





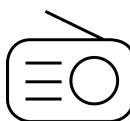
For you -

*In spaces reclaimed
and out on the lonely highway,*

*May you find
what feels like home*

ephemera

a Kentucky Route Zero fanzine



For the best possible experience, scan this QR code (or [click here](#)) for a playlist of songs you can feed through your headphones (or the radio on your delivery truck) as you make your way down the Zero.



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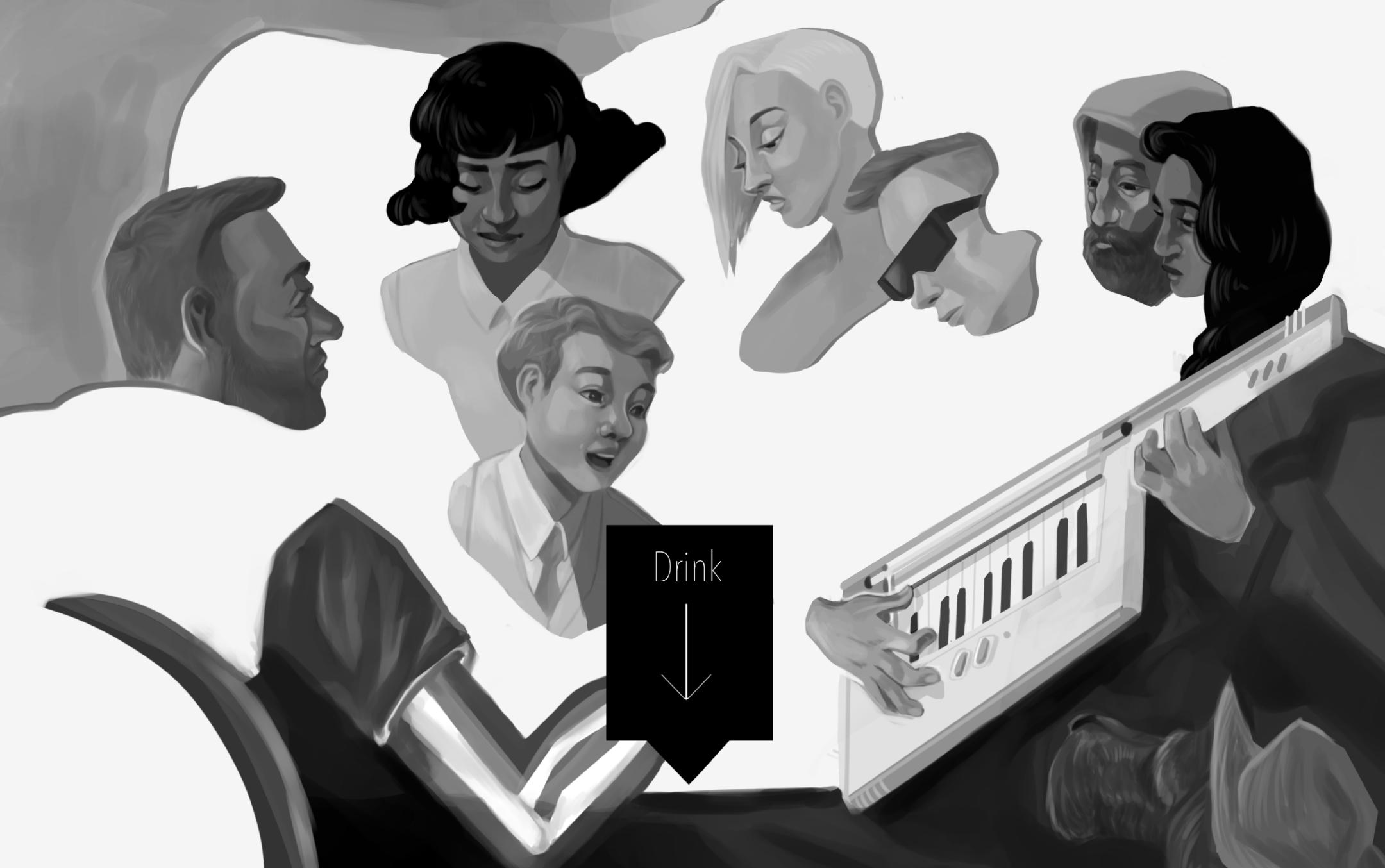
Ephemera is a collaborative fanzine co-published by Angela Lee & Liz Walcher, in conjunction with twenty other artists and authors. This collection of works is inspired by the game **Kentucky Route Zero**, conceived and created by Jake Elliott, Tamas Kemenczy, and Ben Babbitt. All materials herein belong to their respective creators. All other materials and properties belong to the Consolidated Power Co. and will be taxed/billed accordingly.

