Talking Bout My…

I ran across an innocuous-yet-aggravating-anyway argument on the Twitter machine this week.Say not so! In this instance, a member of one so-called Generation™ took offense at someone from another Gen™ who claimed that theirs was indeed the best of all possible G™s – because look at all the wondrous innovations theirs could claim – while the other G™s were a bunch of wankers due to their inclination to war, racism, laziness, lousy taste in music/film/etc., and other particulars. The exchange was lively, generally pointless, and, as these things do, escalated into name calling of all sorts.

Naturally, because I am a reserved and mature individual – a proud member of Boomer II™ – I waded right in and reasonably informed the lot of these GenXYZ whiners that their claims and counters were all pure bollocks, that the whole idea of individuated G™s was a load of horse pucky contrived by consultant types who wished to sell their keen genius to gullible commercial enterprises who would *leverage* this deep insight in hopes of extracting hard earned cash from downstream marks more credulous than themselves. So grow up, ya damn punks.

Whereupon my hard-earned insight was met with a volley of contumely. Can you imagine? Call me Cassandra.

In one of my earlier incarnations c.1995-2015, I played dress-

up as a marketing savant, the better to bring home the proverbial bacon. This often meant suffering endless presentations on how best to move product by targeting the characteristics of one G™ or another. A shapeshifting farrago of bullshit spun from a few malleable observations, the knowledge gleaned is of a piece with clickbait listicles and articles that purport to tell us how *WE* feel about some prevailing trend/crisis/fad, and the seven weird tricks we can use to get rich/find love/forestall death/&c.I saw a teaser this week for 7 tricks that will help me “avoid death.” Color me dubious.

Imagine the scene: One or more (tag team presentations were the rage for a while, until these fell from favor in response to the keen realization that one dancing bear was cheaper than two) experts would offer compelling arguments as to which G™ we should be paying attention in that moment, and how we might *craft our message* to best emphasize our sincerity to whichever G™ held the greatest cash extraction potential at any given moment. Here we were assured that Cohort A responds to such and such, while Cohort B is completely different, except for those ways in which they are exactly the same, and that the most important thing to remember is the critical importance of *authenticity* in our efforts to ensure this or that G™ that our product/organization most truly reflects the *closely held values* that are paramount to whichever G™ (or G™s) we sincerely aim to convince.

My memory is rife with garrulous women (almost always women) bedecked in shoulder padded blazers and decorative scarves, punctuating their exhortations with an array of dynamic hand gestures and zesty half-turns of their upper torso.The better to emulate a billboard for realtors and chiropractors, reckon.

Who wants to succeed TODAY?

Naturally, I was eager to report back to my superiors the critical intel I had derived on the company dime, the better to justify my ongoing existence in the corporate ecosystem. I catalyzed a broad range of strategic initiatives to instantiate and effectuate win-win scenarios to actualize upsides to all inspirited parties. Many a noun was verbed in this bedazzling display of communicational derring-do.

At root, Gen™ discussions inevitably assert a we/they formation: “They” are like this, or “We” are some such way. It asserts a claim – often, an accusation – based upon broad generalization, not unlike “Blacks are like” or “soccer moms are like” or “Lithuanian hockey players are like”. Suffice to say that any message that leans on such tired generalizations is safely disregarded. At best, it is a transparent blandishment to detach you from your money. At worst, it is supplemental fuel for the slice/dice alienation machine that dominates modern discourse.

This categorization is typical.

Generation

Gen Z

Millennials

Gen X

Boomers II

Boomers I

Post War

WWII (The Greatest)

Born

1997 – 2012

1981 – 1996

1965 – 1980

1955 – 1964

1946 – 1954

1928 – 1945

1922 – 1927

Current Age

10 – 25

26 – 41

42 – 57

58 – 67

68 – 76

77 – 94

95 – 100

If nothing else, the notion that groups spanning 15 years in age (Gens X, Millennial, and Z) share meaningful commonality is transparent poppycock. It is silly to suggest that a Gen X born in the late 60s has more in common with one birthed in 1980 than with an early-60s Boomer baby. Or that a Millennial born in 1995 is more akin to one sprung in 1981 than with a Gen Z popped out in 1999. Despite the boatloads of survey metrics and sales figures and so on, conferring personality traits on a vast population based on date of birth is nothing more than another flavor of astrology, based on year rather than month, propped up by whatever anecdata are at hand that can be twisted to satisfy an ordained outcome.

I find it interesting that the so-called Greatest Generation spans a slim five years, a timeframe that might provide some useful insight but complicates the life of the erstwhile marketing slick in search of the most commercially motivating least common denominator.

