

# HAPPY THANKSGIVING: DELAYED CRANES AND PIGS EDITION

I'm grateful for Michigan's bounty. Unless we start doing something about the climate emergency, it may not be there very long.

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## A WORLD WE BUILT TO BURN

It's the windy end of a hot summer in California right now, and everything wants to burn. This year, like every year, fall winds jostle and tug a dry landscape of golden grasses and scrubland up against forests whose floors are piled with dry litterfall. Old powerlines hang from poles all over a landscape that has been changed by the human suppression of the fires that were always a part of the ecosystem.

More houses are closer to this tinderbox, as we've pushed the wildland-urban interface further into the interior of the southwestern states than it has ever been. The power lines are owned by a bankrupt utility, PG&E, and in a lot of places, they were turned off last week, to prevent the utility company from burning down more towns like Paradise, CA, which burned with a kind of biblical rage this time last year.

And then, on top of all this, there's climate change, making the hot and dry and windy just a bit hotter and drier and windier.

The reasons PG&E cut off power to millions of people in California are myriad and complicated and go back the better part of a century.

This is a story of climate change, but it's also a story of messed-up political priorities that

date to when our great-grandparents were still getting used to the idea of electricity. It's a story of disrespect and exploitation of the land, of failures in capitalism, regulation, and political will, of people who don't want to live with the consequences of their decisions, and people who have to live with the consequences of other people's decisions.

There isn't a right answer here, there isn't a single responsible party, and there's not a clear, safe, and easy path forward. In the words of Paradise's mayor, Jody Jones: "It's really kind of a no-win situation."

In California those who wanted to blame PG&E for the power shutdowns called this an infrastructure problem, and PG&E deflected by saying it was a climate change problem. But climate change, and more generally, the wider range of the planetary stress we're living through now, is an infrastructure problem.

I'm not just talking about the 2 degrees centigrade we hear about all the time. Everything from fires to CO2 to biodiversity loss and plastic pollution have come from how we have managed our built environment and currently maintain our infrastructure, and our infrastructure touches every part of life and culture, from forests cleared to create agricultural land for beef and palm oil, to travel-related carbon emissions and heat waves, to the houses built in what was once the California wilds. The issue at the heart of all of these things is how we manage the planet, now that we know that's what we're doing.

None of our old infrastructure was built with planetary management in mind, and very little is even now. What we're dealing with is hundreds of years of something that software world calls technical debt. Technical debt is the shortcuts and trade-offs engineers use to get something done either cheaper or in less time, which inevitably creates the need to fix systems later, often at great cost or difficulty.

Some technical debt is understood up front, some comes from builders being ignorant of the system they are working in. Most of our planet's infrastructure is mired in huge amounts of technical debt, most of which we didn't know we were signing up for at the time, some of which we're just incurring recklessly as we go along, unable to face the scale of the problem and pushing it off on the next generation.

California is a perfect microcosm of this. The infrastructure is failing, and political priorities are just elsewhere. In the case of energy policy, there's a huge push to switch from fossil fuels to renewables, which is much more politically sexy than fixing transmission lines. With housing, it's approving building deeper and deeper into wildlands, often while local policies, old laws, and zoning keep city and suburban density low and property prices unsustainably high.

So here we are: Keeping the lines on will probably kill people. Turning them off will probably kill people. Our political system is facing a real-life trolley problem created by our ever-expanding technical debt. It can't have been easy for the people making the decisions.

I've known people who worked for PG&E in technical roles. I've known plenty of people who work on, and care about, infrastructure. They're not bad people on the whole, and I'm sure part of the aggressive de-energizing came from a rank and file traumatized by last year's fires and acutely terrified of having a hand in killing people. There's almost never as many people cackling in dark rooms while chomping on expensive cigars as people think there are.

There just aren't enough bad guys for all the problems we have right now, leaving us with the hard work fixing problems and not enough of the satisfaction of blaming people.

This past week those who lived in the blackout areas were told to prepare as best they could.

This enraged many, including California Governor

Newsom, who is in charge of the government that would in theory be taking care of this kind of thing. The angry people, from Newsom down, felt somebody, somewhere, was supposed to be responsible for all of this, that there simply weren't supposed to be problems like choosing between fires and blackouts.

But much of the next century is going to be problems like this, not just for California, but for the whole world, as we deal with several generation's worth of technical debt around infrastructure and learning to really manage our planet. There's a lot we can learn from the California case, both about how to fix it, and how to cope in the mean time, like: have a plan.

People often get very angry when they hear that they have to have a plan. During the European heatwave and evacuations ahead of storm surges on the East Coast over the summer, and then California's fall fire-and-blackout season, those living in threatened areas were told to have a plan to take care of their people and themselves.

