WEDNESDAY MORNING: SIMPLE PAST, PERFECT FUTURE

There are thirteen verb tenses in English. I couldn't recall the thirteenth one to save my life and now after digging through my old composition texts I still can't figure out what the thirteenth is.

If I have to guess, it's probably a special case referring to future action. Why should our language be any more lucid than our vision?

Vision we've lost; we don't elect people of vision any longer because we don't have any ourselves. We vote for people who promise us bullshit based on illusions of a simple past. We don't choose people who assure us the road will be hard, but there will be rewards for our efforts.

Ad astra per aspera.

Fifty-five years ago today, John F. Kennedy Jr. spoke to a join session of Congress, asking our nation to go to the moon. I was six months old at the time. This quest framed my childhood; every math and science class shaped in some way by the pursuit, arts and humanities giving voice to the fears and aspirations at the same time.

In contrast I look at my children's experience. My son, who graduates this year from high school, has not known a single year of K-12 education when we were not at war, when terrorism was a word foreign to his day, when we didn't worry about paying for health care because we'd already bought perma-warfare. None of this was necessary at this scale, pervading our entire culture. What kind of vision does this create across an entire society?

I will say this: these children also don't recall a time without the internet. They are deeply skeptical people who understand how easy

it is to manipulate information. What vision
they have may be biased toward technology, but
their vision is high definition, and they can
detect bullshit within bits and pixels. They
also believe we have left them no choice but to
boldly go and build a Plan B as we've thoroughly
trashed Plan A.

Sic itur ad astra. Sic itur ad futurum.

Still looking at past, present, and future…

Past

- Interview with Prof. Andrew
  Bacevich (ThisIsHell) — Yes,
  THAT Bacevich, who looks
  back at 120 years of U.S.
  military warfare. Give a
  listen as he cuts through
  the fog-of-war-bullshit. And
  then read his article in
  Harper's.
- $1.1M Millennium Technology
  Prize awarded to Caltech
  biochemical engineer Frances
  Arnold (LAT) — Based on her
  work on directed evolution,
  Arnold is the first woman to
  win this prize. It's worth
  noting how her career
  trajectory was shaped by the
  Reagan administration. What
  did we lose by not having
  her working on alternative
  energy in the 1980s-1990s?
- Blast from the past profile
  on Elon Musk (Inc.) — If
  you've heard all the buzz
  about Peter Thiel/Hulk
  Hogan/Nick Denton/Gawker,

you may want to read this piece circa 2007 and note Thiel's role in shaping Musk's future.

- Failing to learn from our arts and humanities past hurts us (Chronicle) — Neoliberalism's tendency to measure everything in discrete terms places too much emphasis on STEM and not enough on arts and humanities including the classics. I always think of this particular argument justifying balance.

Present

- An Inconvenient Anniversary: a decade of climate science's progress (ScientificAmerican) — Yesterday marked ten years since Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth was released. SA looks at our current scientific status compared to 2006.
- Coca Cola halts production in Venezuela due to lack of sugar (Reuters) — Given the dramatic drought in VZ, I'm actually surprised it wasn't a lack of electricity or water that put the brakes on Coke. Not a positive indicator of our progress

since 2006

- Primary school for low-income students funded by Facebook may not open due to lack of water (The Guardian) — A serious water shortage is tying up permits for a squeaky-new school built by Facebook in East Palo Alto. Huh…seems odd a company with access to so much data couldn't see this coming. Yet another poor indicator of progress since 2006.
- Nice explainer on the invisible part of the internet (Ars Technica) — A bit over the heads in a few places when it touches on modulation and multiplexing and other terms without adequate definition, but still a solid read about the current state of the internet.
- Google+Levi's interactive jacket (ItsNiceThat) — Because you can't get to work these days without being jacked into the invisible internet.

Future

- Comparing Apple to BlackBerry, developer Marco Arment frets for Apple's future (Marco.org) — I can't

help laugh at this bit:

> …When the iPhone came out, the
> BlackBerry continued to do well
> for a little while. But the
> iPhone had completely changed
> the game…

Not only is Arment worrying Apple
hasn't grokked AI as Google has, he's
ignored Android's ~80% global
marketshare in mobile devices. That
invisible giant which hadn't
'completely changed the game.'

- Ivanpah Solar Power Facility
  in the Mojave Desert caught
  fire (WIRED) — IMO, sounds
  like a design problem;
  shouldn't there be a fail-
  safe on this, a trigger when
  temps spike at the tower in
  the wrong place? Anyhow, it
  looks like Ivanpah has other
  problems ahead now that
  photovoltaic power
  production is cheaper than
  buggy concentrated solar
  power systems.
- Women, especially WOC, win a
  record number of Nebula
  awards for sci-fi (HuffPo) —
  Prizes for Novel, Novella,
  Novelette, Short Story and
  Young Adult Science Fiction
  and Fantasy works went to
  women, which is huge
  improvement given how many
  writers and readers are
  women and women of color.

What does the future look
like when a greater
percentage of humans are
represented in fiction? What
does a more gender-balanced,
less-white future hold for
us?

Either I start writing late the night before, or
I give up the pretense this is a * morning *
roundup. It's still morning somewhere, I'll
leave this one as is for now. Catch you tomorrow
morning — maybe — or early afternoon.