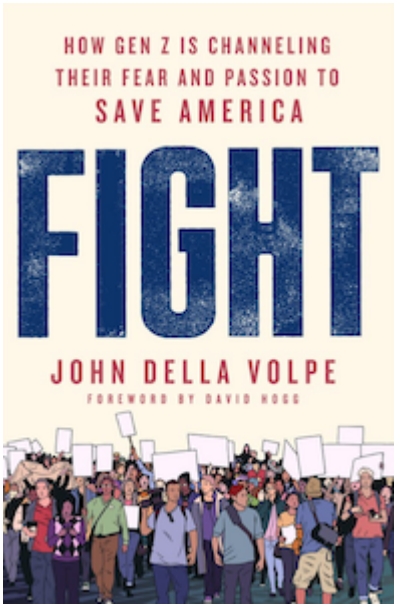
I was surprised to discover that the Boomer cohort has been split into Boomer I and Boomer II aggregations, the original 18 year span clearly too broad to explain anything. Alas, the 17-year PostWar group has not been afforded such fine grained definition, likely because i) population dwindling and ii) that cohort has never been seen as ripe for plucking as the Boomer-and-beyond crowds. Well, until Fox News came along, anyway.

Perhaps it is the inevitable dwindling of the first Boomers that led the market-minded savants to split the target

audience. Whereas early Boomers are now the prime demographic for things like Hoverround scooters, reverse mortgages, and over-heated conservative rage monkeys, the late Boomers are seen as both flush and determined to buy ALL the toys, while also spending freely on pharmaceuticals big and small to forestall the inevitable dwindling that stands in wait. (Or so the profiles would lead us to believe.) Oh, yeah. Big on the rage monkeys, too.

Boomer II has also been dubbed Generation Jones, another gambit by marketing sharps to turn a buck You can buy the book or hire the firm of that name to help you *fashion your strategies*, as they say.; and a handy hook for pundits on deadline to hang 800 words about not much. Generational astrology places me squarely in the middle of Gen Jones, which suggests I don't much care for the Beatles, resent the Boomer I gang because I missed all the free love, and other such simplifications. (And yes, I aver that my depiction is itself an over-simplification of a much more nuanced and textured exegesis of bovine offal.)

Despite the popularity of "OK Boomer" memes, it appears at long last that us Boomers are no longer the generation most responsible for that gigantic shit show 2022 represents. Nope. The worm has turned. It's those lousy Gen X and Millennial slackers are the ones to blame. If things are to improve, it is up to those stalwart Gen Z warriors to save the day.



Another sharp with a book

In a recent column at LitHub titled “Can Generation Z Save America? (And Should They Have To?)“, this author demonstrates in a few hundred words the depth of this charade.

Should they have to? Should any generation bear responsibility for leaving the world in better condition than they inherited it? And is “saving America” really the most important problem facing the world anyway?

Then there is this trenchant insight.

> *The oldest Zoomers…are old enough to have voted for or against Donald Trump in two presidential elections.*
>
> *Della Volpe, LitHub, 1/20/22*

Golly. They are beginning to vote! That changes everything!

Sure, the majority of this cohort voted against the most abjectly unfit candidate this nation has ever seen. Gen Zers are on the whole more progressive than not, but not monolithically so; this is standard for any so-called “youth cohort” going back at least to the 60s. The “youth of today” is always going to upend the gameboard within the next election or three, you just wait. It just never seems to come

about, and soon enough your Gen™ is the target of the next generation's ire and resentment.

The other Gen Zers, fully on board with marching authoritarianism, are not going away; if history is guide, their number will swell over time as the betrayals of becoming an adult under resoundingly inhumane social arrangements take their toll. As to the presumed permanence of Gen Z progressivism, I point to the legions of my cohort who peddled Revolutionary Worker tracts in the late-70s-early 80s, who marched against nuclear proliferation and the extremes of the criminal Reagan administration, and who are now as likely to be MAGAbots as anything.

The old Churchillian canardNot really one of Winstons's bon mots, but rather that of an obscure 19th century French academic, Anselme Polycarpe Batbie. of 'If You Are Not a Liberal When You Are Young, You Have No Heart, and If You Are Not a Conservative When Old, You Have No Brain' is oft wielded, typically by those wishing to justify abandoning the generosity of their youth in favor of blinkered self-interest. People in this society tend to grow more conservative as they get older. This is not inevitable to human nature; more likely it is a process of fear and retrenchment as time plods on and the hopefulness of youth gives way to the crushing reality of surviving late-stage capitalism.