Sometimes they were told it was time to take care of themselves without much notice. The anger in the case of every disaster is palpable, even though these days the disasters come one after another. Sometimes it seems like we live on a planet slowly traversing the old metaphorical stages of grief – most caught somewhere between denial and anger, with a few out on the scientific frontier starting the process of bargaining.

One of our jobs in this century is to accept that we don't live on the planet we thought we lived on, and our societies aren't doing what we thought they were. Even if we were able to change our politics overnight, which is probably impossible without some planetary level disaster wake up call, it would still take many decades to dig ourselves out of our technical debt, and in the mean time, we have to stay alive and try to thrive.

Everyone who lives on this stressed-out planet have to have plans, at every level from transnational to individual. We have to build resiliency and capacity to cope with unstable and difficult circumstances, potentially for years, as we learn to pay down the technical debt and build the infrastructure that can work with our planet. For Californians that means stores of water and non-perishable foods, spare medication, first aid, batteries, N95 masks, and an evacuation plan, especially for those living in fire-prone areas.

In hurricane zones, it means a go-bag. It can mean a lot of things depending on where you are and what protecting your home and family means to you. Where I live now, it means iodine pills in the bathroom first aid kit, in case the old and poorly maintained nuclear power plant not from my home goes wrong.

There are questions of right and wrong and responsibility our societies need to address, but having a plan not a matter of fairness or right and wrong. Those will be litigated elsewhere or another time. When the fires have started, the lot have gone out, the waters are rising or the radiation is leaking, it's a matter of knowing how to take care of you and yours and your community as best you can.

I can imagine you looking at the screen, saying "It shouldn't be this way!" But it is this way. The world we thought we had, with a safe stable environment and not too many people, that is not the world we live in. That is, in short, not real. At the individual level as well as the policy level, we need to let go of that which is not real.

We are living with infrastructure that is not fit for the reality on our planet. The faster we accept that, the faster we can get to the real work of changing it, politically and socially. Personal resiliency and societal resiliency go hand-in-hand.

Without that, bad infrastructure creates vicious

circles, both logistical and political.

Back in the here and now, a lot of activists have focused in California on private ownership and investor motivations as the problem, proposing taking utilities into public hands as the solution. I'm sympathetic, but suspect this doesn't solve any problems on its own, because there's no solution that doesn't involve difficult tradeoffs, and governments aren't particularly good at difficult tradeoffs.

PG&E or the state need to modernize energy transmission to reduce waste and stop burning down whole towns. We need to modernize existing infrastructure all over the world to cope with the effects of climate change. We also need to replace and build new infrastructure to mitigate climate change and decarbonization for the future. We need to protect biodiversity, and limit extraction. In California, as in the rest of the world, these goals are hard to get out of conflict. They draw on the same pool of money, the same political will, and even the same class of workers.

Both modernizing existing infrastructure and building new sustainable infrastructure at once is slow and viciously expensive. Doing one after another is slower, a little cheaper, and more dangerous. These are the trade-offs that will characterize life in the 21st century on our lovely little water planet.

Our incentives often undermine these goals at every level.

As a simple example, power cuts lead to people buying generators, which are worse for climate change than power generation. This is a pattern we see all over the developing world, like the otherwise modern lifestyle in Beirut, but now showing up in the developed world.

More complexly, the worthy long term goal of bringing power generation closer to where it is used, such as solar roof panels and municipal or micro generation technologies pose a undesirable threat to PG&E. Localized residential and

business power generation is better, with lower emissions and less fire risk. But right now, shifting to local production takes funding away from PG&E, putting it into the position of fighting against a future everyone wants – including most of the people at PG&E. This is because the less money PG&E gets, the less it can do to make power distribution safe by burying or replacing power lines, or meeting the power needs of those who can't generate for themselves, who are most likely to be the poorest customers.

California's political priority of changing power sources to renewables has gone quite well, but has drawn attention and money away from rebuilding boring power lines hanging above unphotogenic scrubby foliage, like the kind that caught fire last year, incinerating Paradise.

Local micropower generation is certainly what we all want in the long term, but because of how we've structured the idea of utility service, it can only reduce funding for large scale projects as fewer and fewer people pay in. These priorities don't have to be in conflict, but until we rethink how we're coordinating our response to infrastructure needs and planetary management, they will be. That is also technical debt.

Part of the difficulty with managing planetary resources is telling people they can't have it all. This is hard with all humans, but especially with Americans. The only thing we seem ok with making personal sacrifice for is war, which seems hardly coincident with calling every major policy "a war on" something or other for the past 60 years.

Let me go straight to one of the roughest things we face: not being able to live where we want.

Californians think it's their pioneering right to build houses and whole towns deep into the wildlands, land evolved to burn in a place that has been catching fire on a geologic time scale. But Fire doesn't care where we think we should

build our wooded, outdoorsy, and cheap retirement homes.