Thank you to all of the talented and creative people involved in the making of this work: *Michelle O. Grimmer, Hannah Nicklin, Novel, Josh Lambert, Liz Walcher, Alice Tirard, Leon Reinstein Andriguetto, Eva “laughingpinecone,” Andrea McKid, Terry Laundy, Ilya Zagainov, Quinn K., Josh Reyes, Alex K., Hannah Lawler, Jo Chung, eli fessler, Evan McIntyre, Benedict Lee, and Sara Hamraz.*

Special thanks to Nicolas for initially starting and organizing this labor of love, and to Liz Walcher for her extensive work formatting and editing this zine.

To contact the organizer of this zine with any questions, feedback, or general musings, send an email to hyrulianLegend@gmail.com.

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Drink



For the Shannon / Weaver Dichotomy
by Quinn K.



It says that when you flip a coin
The sound it makes shows both its sides
One side up, only a windchime
The other side up, it's death and light

Try to communicate your worry
Through a speaker, a signal, a code
Your language the same, your listener mute
No words arrive in its brain

Now it is talking to you
The channel one-sided and dead
You hear droning noise, barely speech
You read the closed captions, and understand

A bottle of painkillers with you
You head to the mine of their death
One side of the coin lost its parents
The other is gone, perhaps dead

They owed their death to the company store
That's where you'll owe yours.

At this time you give your last call
Perhaps to your lover or friend
Then an old man arrives, dog in tow
And you ask yourself: "Is this my end?"

You hook yourself to that man tonight
Bound together by falling rock and life
By the irresistible yelp of the speakers
And a yell in a deeper growing darkness

One side of the coin meets the other,
but the coin now is bent, doesn't know what to do
You cannot go home,
You cannot get through

Perhaps you'll just start as a driver.



Choices

by Josh Lambert



Kentucky Route Zero is a confrontational game in regards to the mechanic of player choice in video games, specifically conversational dialogue. Choice in games is often flaunted as a component of the interactivity of the medium. But this is just as often a limited avenue. Games seek to give you different ways to play, in order to increase player agency. A favorite phrase of game companies and designers is, “Make your own game world” or “Play your own unique experience”. This is also commonly attributed to design choices like open-world or non-linear over linear. And games have introduced more procedural elements, more actual randomness, that can contribute to this. But dialogue is still hampered and clumsy.

Game dialogue options regularly fall into narrow slots. There is the good or evil selection, which is sometimes replaced by the nice guy or anti-hero selection, since most games set you up as the great hero. Other dialogue paths presented to you tends to turn every conversation into an interrogation. You’re going down a list, checking off questions to advance the plot, or a mission, or gain background on things. Often whatever you choose is tied to a reward or affects the gameplay or the plot. Characters are there as experts on whatever the game wants to tell you about. Little to nothing can be read into them, their personalities are often stock or non-descript, and the actual writing is formalist information with a splash of basic theme tossed on. Any attempt to throw on atmosphere, emotion or humor is usually jarring and ineffective. *Kentucky Route Zero* is an inversion of this.

