

Thorlabs is not a publicly traded company — there is no legal fiduciary duty to shareholders to minimize development costs. If the CEO wanted to make it a core value of the company to maintain a workforce of American engineers, he could do so.

He might be obligated to, for the time being. I'm not sure if Thorlabs took stimulus money, in the form of Federal loans which they don't have to pay back if they maintain American jobs, at least for a fixed period of time. The company may have.

Theoretically, I could jump ship — there are other jobs, although it's certainly not a *great* time to be looking to change jobs. But what does an engineer like me do when all the employers are trying to ditch experienced American engineers who, yes, are also costly, and push outsourcing at any cost?

I've still got to support my family and hopefully pay off, or at least pay down, the mortgage while I can still earn income, but I'm looking at more brick walls going up on my career path. And there won't be too many more times that I can make it through application and interview processes — age discrimination is, most defnitely, a real thing, in tech, no matter how many successful projects I've got under my belt.

An interesting problem.

Taters for Tots

Yesterday Grace and I had a shopping trip to the GFS (Gordon Food Service) store on Carpenter Rd., part of a regional restaurant-supply chain. The last time I was there, early in the pandemic, they had not made any significant changes for virus safety. They've since done it, though, adding plexiglass barriers, requiring masks, and the like. It is open to the public but not very widely-used by typical grocery shoppers, so it is usually not crowded at all, and yesterday afternoon was no exception. So we felt pretty safe there.

We got some things for upcoming birthday parties — Veronica and Joshua both have birthdays this week. We tried some more bulk items that are used more often in restaurant kitchens than in home kitchens. One was a giant package of dehydrated hash browns. We've used the smaller packages, but this one holds a gallon of hot water to rehydrate the dried shredded potatoes and is billed as making forty-nine servings.

It's a bit hard to use in a home kitchen. It's hard to get a gallon of 130-degree water prepared without making a big mess. I used an electric kettle to make

boiling water, and cooled it down a bit with hot tap water. The resulting water was probably too hot and so over-cooked the potatoes, which became too soft.

I didn't want to have to make three or four giant frying pans full of hash browns, so I attempted a variation where you spread them out on sheet pans, tossed with butter, and bake them at a high temperature. I chopped up butter and tried to blend it in, but the soft potatoes were tending to turn into mashed potatoes. I made two half-sheet pans full of potatoes, with butter and bacon fat, and topped with a bunch of frozen chopped green onions from our kitchen garden, and slices of Canadian bacon. I made one tray spicier than the other, by drizzling it heavily with sriracha.

The package directions call for baking the sheet pans at 525 degrees, or 425 if you have a convection oven. Our oven will go up to 525, but that's a lot to ask from a home oven, and I don't think it blasts out as much heat as evenly as a heavier-duty commercial kitchen oven. So I only put one tray in at a time, and I had to bake them longer than the 12 to 15 minutes the package called for — more like 20 or 25 minutes.

The result wasn't terrible, but it wasn't fantastic either. The first tray was very crispy on the edge, which was nice, but not so crispy in the middle. The second tray was more like a doctored-up tray of mashed potatoes.

Two adults and seven kids ate a tray and a half, or about thirty-seven so-called "servings," so clearly that definition of servings is more like the amount one might have as a small side dish rather than a meal. But they filled everyone up and no one will want to eat again for several hours.

I'll probably try using these again, but use half the package and rehydrate the potatoes with cooler water. I'll try using the same two half-sheet trays, but spread them in thinner layers, so they brown better, and serve them as a side with soft scrambled eggs.

In a few years, we might have four teenagers at home, and feeding teenagers isn't easy. It takes a heap o' vittles to feed a gaggle of young hobbits!

Speaking of young hobbits, I've got good news and bad news. Elanor is now clearly saying a few words. That's the good news. But the bad news is that her favorite — the one she says the most often — is the f-word. Oops.

What can I say? It's been a hard year.