What Californians, as well as many other Americans, and hundreds of millions of people around the world need to give up on is living where they think they ought to be able to live. Californians are busy building new neighborhoods into the rightful territory of giant fast moving infernos; post-Hurricane Texans think they have the right to build in low-elevation Houston, and poverty-stricken Bangladeshis and Indonesians think they should hold on to the shores they've always lived on.

Houston is technical debt. New Orleans is technical debt. Puerto Rico is plagued by intertwined monetary and technical debt. Jakarta is sinking, literally, into technical debt.

Paradise, CA was technical debt.

One of the first lessons of climate, and infrastructure, is that people have to live closer together and in easier places, or they will die. Nature doesn't care who deserves what. Nature is not interested in how things are supposed to be. We are interested in being kinder than nature, we are interested in justice, and we are going to have to be responsible for bringing that kindness and justice to the people displaced by nature, and who are in need in need of the good things we can all have when we pay down that technical debt and build global infrastructure that works for everyone, including nature.

Ultimately, Californians and Texans and Bangladeshis and Indonesians are participating in the same project, along with the rest of us, to manage ourselves and our resources in ways that let us live comfortably and not quite so heavily upon the Earth.

We have to retreat from the shore, stay out of the wild places, and be careful with our water. We have to use less energy, less land, and take better care of each other at the global level. The faster we figure that out, the better our

chances are. Most of the world is past denial now, and so is most of California. Skipping past anger and bargaining and even depression, all the way to acceptance of this new reality, and getting to work, is the best we can do.

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## **A GROWING PROBLEM: AGRICULTURE, CLIMATE, AND TRUMP**

Agriculture is complex even in the best of times. It's nightmarish faced with the mounting climate emergency and the crises Trump creates. This is an open thread.

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## **BACK TO SCHOOL: PLANNING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIVISM SUCCESS**

The GOP as a whole has an abominable track record on environmental protection, from green

energy to toxic waste and now on climate change.  
Focus your fire on them, not your allies.

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## **10 YEARS OF EMPTYWHEEL: KEY NON- SURVEILLANCE POSTS 2011-2012**

Some key non-surveillance posts from 2011 and 2012.

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## **MONDAY: AMERICAN MOUTH**

**In this roundup:** Volkswagen vacillations, disappointments a la Colombia, UK, Hungary (and don't forget Poland!), anthropocene extinction, and maybe a straggling bit at the end to get this Monday on the road.

Today's featured musician is Sam Beam, who performs under the stage name *Iron & Wine*. He's a long-time songwriter whose *oeuvre* falls somewhere between folk and indie rock. Its spareness is successor to grunge, mellow good-humored maturity without the youthful driving angst. You may have heard his work before in TV and film – like *Flightless Bird*, *American Mouth* circa 2007. The video embedded here features one of my favorites, *Tree By The River*, though I prefer the performance of the same song in this video (at 9:43). You can catch Beam's more recent work, *Love Letter for Fire*, with singer Jesca Hoop at this link to the entire album.

### Volkswagen de-volking

- VW doesn't want US to release documents to EU (Reuters) – Bosch, manufacturer of the fraudulently programmed electronic control unit which defeated emissions standards, also doesn't want EU investors and vehicle owners to get their hands on the 20 million documents produced for the the U.S. government suit against Volkswagen. Yeah, no. Wonder where the German government stands on document request?
- 66% of 2.0L passenger diesel owners in U.S. signed up for settlement (USA Today) – That's a lot of buy-outs. Only ~3,300 opted out of the deal altogether. The remaining vehicle owners can still take advantage of the proposed vehicle fix – but good luck with resale on those beasts.
- VW offered \$1.2B to car dealers as settlement (Bloomberg) – IMO, this was light; this could have cost VW a lot more considering how much damage Dieselgate has done to dealers' brands. Offer is subject to approval

by federal court.

- First, Audi tech officer Stefan Knirsch suspended (AutoNews) – If you're going to say something clearly false on the record to media, you deserve a whack for it. This is just plain stupid:

"We don't have the four-eye principle, it's more like the six- or eight-eye principle," he said. "That is a very normal reaction once you've undergone something like this. And, we are extending this beyond the exhaust emissions issue by looking at every software process in r&d within the entire company. We are taking preventive measures to make sure something like this cannot happen again."

- Then Audi tech officer Knirsch stepped down (Forbes) – 'Defenestration', they called it, but they say organized labor gave Knirsch the much-deserved push out the window (I do love that word 'defenestration'), having prevaricated about his role in the emissions defeat technology's implementation.
- Now Audi chief to be questioned (Autocar-UK) – Rupert Stadler, who became

Audi's chairman and CEO in January 2010, has known about the emissions defeat technology in the 3.0L passenger diesel since shortly after he was named to his role. That's four years of doing nothing to stop the defeat before independent research discovered it, and another year-plus before the EPA took action.