Dialogue selections in *Kentucky Route Zero* are fleeting and laconic. They can be funny, morbid, exhausted, hopeful, and sarcastic. They can be poignant and dumb as hell. They’re often purposefully inconsequential. And that lends them a power and significance unlike any game I’ve played. The writing is good, and it reinforces that the game is about real characters. Not archetypes, but also not blank slates that you map choices onto. The game is labeled as surreal or magical-realist, and I guess those fit as well as any, but it also feels alive and prone to variables. Sometimes I make dialogue choices quickly, or I just choose

the most direct option. But other times I think long about a choice or am intrigued by an opaque sentence. *Kentucky Route Zero* is a mostly linear game, and the dialogue options largely seem to lead you to the same point (I have not replayed any of the chapters, preferring to keep a single playthrough until the game is finished). How you get there, then, would seem to be immaterial, but instead that's a large part of the experience, and a hugely enjoyable part. A lot of this is that the writing is, once again, quite good, but also due to how the dialogue seems throwaway on the surface makes the characters more alive, lets you build the world, and makes you care about everything that's happening. And this successful and enjoyable use of choice is more interesting because it seemingly counteracts a huge thematic part of the game.

Kentucky Route Zero is about how our world offers a disproportionate number of us no choice. Capitalism and bureaucracy have incurred obligations on us, in realms psychological, financial, and social, not to mention our own personal debts. There is no way out within the structure. As an aside, *Kentucky Route Zero* will often give you multiple options for a dialogue choice, and not always from one character.

A selection in most cases moves the conversation forward, and the other options cannot be returned to in order to be selected. There are several members of the cast at any given moment, and sometimes the main group won't be in the scene and you can make other choices for other characters. This comes up in Act 2 when you visit the Museum of Dwellings, which shows off various buildings and structures. You learn the people who lived in the area were allowed to remain after their living spaces were destroyed to build the museum, staying in the attractions as a living space. As you walk through the museum, you don't speak to the inhabitants. Instead, you process through recordings of employees that work there as they ask the inhabitants what they know about your group from the time you were there earlier. This just happens, there is no real demarcation point to the flashback, and it takes a bit to realize what is happening. But the dialogue choices are from the perspective of the employees.

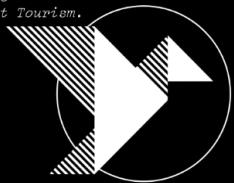
If game dialogue often falters into interrogation, this is one that is designed to be so from the outset. You are forced to ask these questions, and they are unlike the dialogue throughout the rest of the game.

The writing is the type of annoyance that categorizes modern communication. Passive-aggressive, polite but uncaring, a light layer of hostility smoothed over with the necessity of occupation. And I felt sick choosing it. I didn't want to ask these questions, I wanted to leave these people alone. These wrenched me more than any of the keyed-up morality exercises games like to throw at you to prove their maturity. This was the amoral hell we all find ourselves in as we're making it day-by-day. We are often the people asking the questions, as much as we may not want to be or we simply don't realize the ends we're working for, the conditions we're reinforcing. That made the lack of transition into it even more effective. More and more, you look around and think on what you've done or what you do and despair. How'd it all get to this point? How culpable am I? What other options do I have?

So if *Kentucky Route Zero* is a game about how choice is rarely an option, yet contains a sprawling array of choices that bring it to life, what does that lead to? On one hand, the end of Act III, where the game takes control of the cursor from the player and forces them to click the only bad option available (I hope I'm not the only one who just sat there not wanting to do anything until the cursor moved and was slightly spooked). On the other hand, a tough conversation between two people, a reflection on how the sun looked one morning, an exploration of the sense of déjà vu upon sticking a hand in an aquarium, or the ramblings of a child. These are the small things *Kentucky Route Zero* makes into something greater. And, for now anyway, these are the things that haven't been taken away from us, the choices we've still got.



A service of the
Bureau of Secret Tourism.



Weekly route schedule

31

On rainy Tuesdays,
when an owl hoots
Every other Saturday,
when you remember a
childhood memory

3:61 a.m., daily, and
4:85 p.m., daily

65

With the
first tulip
of spring
At inopportune times
When predicted by a
passing astronomer

2:27 z.m., Mon. & Sat.