What Comes Next

COVID-19

The pandemic is still raging, and in fact it looks like our death rates are only going to increase for the forseeable future. In Washtenaw county, the University of Michigan is now the engine of COVID-19 transmission, and almost 1,000 people have tested positive. You can follow along on an online dashboard here.

I will be working from home as much as I can through the end of the year. Grace and I are now taking extra safety steps after going out to public places such as grocery stores. We're using a homemade solution of povidone iodone as an eye wash, nasal spray, mouth rinse, and gargle. This kind of thing is available over the counter in other countries for reducing transmission of many viral illnesses, including the flu. There's a clinical trial in progress. The summary reads:

> Povidone-iodine (PVP-I) is a broad-spectrum antiseptic with activity against bacteria, fungi, and viruses. It has been previously used in both intranasal preparations against Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) as well as oral preparations in in-vitro studies of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV), Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), influenza H1N1, and rotavirus with good efficacy. This study will evaluate the efficacy of PVP-I as prophylaxis in Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID19)-negative front-line health care workers and hospital patients.

There's also a completed study:

> Povidone-iodine nasal antiseptic solutions at concentrations as low as 0.5% rapidly inactivate SARS-CoV-2 at contact times as short as 15 seconds. Intranasal use of PVP-I has demonstrated safety at concentrations of 1.25% and below and may play an adjunctive role in mitigating viral transmission beyond personal protective equipment.

None of these tell you exactly how to make it. But Grace has been mixing 190ml of distilled water with 10ml of 10% povidone iodine solution, available at drugstores, to make a 0.5% solution. Make sure you know what percentage you are getting, as using a higher concentration can produce irritation. We use some of this in nasal spray bottles, with Q-tips to place the solution in our eyes, and as a gargle. Has it saved us, or will it save us, from COVID-19 infection?

There's no way to know, but it's a low-cost, low-risk intervention, as long as you aren't allergic to iodine. If you don't know if you're allergic to iodine because you don't recall using it, you might try applying a small amount of the 10% solution to a small patch of skin on the skin on your wrist or in the bend of your elbow, and wait 24 hours to see if you notice any adverse reaction.

The 2020 Election

We're getting down to the last few days before Election Day and I want to talk about what I think might happen next. I was thinking that the bulk of this week's newsletter would be devoted to this topic, but now that I'm here and ready to write it, I find that I just don't have the heart to dive into a long discourse on the subject.

I'll refer you to an article by Nathan J. Robinson, who interprets Chomsky's view on strategic voting for leftists. I find his explanation to be clear and thorough,

but I don't think it is the end of the story. Grace and I might attempt to unpack this whole topic on a podcast discussion, although we have both already voted, and so have many millions of other people, but it might help people clarify their strategies for future elections, and also future activism work above and beyond electoralism.

Election day, unfortunately, in my view, likely won't really be the clean line of demarcation that people are hoping it will be. I think it's very likely that we'll have a situation like the election of 2000, which dragged on for months before the Supreme Court finally shut down the recount.

The best thing I've read on this subject so far is this paper — note that this is a link to a PDF file, not a web page.

There's an article in Vox here about the team and process that produced this report:

> ...in June, an organization called the Transition Integrity Project (TIP) convened a group of more than 100 bipartisan experts to simulate what might happen the day after Election Day — running a kind of political "war game" where veteran Democrats role-played as the Biden campaign and veteran Republicans acted as the Trump team.
>
> They simulated four scenarios: a big Biden victory, a narrow Biden win, an indeterminate result à la the 2000 election, and a narrow Trump victory. In every scenario but a massive Biden blowout, things went south.

These scenarios were run several months ago, and so the report doesn't take into account things that have happened in the meantime, and what those things suggest might happen next, but I still think it's pretty fascinating, and likely to be fairly accurate. It at least gives a framework for comparing what actually happens to several concrete predictions.

Back to vague predictions. I think it's going to get ugly, and we are no doubt going to start to see more and more moments when America's profound sickness turns into full-blown psychosis.

Have a great week!

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