No matter where one finds oneself on the trajectory of time's arrow, there is and always has been a generation gap and two extremese of attitude towards the younger generation. It's either "damn kids these days" or "the kids are alright". My own view is that the young upstarts are damned fine, as fine a group of humans as you could ever hope to meet. At the same time, I recognize that a huge percentage of Gen Z is damaged, tormented, filled with self-doubt/loathing as many of my time were, with a considerable portion of rabid authoritarians, fascists, and neo-Nazis. In other words, not at all different

now than any time since the U.S. became an imperial power.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

From the agonies of the Depression and the sacrifices of WWII, to the soul-crushing conformity of the post-war era and the social upheavals of the 60s and 70s. From the specter of nuclear holocaust to the resurgence of purely corporatist governance around the globe, environmental decline, climate change, and so on. Feudal serfdom, Black Death, Christian Crusades and Inquisitions, rampant disease, starvation, gruesome wars, &c. Things have been Fucked Up and Shit (FUAS™) for as far back as we can see.

But it seems that every generation must see their own struggles as *sui generis*, as somehow worse than it ever has been before in the history of forever. In this, they are correct. And also wrong and missing the point.

The struggle has been real for as long as time is recorded.

History is a catalog of FUAS™, with a broad exemption for the select few throughout history who lord it over the masses. The ability of the select to maintain their status has always rested upon an arsenal of carrots, carefully bestowed to instill ambition among the lessers, and sticks, indiscriminately wielded to instill fear among same. But the greatest weapon the top dogs have is the ability to create divisions among the mass of people whose core interests diverge sharply from the swells and overlap almost completely with each other. Dividing the underclass into subsets, and then turning them one upon the other, loads the hard work of maintaining an empire on those upon whom the empire lies heavy.

Check the subtitle of that LitHub article. "John Della Volpe Wonders If Demography Can Save Democracy" is a forehead slapper typical of the genre.

No. The answer is no. Just. Fucking. No.

Demography has no agency, no collective will. It is mere counting and sorting, a chimera propped up by statistical and anecdotal evidence of questionable utility. But sure, let's set an impossible expectation and divert the polity from recognizing that, if democracy is to be saved, it will require a epic display of communitarian effort and solidarity across all ages, genders, races, and classes. "Let those kids handle it" won't cut it, just like we can't count on Black women to save us, or The Squad, or Bernie, or or or….It is up to all of us.

Generational definitions are manipulations, several among many that get repeated enough to become 'common sense'. These flatteries, designed to appeal to base emotion, are fundamentally tools for moving widgets. But they also serve a more pernicious purpose as part of the rampant flattening of citizenship and community.

Too many of us appear desperate to be told who and what we are, eager to accept the kind of labeling nonsense that the Gen™ hucksters serve up in shiny packaging. But we also see it elsewhere: in party affiliation or devotion to one or another sportsball (game or team). In our identification with one religion over another, and the antagonisms that arise even (especially) when the differences are so slight. Vax and anti-vax. Regional identification and prejudice. Stones or Beatles. Paul or John? There is not end; the quark will never be found.

The impulse to belong to one tribe or another may be the most dangerous infection we face today, and unlike COVID there is no vaccine. The slice and dice machinery is uncanny in its ability to ferret out fissures. It makes us all less appreciative of both the individual differences that make each member of any tribe unique, but to the actual, meaningful commonalities we share within and without our alleged tribe. This reliance on conferred identity flattens, makes us

numbingly similar under the guise of superficial difference. And comfortable in our received identity, we begin to see significant cultural variations as threats to be defended against. And here lies the real danger, as fear turns to aggression and of fantasies of dominance and purity.

Writer Ted Gioia is best known for his music criticism and histories. (His *Music: A Subversive History* is a real banger for anyone interested in the social. Highly recommended.) But on his blog, *The Honest Broker*, he often branches off into other realms. Today, as I was struggling to wrap this essay, he published a piece about philosopher Byung-Chul Han that included this observation:

> *"It was once fashionable to opt out from the groupthink and reconstruct your own life in a free-spirited or even openly dissident way. But the groups and power brokers have gotten less tolerant of dissent nowadays, and it's harder to find a space for self-invention outside their purview."*
>
> *Ted Gioia, The Honest Broker, 1/24/22*

I cannot fully agree. The 'groups and power brokers' have never been particularly fond of self-invention beyond narrowly prescribed guardrails. Self-invention and self-realization are threats to the prevailing order, and the machinery in place to set the seal on bland conformity is relentlessly efficient. And pretty much anything that feels transgressive in one generation (long hair, tattoos, rainbow hair coloring, clothes made of U.S. flags) will be quickly flattened into yet another commodity that trades its signification as rebellion for that of consumer obediance.

At root, this is my objection to the Gen™ industry's role in a broader campaign to determine who we are so we don't have to put in the effort. It is a mechanism of the Great Flattening machine – an array of large and small instruments ranging

across political parties, bread and circus sport extravaganzas, music streaming algorithms, blockbuster movie hegemony, Wordle, TikTok influencers, &c. – that aims to turn us into reliable and docile consumer drones.

When we all do and like the same things, this slouching beast declares, we will all be happy.

Then we can all fall in line for authoritarian rule, because at least the trains will run on time while we all watch the Super Marvel Universe Bowl together.