70

Twice, at 3:13 p.m. on Dec. 29,
2004 and at 11:00 a.m. on Jan. 28,
2020

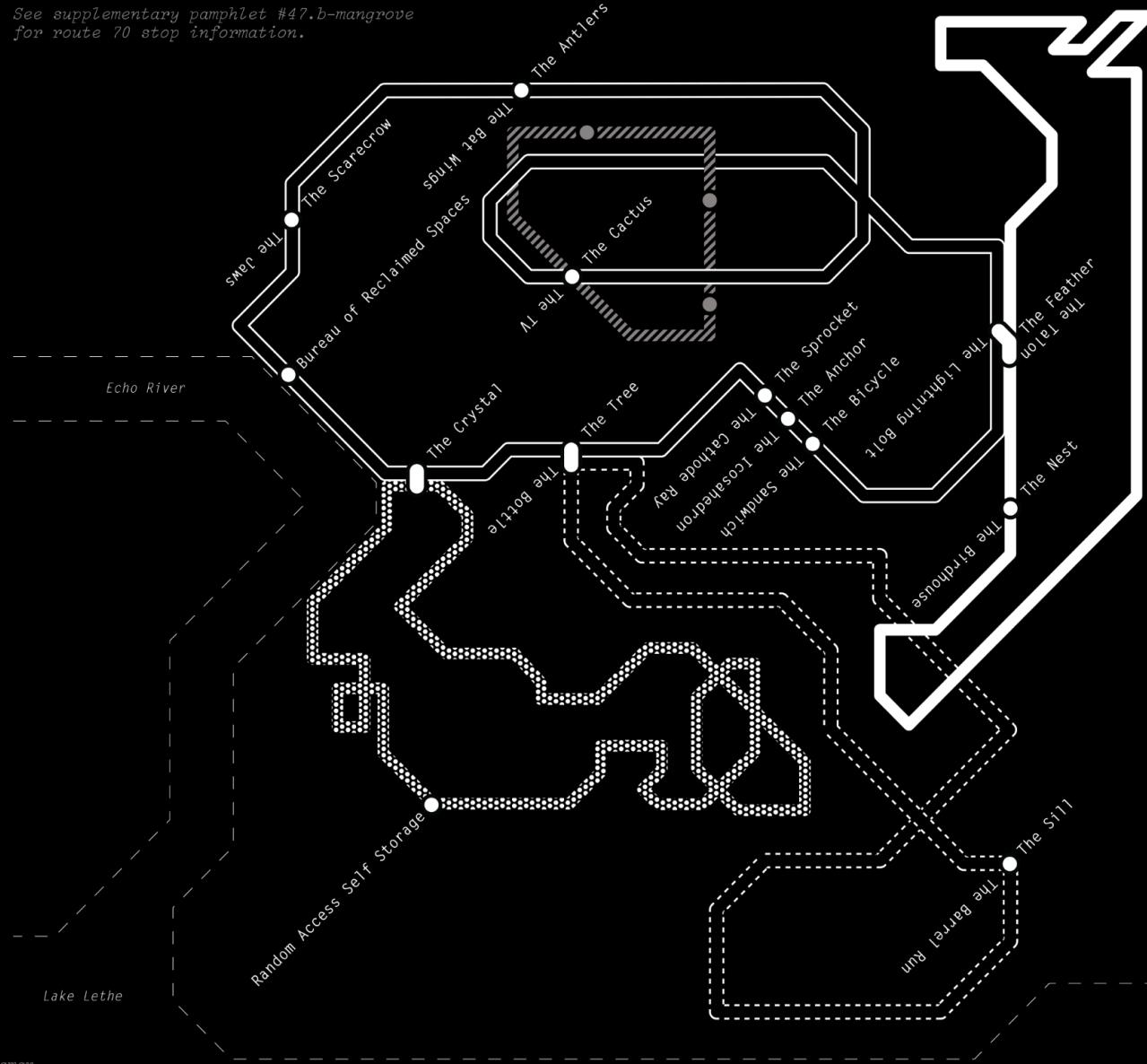
259

When tuned
to 52 Hz,
listening
idly
When emboldened by a
sense of duty
When the solitude sets
in, and reaches the
heart

3192

After
yawning
without
realizing
When a phone rings
twice to no answer
Not long after praying
for the happiness of
another

See supplementary pamphlet #47.b-mangrove
for route 70 stop information.