- But Audi chief already in hot water over \$14K beer party (Bild am Sonntag) – Um. What? He spent that much money when the company needed to pony up BILLIONS for settlements, recalls, and repairs? VW told him it's on him, out of his own pocket. Sure sounds like VW Group's culture needs a reset.
- Dieselgate will be done by end of year, thinks VW's CEO (Road and Track) – Dude's delusional or just making shit up for the media. Their U.S. engineer won't be sentenced until January, and they still don't have a 3.0L engine fix, let alone a complete deal to offer the owners of those vehicles.
- Meanwhile, Volkswagen thinks

electric cars will help us forget all about Dieselgate (The Verge) – Sure. I'll jump right into a VW programmed by these guys. Forget about it.

#### Disappointing democracy

- Black Monday: As many as 6 million Polish women protest against abortion law (France 24) – Poland's conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party wants to enact a ban on all abortions; Poland already has strict anti-abortion laws, permitting terminations only in the case of rape, fetal deformity, or pregnancy threatens the mother's life. Women modeled a 1975 Icelandic women's strike, wearing black to mark the death of their rights.
- Colombia's low voter turnout may have undermined peace agreement with FARC rebels (Deutsche Welle) – Sub-40 percent turnout for the historic vote on an agreement between Colombia's government and FARC lead to an unexpected defeat. Colombia's ex-president Uribe campaigned against the agreement as it did not hold

FARC accountable for past violence. FARC says it will work with the Colombian government to salvage the agreement.

- UK's PM May indicates focus on immigration limits over market exit (Guardian) – Yeah, double down on racism and nationalism by focusing on limits of free movement by (non-white) people. I'm sure that this will help UK's economy. Meanwhile, banks like Royal Bank of Canada focus on 'smexit' and sterling drops to lowest level since the week after the referendum.
- Bright spot: Hungary's referendum on refugee limits fails (Der Spiegel) – Another case of low voter turnout has a better ending; not enough voters turned out to make referendum limiting the number of refugees legitimate.

#### Extinction level events every day

- Native Hawaiian bees now endangered species along with 48 other local plants and animals (Maui Time) – It'd be nice if neonicotinoids were banned before any more pollinators

became endangered. It's not like we have alternatives to pollinated crops.

- Lone Rabbs' fringed tree frog dies (Scientific American) – The species once found in Panama may have been wiped out by a fungal infection. This sole specimen had been rescued from its Central American home nearly a decade ago. The species is now believed extinct.
- Sixth mass extinction under way may kill large marine animals first (Los Angeles Times) – Large sea creatures may be the most obvious losses, but the extinction of Rabbs' tree frog shows small animal species are already taking the brunt of the anthropocene's deadly force. Human's impact on the environment launched a mass extinction unlike others documented in fossil records.

#### **Longwatch: Blockchain technology**

Digital Catapult and Furtherfield produced a video overview of blockchain technology and its potential use. It's not a very long video – less than 7:50 long – but it provides a brief explanation of the technology's purpose while expressing some fundamental concerns about blockchain's development. The homogeneity of developers, for example, is a legitimate

concern; a lack of diverse thought in development of other software+hardware technology has cost society enormous amounts of productivity while excluding already marginalized populations. A value-transfer system recognized by democratic governments should minimize opportunity costs while protecting interests of all citizens who rely on such a system.

Tuesday's breathing down our necks...and it'll be trash day. What a coincidence. See you then.

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## THURSDAY: ALIEN OCCUPATION

Since I missed a Monday post with a movie clip I think I'll whip out a golden oldie for today's post.

This movie – especially this particular scene – still gets to me 37 years after it was first released. The 'chestburster' as scene is commonly known is the culmination of a body horror trope in Ridley Scott's science fiction epic, *Alien*. The horror arises from knowing something happened to the spacecraft *Nostromo*'s executive officer Kane when a 'facehugger' leapt from a pod in an alien ship, eating through his space helmet, leaving him unresponsive as long as the facehugger remained attached to his face. There is a brief sense of relief once the facehugger detaches and Kane returns to consciousness and normal daily functions. But something isn't right as the subtle extra scrutiny of the science officer Ash foreshadows at the beginning of this scene.

Director Ridley Scott employed a different variant of body horror in his second contribution to the *Alien* franchise, this time by way of a xenomorph implanted in her mimicking

pregnancy in scientist Shaw. She is sterile, and she knows whatever this is growing inside her must be removed and destroyed or it will kill both her and the remaining crew. The clip shared here and others available in YouTube actually don't convey the complete body horror – immediately before Shaw enters this AI-operated surgical pod she is thwarted by the pod's programming for a default male patient. In spite of her mounting panic and growing pain she must flail at the program to enter alternative commands which will remove the thing growing inside her.

I suspect the clips available in YouTube were uploaded by men, or they would understand how integral to Shaw's body horror is the inability to simply and quickly tell this surgical pod GET THIS FUCKING THING OUT OF ME RIGHT THE FUCK NOW.