_____

DISCLOSURE: If you click on a book recommendation here it will take you to the Indiebound website where you can purchase the book from your favorite independent bookseller. I2B will get a slim cut of the action if you buy when you click over from this site, and it is better for the author and the bookstore, too. And it's way better than sending your money to Bezos.

Wave the Bloody Shirt

It's not hard to find examples of politicians exploiting tragedy for cheap emotional gain. But it's hard to imagine a more cynical episode than the stunt trump pulled last night during his congressional address.

On January 28, just a week into the trump reign, our Commander in Chief green lighted a military raid in Yemen. By most accounts, the president* took a cavalier attitude toward approving the mission. He could not be bothered to attend to the mission in the Situation Room, preferring to stay in the residence and tweet about trivialities. Leadership.

During the raid, CPO William Owen died, and six other SEALs were injured. An estimated 29 civilians died in the raid, including children. A $75M Osprey helicopter was disabled; airstrikes were called in to destroy the aircraft to keep it from falling into enemy hands. No strategic intelligence was attained, no strategic hard target or combatant captured or killed. It was a clusterfuck from start to finish.

This woman, Carryn Owens, lost her husband. Her grief is beyond my imagination.

I’m confident in saying that it is also beyond the president’s * imagination. Or interest, really, in anything other than its value as a show biz gambit that allowed him to bask in one minute and forty-four seconds of standing ovation tribute, tribute that may have been intended for Mrs Owens and her late

husband, but which he treated as his due. He even made her stand up a second time, this woman consumed in mourning and public grief, reduced to a prop in a sick game to let this sick man believe himself to be a popular leader.

Watch the tape. She wants to go away and hide. Now look at trump: the sick bastard is beaming, smiling, waving thumbs up as though he had just had a protester dragged out of one of his rallies. The world is just a reality show set to him. He could care fuck. all. about human feelings, about suffering, about yearning. Give him an applause line and everything is fine.

This is what sociopathy looks like<fn>And isn't Speaker Ryan the cutest little puppy dog?</fn>

Trump quoted the Bible. Trump said "Ryan" was looking down from heaven, and "he is very happy because I think he just broke a record" for the ovation. Huzzah.

Now, take a look at the Joint Chiefs of Staff during this revolting spectacle.

Ever since the botched mission, trump has swung between claiming everything went great to blaming the failure on Obama. And then a few days ago, he tried to hang it around the necks of the military.

> *“This was something that was, you know, just – they wanted to do,” Trump said. “ And they came to see me and they explained what they wanted to do, the generals, who are very respected.”*
>
> *“And they lost Ryan,” Trump continued.*

Not one of those generals would deny their responsibility for CPO Owens’ death. It’s part of the role of leadership. (And by the way, Don, to you his name is Chief Petty Officer Owens. His friends call him Ryan.) The look of disgust on these faces is telling.

Trump, a pretend leader, is never to blame, never culpable for any failure. When things are going well, it’s all to his credit, just as when an audience is on its feet cheering, it is because of his magnificent greatness.

FWIW, CPO Owens' father has refused to meet with the president*, claiming that the questions surrounding the approval and execution of the raid make it impossible for him to face trump. He has called for a full investigation, saying, "Don't hide behind my son's death to prevent an investigation."

The schmuck from Queens went one step further. Not only will he hide behind CPO Owens' death to avoid an investigation, he is waving a good man's bloody shirt to wrap himself in applause and adoration.

It's difficult to imagine a more revolting manipulation of genuine grief. Somehow, though, I think we have a long way to go before we hit bottom with this guy.

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Night

Soon, it will all be over. Hard to believe, but true.

The end.

Denouement.

Fin.

The end of the arguments, the pitched battles on Facebook and

in the comments section of your favorite newspaper, the unbridled anger, the long friendships dashed, families split asunder. The embarrassed glances as your neighbor plants another sign for *that* person, that idiot fraud who is going to destroy democracy as we know it, that tool of the special interests whose only interest is in undermining your freedom, your very way of life.

But enough about the race for Leon County Property Appraiser<fn>Which is, in fact, a nearly perfect microcosm of the entire U.S. political circus.</fn>. There seems to be some kind of reality show contest underway to see who gets to live in the Big House That Slaves Built. And it all comes down to November 8. Come November 9, we will either wake up to a bright tomorrow or to the certainty that our polis will soon descend into a scorched earth hellscape upon which once-promising seed will find no purchase.

Here's my humble prediction: no matter who wins, the entirety of our electorate will find themselves in one or the other of these mindsets. The rosy scenario, alas, is possible only if MY preferred candidate wins. Otherwise, all is lost. Naturally.