XANADU: You reached the caverns measureless to man,
and sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean.





For an old man
by Quinn K.



In the streets and in your name there's country songs
Bluest grass and moonshine, inveterate white
There's a veil eroding dog and man alike
One that binds them to a strangeness and another
Is the strange then real, does it have ideas?
Is it cell or cancer for itself and others?
Yellow bones as pale as whiskey mute stand here
Stop and sink or act and live and take the wheel.

Jr qevsg nybat hapregnva jnirf nf zvfg fcenlf hf fb pbyq

[PHONE MESSAGE START]

by Alex Koontz



(A young man's voice mid-sentence. An oscillating fan can be heard in the background)

Message: ...of course I was upset about it. I mean who wouldn't be, right? But I kept telling myself that the one is out there. That's what they always say, isn't it? Ha ha...

But later that same night I drifted into a fog of pitch blackness. I don't remember how I got there. I wasn't scared at all though. The darkness was mine, crafted by my own mind and misery.

My senses started coming back one by one, first with the feeling of rain. Not rain in the normal sense, but a lukewarm mist. It was really comforting. The air was thicker than pine sap.

Next came the smell of fresh flowers. I'm no expert on the subject but it seemed like Lavender. Or maybe it was Lilac... or even a Lily now that I think about it... but anyway, a soothing wave of ease washed over me.

I tried to speak, and I mean I really tried, but nothing came out. It was a bit nerve-racking at first, but I got used to the sudden disability. To be honest I didn't want to hear my voice. To be absorbed into the silent, humid air would be perfect.

And it was perfect for a long time. Could've been minutes or days. I won't say that time stopped, but it sure as hell wasn't moving much. My internal clock was striking thirteen.

Before being completely consumed by these feelings a light appeared. Small at first, but then it grew until it blanketed my vision. A ray of sunshine in the abyss of my surroundings. I reached out farther than I'd ever reached and grasped the light.

Then I turned the handle to shut off the shower.

[PHONE MESSAGE END]





*Miners and Manipulations:
The Exploited Workers Analogy*
by Novel



In recent mediums of art, there has been some difficulty in representing a holistic symbol of capitalist oppression. A wanting for an occupation that had a strong correlation between the work endured and impact on the mental and physical health of the worker. It also needed to be recognized and understood by a large majority of people.

The life of the miner easily embodies all of these facets, providing not only a political and social commentary, but also a spiritual one. The first miners worked in near darkness, caked in dirt and at a constant fear of death. Of course contemporary employees work in darkness but it's a modern darkness, dealing not with the vacancy of light but of information and the access to public funds. The darkness of corporate greed.

Most blue or white collar workers return to their home, a catalyst of both impending debt and a small necessary treasure. The home attempts to symbolize your personal independence. Miners worked long hours and with their muscles sore, their bones near broken and all essentially for a family they may never see, becoming starved and destitute, exploited with no access to recourse. Clearly this is not only the story of the average miner but of the average 99% currently within the world we live.

The coal and minerals found did not go to helping those in need or the people who pulled them from wet rock, but the people who owned the mine and its contents, and by extension owned the workers. This narrative is being lead by millions of people today.

Due to the universal nature of the miner it's no surprise that the plight of the mining class has been used as an analogy for economic and social oppression, and *Kentucky Route Zero* was where I experienced this narrative tool for the first time. I have no clue whether I'd actually experienced this before in all honesty, but if so then I'd still never seen it used in such a confident and eloquent manner.

Other mediums dabbled in similar themes, such as the motion picture “There Will Be Blood” (which primarily used the oil industry to express similar issues, such as personal corruption and moral dissociation), but this was the first game I’m aware of that chose to tell this kind of story in such a way. I still remember playing the first chapter of KRZ and reaching the dark and haunted mines, discovering the exploitation and horrific death of its workers and realizing the many parallels I personally witness and read about today.

