

Existential Weather Report (Election Day 2020)

by stephen hastings-king

How strangely things feel. Today was lovely and warm, the light November soft, people were out and seemed happy unless they didn't, the restaurants full, Plague Time still upon us, the aggregate numbers keep increasing, Massachusetts just changed its daily data release, now they're about granular testing data, worries about hospital capacities have subsided so the state now tracks it by region rather than by the older census of individual hospitals, even as the daily hospital census was the only day-to-day indicator of how things might stand where any given in-state user lives, these format changes have thrown users into a more aggregate-dependent understanding of Plague Time than has been the case since April, aggregate increase numbers are a vice that is tightening except, unlike most vices that tighten, but you don't know where it is tightening, except on Thursdays, when the state's city/town data lets you know where it had been tightening the previous week----(if you're lucky) Plague Time is mostly a data-effect: today that effect permeated the interpretation of what I was seeing as I drove past, doing errands that were primarily about needing olives for a martini to celebrate the it's finally over, knowing, for example, that the dead weight of third-way neoliberalism is still upon us, but, I had decided, at approximately 11:27 this morning, to say fuck it, I'll think about that tomorrow, along with the vexing problem of how is it possible that 70.5 million voted for Trump, knowing what we know of him in 2020, but today, I decided, in a similar vein, at approximately 11:27 this morning, that I'm just going to go with the fact that several million more did not vote for him and that now, save for the lame duck and the narcissistic injury that will give it such flight as it might have in the end, it's over. It's over. And, for the time being, that's enough.

Nonetheless, I keep thinking: The past four years. What the fuck was that?

Outside was lovely and warm, the light soft, people were out, the restaurants were full, Plague Time a barrier, a sense reinforced by driving around in a car, doing errands that were primarily about needing olives for a martini to celebrate the end of whatever that was that just happened, so that the collective experience of electoral victory that I would have preferred was everywhere mediated by being-in-a-car, except for the minute it took to pass a celebration in Newburyport, downtown by a traffic light, on a day of particularly slow traffic because it was there-won't-be-many-afternoons-like-this-until-spring crowded, traffic was at a crawl, we ended up stopped in front of a celebration of maybe 20 people, Biden/Harris swag and drums, passing car-horns honking. and it was poignant, as celebrations go, everybody separated by masks and windows and Plague Time, but the situation of being stranded at a red light in front of them nonetheless came with a sense of solidarity that was also a reminder that Plague Time presented Donald Trump an imperative to govern, which he had no idea how to do---so while Plague Time may have reduced solidarity to sightlines and recognitions at a traffic light that expressed itself as horn honks and maybe tears, it was also a fundamental condition of possibility for our being able, finally, to rid ourselves of him.

Later, at home, on the internet, I assemble fragments of street celebrations from cities one coast to the other. I watch them and listen in the compressed fidelity of computer speakers. How strangely things feel.

Our tour of the northeast quadrant of Massachusetts revealed that, while some Trump 2020 swag remains (flags, large signs on buildings, smaller ones on lawns), much has come down, including a particularly obnoxious assemblage on Route 1 at Linebrook Road that was, a week ago, comprised of dozens of signs (God and Guns and Blood and Soil, Jesus 2020, No More Bullshit, Fuck Your Feelings, etc.). Only one sign remains (Jesus 2020). Where the blood and soil billboard was is now an American flag. But the mega-

swag display at a Salisbury construction company is still up. Even though the place was obviously closed, I flipped it off as I passed. I'm guess I'm not over whatever just happened. What I'm sure of is that I'm really, really tired. I don't know why. I'll think about it tomorrow.