Tuesday will mark the twelfth consecutive Presidential election that I have followed, dating back to 1972, with an almost clinically-diagnosable degree of obsession. In that time, I have watched every major election return – all the way into the late West Coast returns – and every national party convention. Gavel to gavel. Coast to coast. If recognizing a problem is the first step toward beating it, I'm good.

My name is Rob, and I am a political junkie.

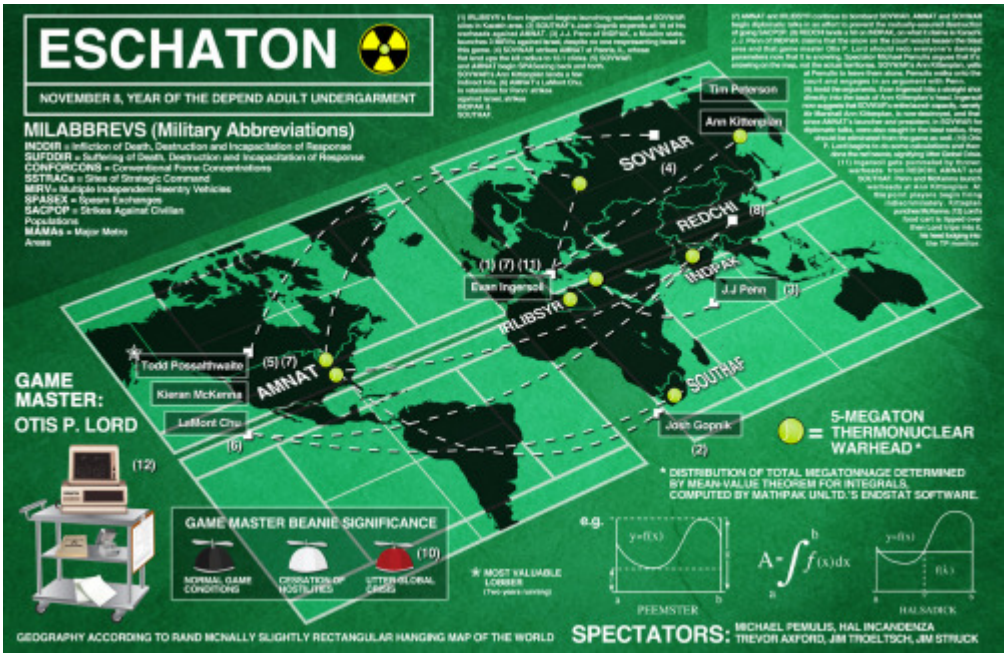
(Faithful followers of the blog [all three of you] have wondered why Your Narrator, of all people, has not written more about the election this year. Short answer: what could I possibly say that hasn't been said at least 7 times already?

Also, too: I've had a hard time making any sense of it. It beggars belief, really.)

Anyway, November 8 is a pretty Biden big deal. It is a critical hinge-point in one of the greatest sagas ever told, a day of epic convergences and salient plot development.

I am speaking, of course, about David Foster Wallace's gargantuan *Infinite Jest.*<fn>Available at a fine local bookseller near you!</fn> In lieu of rehashing the obvious and over-determined plot points and characters of the Clinton-Trump pas de deux, what say we resist my electoral OCD and spend a little time on an addiction in front of which Your Narrator finds himself compelled to pay attention to every tiny fucking detail no matter how inconsequential in the larger scheme it may actually be. Just like this fucking election.

Pages 321-342 of *IJ* describe the last, epic contest in the game of Eschaton. This is DFW at his comic peak, his closest brush with the fiery arc of Pynchon flaring rockets. Eschaton is a game invented at Enfield Tennis Academy in which youngsters with tennis rackets play out a nuclear holocaust scenario by lobbing "tennis balls so bald and dead", each representing a 5-megaton explosive, on a quartet of tennis courts marked off to represent a world map. Various items of clothing – shorts, shirts, socks, jockstraps – demarcate military installations, civilian population concentrations, transportation assets, &c. Each kid represents a different world power<fn>Or non-power; Canada in particular takes a heaping share of disregard.</fn>, and battle is waged according to strict decision trees derived from game theory, international relations studies, and the ability of said kids to accurately lob a tennis ball onto or into a nation-state and its clothing-represented assets.



It was Sunday, November 8, that this last and final Eschaton contest of all time, a game that had heretofore been a staid and measured contest of skill and strategy, descended into *Lord of the Flies*-esque blood-letting, a free-for-all melee in which propriety and acceptance of civilizing norms are discarded in favor of a winner-take-all-damn-the-torpedos orgy of anything-goes savagery in which anger and vengeance seem to be more important than arriving at mutually beneficial outcomes.

Sort of like this fucking election campaign. Damn. Can't get away.