The game *Night In The Woods* which touches on similar themes of socialism and anti-capitalism also features miners heavily within its narrative, with the intent being mostly the same as KRZ. The game even features direct references to the world of Kentucky Route Zero through an underground boat section, featuring the eponymous boat named ‘Junebug.’

Growing up in England, and specifically in a county famous for being built on a prosperous yet downtrodden mining community, these themes feel potent and palatable. Many English people still abhor the Thatcherism movement that decided people had mined beneath our Earth enough and only the entrepreneurial and tech savvy could continue to truly earn a wage, and by extension a good living standard. The land where I grew up was excavated and exhumed to the point that houses subsided and the skies were black with industry, no remorse was felt by the rich and gentry for the commodity they sent down into the depths.

Thank you for reading and people, feel free to contact me or hug me.





From "A Psychogeography of Games"

by Hannah Nicklin

This essay (including its introduction) was written in 2015. At the time of review (early 2021) the package the author sent to Jake is still missing. It has now been in limbo for over half a decade. We are still waiting.

I'm doing a project at the moment called 'A Psychogeography of Games' as part of a residency at Videobrains, 'psychogeography' being a bit of chewy word made up by some French philosophers to describe how the landscape of our lives affects how we move, think and act. So I've been walking with game designers in places that are important to them and talking to them about how the landscape of their lives affects their game design.

The 14:03 to Dalston Junction

The 14:03 to Dalston Junction arrives at 14:06. On the train I half listen to a podcast about Sandhogs - the men and women who dug the Lincoln Tunnel in New York. I read an article in which a teacher defends a letter sent to parents threatening to report them to social services if they let their 7-11 year olds play 18 rated video games. One parent thinks "18" is the difficulty rating, and is proud that their 10 year old can play Call of Duty. Writing this now, it occurs to me that everyone could do better at communicating.

I get off at Shoreditch High Street station. It's a new build, all high concrete ceilings, bold edges, and vending machines shrunken by the width of the ticket hall. I frown at Boxpark and its limited edition pop up shop fronts. Turn right, under the railway lines. Less than 200m on, a Tower Hamlets branded litter bin overflows. Two homeless men talk, sat on a discarded mattress. My podcast is long finished, but I leave my headphones in.

I nearly walk past the entrance to the market. It's thresholded by MAC and Fred Perry stores in subtle navy blue and I worry again that not knowing London well enough I've chosen a Disneyland of a market - like Greenwich or Borough, but on entering I find cobbles and stalls covered in sedimentary layers of knick knacks.

I breathe out. It's ok.

Elizabethtown, Kentucky

Jake and I talk over email to begin with. He's eager to be involved and we begin to talk about where he likes to walk, outside Elizabethtown, Kentucky. Kentucky is a large state - I type this and I think about the banality of that statement. All states are large to me. I come from the second largest county in England, but I can cycle across it in less than half a day. Kentucky: it would take 30 hours, crossing one time zone.

Where Jake lives in Kentucky it's largely flat farmland. There's not really a way away from his house without using a car, there's a wood you can walk through, but without a car, you can't get far.

Jake can't drive.

Jake's favourite place to walk, he tells me, is Peddler's Mall, a flea market on the site of an old Walmart in Elizabethtown. His wife drives him there. We decide that the walk we will go on, on the same day, will be to the same kind of place: through our local flea markets. I choose Spitalfields, and he heads to Peddler's Mall. On the 2nd of April, on both sides of the Atlantic, we sift through the layers of pre-owned miscellany and choose 8 items between us, posting them to one another in the days following.

Chicago, Illinois

My package from Jake is stuck in Chicago. On April 10 2015, 3:19am the parcel arrived at the USPS Facility in Louisville, KY. 19 hours and 17 minutes later it departed the USPS Facility in Louisville, and arrive on the 11th April 2015, at 8:34am in Chicago, Illinois.

There it has remained.

Peddler's Mall

We talk over Skype on the 11th of May, 10pm BST, 5pm Eastern Time.