I don't know if any man (by which I mean cis-man) can really understand this horror. Oh sure, men can realistically find themselves host to things like tapeworms and ticks and other creatures which they can have removed. But the horror of frustration, being occupied by something that isn't right, not normal, shouldn't continue, putting its host at mortal risk – and not being able to simply demand it should be removed, or expect resources to avoid its implantation and occupation in one's self? No. Cis-men do not know this terror.

Now imagine the dull background terror of young women in this country who must listen to white straight male legislators demand ridiculous and offensive hurdles before they will consider funding birth control to prevent sexual transmission of Zika, or fund abortions of Zika-infected fetuses which put their mothers at risk of maternal mortality while the fetuses may not be viable or result in deformed infants who'll live short painful lives. Imagine the horror experienced by 84 pregnant women in Florida alone who've tested positive for Zika and are now being monitored, who don't know the long-term outcomes for themselves or their infants

should their fetuses be affected by the virus.

Body horror, daily, due to occupation not only by infectious agents alien to a woman's body, but occupation by patriarchy.

I expect to get pooh-poohed by men in comments to which I preemptively say fuck off. I've had a conversation this week about Zika risks with my 20-something daughter; she turned down an invitation this past week to vacation with friends in Miami. It's a realistic problem for her should she accidentally get pregnant before/during/immediately following her trip there.

We also talked about one of her college-age friend's experiences with Guillain-Barré syndrome. It's taken that young woman nearly three years to recover and resume normal function. She didn't acquire the syndrome from Zika, but Guillain-Barré's a risk with Zika infections. There's too little research yet about the magnitude of the risk – this vacation is not worth the gamble.

But imagine those who live there and can't take adequate precautions against exposure for economic reasons – imagine the low-level dread. Imagine, too, the employment decisions people are beginning to make should job offers pop up in areas with local Zika transmission.

What's it going to take to get through to legislators – their own experience of body horror? Movies depicting body horror don't seem to be enough.

### **Wheels**

Put these two stories together – the next question is, "Who at VW ordered the emissions cheat device from Bosch before 2008?"

- Bosch asked Volkswagen for indemnification in 2008 (Bloomberg)
- Volkswagen and Bosch met shortly after ICCT revealed

## discovery of emissions cheat device in 2014 (WSJ)

Pretty strong incentives for Volkswagen to  
destroy email evidence. I wonder what Bosch did  
with their emails?

Self-driving electric cars are incredibly close  
to full commercialization based on these two  
stories:

- Michigan's state senate bill  
seeks approval of driverless  
cars (ReadWrite) – Bill  
would change state's code to  
permit "the motor vehicle to  
be operated without any  
control or monitoring by a  
human operator." Hope a  
final version ensures human  
intervention as necessary by  
brakes and/or steering  
wheel. I wonder which  
manufacturer or association  
helped write this code  
revision?
- California now committed to  
dramatic changes in  
greenhouse gas emissions  
(Los Angeles Times) – State  
had already been on target  
to achieve serious  
reductions in emissions by  
2020; the new law enacts an  
even steeper reduction by  
2030 in order to slow  
climate change effects and  
improve air quality.

I don't know if I'm ready to see these on the

road in Michigan. Hope the closed test track manufacturers are using here will offer realistic snow/sleet/ice experience; if self-driving cars can't navigate that, I don't want to be near them. And if Michigan legislators are ready to sign off on self-driving cars, I hope like hell the NHTSAA is way ahead of them – especially since emissions reductions laws like California's are banking heavily on self-driving electric cars.

#### Google-y-do

- Google's parent Alphabet-ting on burritos from the sky (Bloomberg) – No. No. NO. Not chocolate, not doughnuts, not wine or beer, but Alphabet subsidiary Project Wing is testing drone delivery of Chipotle burritos to Virginia Tech students? Ugh. This has fail all over it. Watch out anyhow, pizza delivery persons, your jobs could be on the bubble if hot burritos by drone succeed.
- API company Apigee to join Google's fold (Fortune) – This is part of a big business model shift at Google. My guess is this acquisition was driven by antitrust suits, slowing Google account growth, and fallout from Oracle's suit against Google over Java APIs. Application programming interfaces

(APIs) are discrete programming subroutines which, in a manner of speaking, act like glue between different programs, allowing programmers to obtain resources from one system for use in a different function without requiring the programmer to have more than passing understanding of the resource. An API producer would allow Google's other systems to access or be used by non-Google systems.

- Google to facilitate storage of Drive content at cloud service Box (PC World) – Here's where an API is necessary: a Google Drive user selects Box instead of Drive for storage, and the API routes the Drive documents to Box instead of Drive. Next: imagine other Google services, like YouTube-created/edited videos or Google Photo-edited images, allowing storage or use by other businesses outside of Google.