And it happened on November 8. The Day of Eschaton.<fn>To be clear, it was a Sunday, not a Tuesday, this November 8 in the Year of the Depends Adult Undergarment was. YDAU is likely equivalent to our own 2009. Noting that the main action of this novel of a dystopian future is now several years in the old rear-view is as jarring as growing up with, and living past, the years of action described in *1984* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Time's arrow is relentless in its poking of Your Narrator's hind bits.</fn>

November 8 is also, in the *IJ* mythos, Interdependence Day, a celebratory occasion that marks the declaration by President

Johnny Gentle of the forced union of the US, Mexico, and Canada. Johnny Gentle, a germ-o-phobic lounge crooner cum television star – a man described as having a "pathological inability to deal proactively with any sort of real or imagined rejection" – has defied the odds by winning the Presidency on the platform of, basically, 'everything is filthy and awful and I'm the only one who can clean it up'. That he has never been bothered by two or more ideas occupying his mind at the same time, or that he has disturbing and obvious sociopathic and authoritarian tendencies, is of no apparent concern to a largely imbecilic American electorate which is anxious to have someone place a firm hand on the wheel.

Forget building a yoooge wall. Johnny Gentle forced Canada to accept a "gift" of a massive swath of land comprising most of Northern New England and New York, a land that will be used as a toxic dump for America's trash and radioactive waste. The land is quickly rendered uninhabitable for humans, though rumor abounds that giant feral rodents, perhaps descendant of liberated pet hamsters, roam the wilds feasting on garbage hurled by massive catapults from the south.

Also, too: Johnny Gentle dismantles NATO, ostensibly because they won't carry their own weight, defense-spending wise.

Also, too, also: the mysterious Joelle Van Dyne – aka radio cult personality Madame Psychosis (which we are intended to hear as 'metempsychosis'); formerly-aka the Prettiest Girl of All Time (PGOAT), subsequently a victim of a hideous acid-hurled-in-the-face deformity episode, and currently a member of the Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed (UHID) – is admitted into Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery House on November 8, YDAU.

Of note: JVD is also the featured performer in *The Entertainment*, a video cartridge that is so compellingly mesmerizing and entertaining that anyone who starts watching

it will sit transfixed, through episodes of hunger and thirst and bladder/colonic evacuations, until actual death occurs.

Something like this fucking election campaign.

As Pierce noted in a recent post: “Are We Not Entertained?”, both camps have pulled out all the stops to capture our eyeballs, from HRC’s parade of celebrities we love to watch – like the celebrities currently occupying that Big House That Slaves Built on Pennsylvania Avenue, no to mention A-listers like Bey, Katy, Bruce, &c. – to Trump’s parade of Chachi and Ted Nugent and uh, mm, uh…… OK, granted, Trump can’t call down the star-power the way Hils can, but it doesn’t matter…he himself is The Entertainment *ne plus ultra* of this campaign. He is the can’t-stop-looking train wreck that everybody watches just to see what happens next. Some of us are horrified, some of our neighbors thrilled, at the “authenticity” of his antics. Either way, the folks with the teevee cameras know that if they point at him, a goodly number of us will gawk, perhaps not through embarrassing episodes of defecatory/excretory mishap, but certainly in great enough numbers to keep the camera pointers focused on what we have deemed most important this year.

“So,” you ask Your Rambling Narrator, “the fuck what? I can’t stand this stuff and I *never* watch/listen to any of this crap.” Indeed. And why should you?

(You just know I’m gonna tell you why. But not yet.)

I recently re-read some Joan Didion essays about the 1988 conventions and election – a moment of relative civility in the recurring preznential drama – and I found myself wondering<fn>Heads up! We’re back to *IJ* again.</fn> what was the real-life equivalent of the instant that snivel-nosed Evan Ingersoll snapped to the in-built contradictions of Eschaton’s niceties and agreed upon “apparatus of the game”, which realization led him to drill a frozen rope, line driven tennis

ball into the base of Ann Kittenplan's skull – she representing what we would all recognize as Putin-land – which action shattered the "civility" of old-line Eschaton strategy and unleashed the hellish fury of a full-bore Eschatological melee that culminated with Otis P Lord ending up with an old-school CRT computer monitor fitted tightly over his skull, glass screen side first – pondering how/when/why the norms of "civilized" political battle fell into glass-slivered pieces, looking for the exact moment when our own so-called *real* political culture turned the corner into the lunacy that has us contemplating the actual-if-slight possibility that a spray-tanned reality show host might actually assume the office of the Presidency. Our own Johnny Gentle.

Your Narrator is compelled to consider one of i2b's guiding principles: Reagan Ruined Everything. Perhaps St Ronald was the metaphorical tennis ball to Kittenplan's skull?

Consider Ronnie's abject demonization of the word "liberal" and the various schemes and machinations of the Reagan campaign, their dickying the Iran hostage crisis and stealing debate books and barely concealed racist appeals. Is this it? Here, after all, was a man careening headlong into dementia, a dim bulb in the chandelier ascending to the presidency, a B-

movie contract hack with name recognition largely derived from his silver screen history. Saint Ronnie indeed left a trail of carnage and terrible policies in his wake. But no, Reagan had at least been a Governor, as had many Presidents before him, and despite his anti-towering intellect and retrograde policy inclinations, he was a legitimate choice for President.

I glance back at *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail* and I find myself amazed that History's Yard Waste himself looks almost good in comparison. But no, this was not the moment.

We can think about Willie Horton or Al Gore inventing the internet while he wrote *Love Story,* or the Great Clenis Hunt of the 1990s, or or or….and sure, all these things are contributors to our current debaclish condition, grim harbinger of the degradation to come. But not quite the nadir.

In the end, I think the line drive tennis ball to the nape of our political neck<fn>Block that metaphor!</fn> comes down to the moment Mavericky John McCain, with the help of his fawning media monkeys, convinced America that a barely-literate nobody from a tiny village of Alaskan meth heads was a legitimate choice to sit second in line to the presidency.

And really and come on, that was the moment where the “apparatus of the game” got thrown against the rocks and our descent into Gentle Trumpery was ordained. Not that it wouldn’t have happened anyway, eventually, that somebody would see the weakness inherent in the politico/media co-dependency and knife that soft-underbelly with almost Stradivarian skill. But that moment when a reasonably sentient Presidential nominee selected a barely sentient snowbilly in 4-inch Louboutins to stand as second-in-line to the Presidency, when the media broke its own back bending to deal “even handedly” with a person who justly deserved all the mockery we could muster – that was the moment of insemination, the moment the Trump monster was made possible. Because once we treated her as though she were in the least qualified, all bets were off for any future carny act that wanted to play the media like small-town marks in front of a cartload of snake oil.

Compare the amount of coverage of Palin v Obama in 2008. Compare the amount of coverage of Trump v everybody else this past year. The media gazed upon Palin/Trump as do the victims of *The Entertainment* – they are willing to endure anything because the freak show is so damned compelling. And while we may not be down with soiling ourselves, it's pretty clear that we will swallow pretty much anything.

Along comes Trump. The shattered apparatus of the game was no match for a guy who couples razor-sharp media instincts with the morality of a Kimodo dragon. When Johnny Gentle emerged:

> *the Dems and G.O.P.s stood on either side watching dumbly, like doubles partners who each think the other's surely got it, the two established mainstream parties split open along tired philosophical lines in a dark time when all landfills got full and all grapes were raisins and sometimes in some places the falling rain clunked instead of splatted, and also, recall, a post-Soviet and -Jihad era when – somehow even worse – there was no real Foreign Menace of any real unified potency to hate and fear, and the U.S. sort of turned on itself and its own philosophical fatigue and hideous redolent wastes with a spasm of panicked rage that in retrospect seems possible only in a time of geopolitical supremacy and consequent silence, the loss of any external Menace to hate and fear.*

The GOP was caught flat-footed by Trump, struck dumb by his remorseless manipulations of the very same elements the Party had assumed were their personal playthings, rendered impotent by a stable of so-called contenders who were either utterly content-free, horrifically unlikeable, or both. The Republican party – for all the earnest, very public soul-searching by the very same people who set the table for this Bosch-like feast<fn>Looking at you, Bobo.</fn> – built this damn monster. But unlike Frankenstein's feared and hated creation, the townspeople loved Himself, and turned on Himself's creators

when they tried to reign him in. Shelley never saw that ending coming.

One of William F Buckley's notable quips was "Don't immanentize the Eschaton", which was directed at the do-gooder utopians who he accused of attempting to hasten a post-Armageddon kingdom of god. At root, it was just a fancy way of complaining about government intervention in human affairs, but it made the speaker feel all plummy and clever about his (almost always his) disdain for the lily-livered, oatmeal-brained, pusillanimous pukes of the liberal persuasion. I first heard the phrase in an undergrad pol sci class.

But now it seems the equation is flipped. We have the Great Orange Menace casually declaiming "I'll bomb the shit out of them" and other such expressions of policy, much to the great delight of his devotees who are ready to blow the whole damn thing up out of frustration and anger. We have arrived at the inversion of Buckley's concern in which the purported conservative candidate – our own Johnny Gentle – is the one calling for a thoroughgoing cleansing.

Fortunately, and unlike the sad picture of the Dems and GOP as hapless doubles partners offered in *Infinite Jest*, the Democratic Party found itself nominating a candidate with perhaps the greatest set of qualifications and experience in the history of the Republic.<fn>With the possible exception of James Madison.</fn> And barring some calamitous turn, our next President will be a woman – a WOMAN! – who has been preparing her entire life for this opportunity. An opportunity which, one should note, nobody could have foreseen as even remotely possible when Hillary Clinton began her long climb.