**Longread: Digitalization and its panopticonic effect on society**

Columbia's Edward Mendelson, Lionel Trilling  
Professor in Humanities and a contributor at PC

Magazine, takes a non-technical look at the effect our ever-on, ever-observing, ever-connected technology has on us.

Catch you later!

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## THURSDAY: CREEP

Covers are often treated like poor relations in hand-me-downs. It's not the performer's own work, how can they possibly do the original justice?

Yeah...and then this. I think it's an example of an exceptional cover. It's one of my favorites. There are a number of other fine covers of this same piece – some are sweet, some have better production values, and some are very close to Radiohead's original recording. But this one has something extra. Carrie Manolakos, a Broadway performer known for her role as Elphaba in *Wicked*, takes a breath at 2:19 and watch out. Her second album will release next month if you enjoy her work.

### In Sickness and Health

Here, read these two stories and compare them:

- Now we know the real reason Aetna bailed on Obamacare (Business Insider)
- Aetna CEO Threatened Obamacare Pullout If Feds Opposed Humana Merger (HuffPo)

Leaving you with the actual heds on these articles. How isn't this simple extortion? You know, like, "Nice national health care system you've got there. It'd be a shame if anything happened to it."

Cry me a river about corporate losses. Last I checked Aetna's been paying out dividends regularly, which means they still have beaucoup cash.

If only we'd had a debate about offering single payer health care for everyone back in 2009 so we could say *Fuck You* to these vampiric corporate blackmailers.

### **Still in Shadow**

A timeline of articles, analysis, commentary on the hacking of NSA malware staging servers by Shadow Brokers – no window dressing, just links:

15-AUG-2016 8:48 AM –  
<https://twitter.com/mikko/status/765168232454037504> (Mikko Hypponen–Kaspersky tweeting discovery of Shadow Brokers' auction of Equation Group code)

16-AUG-2016 7:22 AM –  
<http://cybersecpolitics.blogspot.com/2016/08/why-eqgrp-leak-is-russia.html> (Info sec expert Dave Aitel's assessment on hackers responsible)

16-AUG-2016 7:40 AM –  
<https://twitter.com/Snowden/status/765513662597623808> (Edward Snowden's tweet thread [NB: don't be an idiot and click on any other links in that thread])

16-AUG-2016 7:22 PM –  
<https://securelist.com/blog/incidents/75812/the-equation-giveaway/> (time zone unclear)

16-AUG-2016 ?::? –  
<http://xorcat.net/2016/08/16/equationgroup-tool-leak-extrabacon-demo/>

17-AUG-2016 8:05 AM EST –  
<https://motherboard.vice.com/read/what-we-know-about-the-exploits-dumped-in-nsa-linked-shadow-brokers-hack>

17-AUG-2016 ?::? –  
<https://www.cs.uic.edu/~s/musings/equation-group/> (University of Illinois')

Stephen Checkoway's initial impressions)

17-AUG-2016 7:23 PM EST –

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/nsas-use-of-software-flaws-to-hack-foreign-targets-posed-risks-to-cybersecurity/2016/08/17/657d837a-6487-11e6-96c0-37533479f3f5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/nsas-use-of-software-flaws-to-hack-foreign-targets-posed-risks-to-cybersecurity/2016/08/17/657d837a-6487-11e6-96c0-37533479f3f5_story.html)

18-AUG-2016 6:59 AM EST –

<https://twitter.com/RidT/status/766228082160242688> (Thomas Rid suggests Shadow Brokers' auction may be *"retaliation"* – note at this embedded tweet the use of *"retaliation"* and the embedded, highlighted image in which the words *"Panama Papers"* appear in red. Make of that what you will.[1])

18-AUG-2016 2:35 PM EST –

<https://motherboard.vice.com/read/the-shadow-brokers-nsa-leakers-linguistic-analysis> (Two linguists suggest Shadow Brokers' primary language is English distorted to mimic Russian ESL)

You know what this reminds me of? Sony Pictures' email hacking. Back and forth with Russia-did-it-maybe-not-probably, not unlike the blame game pointing to North Korea in Sony's case. And the linguistic analysis then suggesting something doesn't quite fit.

### **American Refugees**

I read in one of my timelines today a complaint by a journalist about Louisiana flooding news coverage. Wish I'd captured the thread at the time; they were put out that the public was unhappy about the media's reporting – or lack thereof. They noted all the links to articles, videos, photos being shared in social media, noting this content came from journalists.

Except there really is a problem. The embedded image here is the front page of each of the four largest newspapers in the U.S. based on circulation, total combined circulation roughly

six million readers. NONE OF THEM have a story on the front page about the flooding in Louisiana, though three of them covered the California Blue Cut Fire. Naturally, one would expect the Los Angeles Times to cover a fire in their own backyard, and they do have a nice photo-dense piece online. But nothing on the front page about flooding.