This is history, right now, obviously and colorfully unfolding each and every day. It is an amazing thing, this system of governance, with its peaceful transfer of power (at least up to now…stay tuned) and its sometimes maddening pace of non-change, its deference to compromise and consensus, to finding

something resembling common ground. It is utterly imperfect. Not watching this would be like not paying any attention to the Civil War or the Depression if you'd been alive then. I cannot fathom the disinterest; then again, Your Narrator is notoriously lacking in empathy and imagination. Mea culpa.

I reckon that within a very short period of time, President Clinton II will disappoint me in some profound ways. In this she will join every other President, including Barack Obama, who I consider the finest President of my lifetime, and one of our all time top 5.

I am damned glad that she is the Democrat who stood in battle with our very own Johnny Gentle. When we wake up on November 9, we better hope (hell, pray if you want to) she took the prize. Anything else is, literally, unthinkable.

Yes or No, But….

How do you solve a problem like The Donald?

From my perspective, the answer is simple: turn out the vote and beat that sociopathic charlatan like a tin drum. Send him scurrying back into the fever swamp that spawned him. Be gone, beast.

But for my Republican friends (stop laughing) and relatives, it is a little trickier. Talking to these folks – in a respectful and civil way (why are you laughing? Stop!) – presents an opportunity for us to find a little common ground

Some of them – call them the #EverTrump crowd – see Big Orange as the answer to their prayers, a knight in Cheetos-colored armor. For them, it's simple. And I got nothing except to say, "Nice weather we're having." Common ground enough.

Then there are the folks Josh Marshall tagged as the "Yes, but…" brigade, people who realize Mister Spray Tan is a disaster on legs, but are going to vote for him anyway. Folks like Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell, who daily have to spin like tops to distance themselves from Trump's latest nonsense, but still, their support remains unwavering. Rubio. Priebus. McCain. The list goes on. Profiles in triangulating cowardice, they want it both ways: principled opposition to the scourge of Gold Star moms everywhere, but a clean heart about withholding their vote for the only living, non-orange person who might actually become President, the Hildebeast. These are the folks who calculate that party over country is a winning bet. For them, I got nothing beyond a suggestion to check out the latest escapades of Mallard Fillmore. And this: history will not be kind to you. Nice weather, by the way.

Then there are those who know el Trumpo is a know-nothing martinet and a fool, but a lifetime of GOP voting leaves them constitutionally incapable of pulling the lever for the pant-suited she-demon. The "No, but…" brigade. JEB!? I'm looking at you. If you're in this gaggle, stay with me, because I want you to find your way to the fourth possible path, the one less traveled by.

Here is where I praise Republicans who realize that a Trump presidency would inflict incalculable damage on our Nation, who cannot imagine having to explain to their descendants how they could have supported – even indirectly – the election of

a vulgar grifter. People who know that they are going to take fire from other Republicans, know they'll hear cries of "Traitor!" People who know they are sacrificing future opportunities in the party they have called home for a lifetime. The #NoButs brigade.

We can also call them Patriots.

I recently struck up a friendship with a long-time member of the conservative GOP establishment. (STOP laughing!) Last time we spoke, X was firmly in the "No, but…' camp, unable to see how she could overcome a lifetime of Clinton-aversion. But today I discover that she has very publicly and definitively joined the #NoButs brigade, proclaiming that if the race is close, she will vote for Hillary Clinton.

I cannot tell you how much I admire her courage. She could have kept quiet and nobody would have known. Except her. And this was a big splash, a very public conversion driven by conscience and rational analysis.
This is what decency looks like. I hope this opens the floodgates.

And I hope those trying to have it both ways realize that, as my Uncle Herschel used to say, "Roll in pig mud, boy, and you get stink on ya."

I'm not asking that every Republican become a Democrat or vote a straight Dem ticket. I am asking – no, pleading, really – that the people who identify as reasonable Republicans cut the charade of "Yes/No, but…" and take a simple stand. Proclaim your support for Hillary Clinton as the next President of the United States. #NoButs

You can vote straight GOP down the ticket from there. You can pledge to do everything you can to ensure that she is a one-term President. As a member of the loyal opposition, you can commit to struggling against any of her policies that strike you as wrong.

What you cannot do – if you want to honestly see yourself as a principled conservative and Patriot – is to sit this out, to let your silence serve as tacit approval of a tiny-fingered, Cheetos-tinted lunatic assuming the power of the Presidency.

Just join the ranks of the sane and repeat after my new pal, who proclaimed, “This is a time when country has to take priority over political parties. Donald Trump cannot be elected president.”
Now that’s some common ground we should be able to agree on.

(Out of respect for her reputation, I won’t quote my pal by name.
She’s getting grief enough without being pegged as a friend of mine.)