The Livingston Parish, Louisiana sheriff noted more than 100,000 parish residents had lost everything in the flood. There are only 137,000 total residents in that parish.

Between the +80,000 Blue Cut Fire evacuees and more than 100,000 left temporarily homeless in Louisiana, the U.S. now has more than a couple hundred thousand climate change refugees for which we are utterly unprepared. The weather forecast this week is not good for the Gulf Coast as unusually warm Gulf water continues to pump moisture into the atmosphere. We are so not ready.

#### **Longread: The last really big American flood**

Seven Scribes' Vann R. Newkirk II looks at the last time a long bout of flooding inundated low-lying areas in the south, setting in motion the Great Migration. This is the history lesson we've forgotten. We need to prepare for even worse because like the Blue Cut Fire in California and Hurricane Sandy in New Jersey and New York, disaster won't be confined to a place too easily written off the front page.

One more day. Hope to make it through.

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[1] *Edited for clarity. Kind of.*

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## **MONDAY: SKATE AWAY**

Monday means it's movie day, and I think this charming little documentary fills the bill. Valley Of A Thousand Hills from Jess Colquhoun

looks at Zulu youth participating in a skate camp and the impact on their lives. They're quite optimistic in spite of limited resources and opportunities. The film left the feeling they're on the verge of a breakthrough – like these kids could really change global culture if they wanted to. They appear more self-aware and energized than most adults I run into of late.

#### Wrath of Gods kind of weather

- Catastrophic flooding displaced more than 20,000 Baton Rouge area residents (NOLA.com) – Damn it, the news coverage on this flooding was so thin this morning save for local papers. Flood victims include the governor and his family who had to be rescued from their home; actor Wendell Pierce lost everything in his Baton Rouge area home. Four parishes had already been declared a disaster including Tangipahoa, St. Helena, East Baton Rouge and Livingston.
- Aerial photos show massive damage to more than 10,000 homes (TheAdvocate.com) – Follow Maya Lau on Twitter for more photos; LSU campus is inundated and many homes are beneath water to their rooflines.
- Severe monsoon flooding

displaced 50,500 around Manila, Philippines (Floodlist) – There have been a handful of deaths reported with more persons unaccounted for. Worst rainfall amount in 24-hour period 14-15 August was 6 inches over the Dagupan area. More rain is expected.

- Half a month's rain in short time period floods Moscow (euronews) – Flooding is worst Moscow has seen in 130 years. Reporting is extremely thin about this event which occurred over the last 24-48 hours.
- Massive flash flood killed 20 last weekend in Skopje, Macedonia (video, France24) – There's quite a bit of video from other outlets in YouTube about the flooding; ironic that Russian aid workers went to help Macedonia just before flooding began in Moscow.
- Nearly 3000 homes swamped in Thailand (Bangkok Post) – Flooding near Phayao was the worst in seven years; at least one person is missing.
- Sudanese states Kassala, Sennar, South Kordofan, West Kordofan and North Darfur flooded, killing 100 (Deccan

Chronicle) – Heavy rains since June worsening two weeks ago led to a late night flash flood that swept away villages. More than 100,000 have been displaced. Clean drinking water is now a serious problem.

Might be time to brush off that copy of J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and ponder a post-apocalyptic future under water. We've likely passed the 1.5C degree global warming threshold without any sense of urgency to act on climate change which fuels this wave of flooding.

#### Sigh-ber

- Hotels across ten states breached (Reuters) – Hey, now you philanderers have an excuse for that bizarre charge to your room at the Starwood, Marriott, Hyatt, or InterContinental hotel for strawberries, whip cream, and a leather flogger during your last business trip. "It's just a hacker, honey, that's all, really..." HEI Hotels & Resorts, the operator of the affected hotels, found the malware in its systems handling payment card data. The malware had been present in the system for roughly 18 months while 20,000 transactions were exposed.

- Google 'secretly' developing a new OS (TechnoBuffalo) – A well-known Linux blogger wrote Google references "Pink + Purple == Fuschia (a new Operating System)" in its Git repository. The two colors are believed to refer to Magenta and LK kernels which Google is using to build a wholly new operating system. Magenta does not have a Wikipedia entry at the time of this post but Googlesource has a brief explainer for Magenta and LK. The two kernels serve different purposes but combined they may be able to operate any device whether small Internet of Things single purpose devices or multi-purpose devices like personal computers. This may be the direction Google has chosen to go rather than fully merge its Chrome OS with Android. The new operating system could also resolve some annoying problems with antitrust regulators if Android is cut loose and managed by an open source consortium, perhaps one established by and aligned with the Open Handset Alliance.

- Banking malware attacks Android users browsing sites using Google AdSense (SecureList) – The thieves pay for a listing on AdSense, put their malicious ad in the system, and it downloads to an Android device whenever the user reads a website featuring the contaminated ad. Yuck. Use your antivirus app regularly on your Android devices as this nasty thing may pick up your financial information.

#### Longread: Manners matter?

At Aeon.com, Professor Eleanor Dickey of University of Reading-UK discusses the 'magic word' and its use in early democratic society, and its decline with the rise of a hierarchical system in the fourth century BCE. Are we a more or less democratic society based on our current level of societal manners?

Catch you tomorrow if the creek doesn't rise!

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## **THE JUST RIGHT FEAR INDUSTRY, IN 18,000 WORDS**

Steven Brill thinks we're not worried enough about bioterrorism and dirty bombs. He makes that argument even while acknowledging that a dirty bomb attack launched in Washington DC would result in just 50 additional cancer

deaths. And curiously, his extensive discussion about germ threats (inspired by a Scooter Libby report, no less!) doesn't mention that the Russian military is currently struggling to contain an anthrax attack launched by a thawing reindeer.

That's the problem with Brill's opus: anthrax attacks only matter if they're launched by Islamic extremist reindeers, not reindeers weaponized by climate change. (And if you were wondering, although he discusses it at length, Brill doesn't mention that the 2001 anthrax attack, which was done with anthrax derived from a US lab, has never been solved.)

He makes a similar error when he spends 18 paragraphs focusing on what he (or his editors) dub "cyberterrorism" only to focus on OPM as proof the threat exists and includes this paragraph from Jim Comey admitting terrorists don't yet have the capabilities to hurt us our Chinese and Russian adversaries do.

For his part, the FBI's Comey worries more about a cyberterror onslaught directed at the private sector than one directed at the government. "These savages," he says, "have so far only figured out how to use the internet to proselytize, not to wreak physical damage. What happens when they figure out how to use it to break into a chemical plant, or a blood bank and change the blood types? We know they are trying. And they don't have to come here to do it."

Biothreats and hacking are a threat. But it would be sheer idiocy to approach the problem, at this point, as primarily one of terrorism when climate change and nation-state adversaries clearly present a more urgent threat.

But it's not just Brill who adopts some weird categorization. The article is perhaps most interesting for the really telling things he

gets Comey to say, as when he suggests FBI drops investigations when they hear a “wing nut” making bomb threats in a restaurant.

“Think about it from our perspective,” Comey said when I asked about this. “Suppose someone is overheard in a restaurant saying that he wants to blow something up. And someone tells us about it. What should we do? Don’t we need to find out if he was serious? Or was he drunk? The way to do that is to have someone engage him in an undercover way, not show up with a badge and say, ‘What are your thoughts in regard to terrorism?’ ”

“Plenty of times it’s a wing nut or some drunk, and we drop it,” he continued.

I actually think the FBI, as an institution, is better than this. But to have the FBI Director suggest his bureau wouldn’t follow up if someone making bomb threats was deemed a radical but would if they were deemed a Muslim is really telling.

Which gets to the core of the piece. Over the course of the 18,000+ words, Brill admits – and quotes both President Obama and Comey admitting – that what makes terrorism different from the equally lethal attacks by other mentally unstable or “wing nut” types is the fear such attacks elicit.

President Obama described the difference to me this way: “If the perpetrator is a young white male, for instance—as in Tucson, Aurora, and Newtown—it’s widely seen as yet another tragic example of an angry or disturbed person who decided to lash out against his classmates, co-workers, or community. And even as the nation is shaken and mourns, these kinds of shootings don’t typically generate widespread fear. I’d point out that when the shooter or victims are African

American, it is often dismissed with a shrug of indifference—as if such violence is somehow endemic to certain communities. In contrast, when the perpetrators are Muslim and seem influenced by terrorist ideologies—as at Fort Hood, the Boston Marathon bombing, San Bernardino, and Orlando—the outrage and fear is much more palpable. And yet, the fact is that Americans are far more likely to be injured or killed by gun violence than a terrorist attack.”

The FBI’s Comey agrees. “That the shooter in San Bernardino said he was doing it in the name of isil changed everything,” he told me. “It generates anxiety that another shooting incident, where the shooter isn’t a terrorist, doesn’t. That may be irrational, but it’s real.”

Nevertheless, all three – even Brill, in a piece where he takes Obama to task for not publicizing his change in dirty bomb response, refers to “deranged people and terrorists” obtaining assault weapons as if they are mutually exclusive categories – seem utterly unaware that part of the solution needs to be to stop capitulating to this fear. Stop treating terrorism as the unique, greatest threat when you know it isn’t. Channel the money being spent on providing tanks to local police departments to replacing lead pipes instead (an idea Brill floats but never endorses). Start treating threats to our infrastructure – both physical and digital – including those caused by weaponized reindeer as the threat they are.

And for chrissakes, don’t waste 18,000 words on a piece that at once scolds for fearmongering even while perpetuating that fear.