Jake tells me about his wife driving them to the Peddler's Mall - about hoping their three year old falls asleep on the way.

He tells me about the run down car park with weeds growing up between the concrete, the shell of a Walmart in which the Peddler's Mall now sits. Each booth unmanned and items tagged with a unique serial number.

He talks to me about the landscape that stands strongest in his childhood - the redwoods of Sacramento, where his grandparents bought a place with the intention of making it an off-grid refuge, ready for the collapse of society.

I tell him about sitting at the kitchen table when I was 3 or 4, colouring in the contours of a map of Lincolnshire, Red, yellow and green, depending on where would flood when the ice melted.

He tells me of the 3-hour car journey from Elizabethtown to Nashville, Tennessee with his wife and sister. He says, "The landscape here is really amazing for me, there are parts of it when you get away from any of the major cities, some of the more mountainous parts of it are just really intoxicating."

I think back to the only time I've visited America, sat in the rear left passenger seat with the taste of dust and sugar and heat on the air.

Jake explains that the germ of the idea for Kentucky Route Zero was the passenger journey with his wife and sister.

"Travelling on these highways, being on the road for most of the game [...] driving one of these trucks, delivery trucks, and specifically the idea that you could live in the truck, you know, that they're kind of big enough that you could live in them, so you're bringing a building around with you"

It's the sense of being a passenger that's important.

He says, "A lot of the game feels like you're sort of... a passenger, to me. [...] You don't know where you're headed exactly, not just you, but the characters don't know where they're headed [...] also because they accept [it] when people tell them to go places, even kind of strange places"

I can't drive.

I think of sitting in the passenger seat of a mini. I think of the leather bucket seats and the computer we built together, the touchscreen nestled in the central pillar of the dashboard. I think of dark nights in Leicestershire, where I would scroll through Winamp and bring up soft electronic music voiced by Benjamin Gibbard. The sub that replaced the boot hums and I can smell the heat on our skin.

Vaporware

The people who came up with the word 'psychogeography' also talked about détournement – a playful reclaiming of the edifices of capitalism, ways of joyfully re-making the world around us on our own terms. Who says this is how you should use a street, or a building, or a chair? Who says we have to move at this speed? Did you know that Paris has such wide boulevards precisely to stop barricade building from happening again? Who owns this land? Who is 'the public', exactly?

My friend was once thrown out of the Bullring Shopping Centre, Birmingham, for reading a book.

Another French dude called Baudrillard talked in 1981 about the way the media replaces what is with the way things appear, and that after a while we think about things as the way they appear, and forget what they actually are. A moment becomes a photograph, a moment becomes a moment only if it is photographed.

In 1946 Hannah Arendt talked about the disrupted scale of the modern world - things "torn out of their functional context" - the city evicts us from a human scale, motor travel evicts us from a human pace, our mobile phones and mp3 players today evict us from the need to seek immanent - nearby - human interaction. Contextless, the contemporary citizen passes through "frictionless passageways designed as conduits or simply so vast or alien they have lost contact with human proportion" (Buchanan, "Space in the Age of Non- Place" Deleuze and Space: 2012)

In Kentucky Route Zero, Xanadu says "it's like a real place, they pick up garbage, they deliver mail, they go to work and to church... but it has an awful kind of emptiness."

The characters in Kentucky Route Zero aren't only missing their functional context, they kind of forgot they were looking for it. They live lives of inbetween; Delivery drivers, artists working desk jobs, boys who have lost their family, scientists tuning televisions in and out of static. All wandering a landscape of pre-used spaces.

Jake says that, "A pretty consistent motif in the game [...] is] space that used to be something else, [...] you're trying to do some forensics on a space and figure out what it maybe used to have meant, or used to have been, [it's a bit about the politics of reclaiming it, squatting,] but it's also [...] the mega-corporation side where a company will raze a neighbourhood and build something else [...] – the battle between the human and the superhuman scale, [...] those are the political tensions that we have in mind, working with these ideas of reclaiming [...] And also debt. ... and homelessness, having been displaced from your home [...] it's meant to be something that's going on in the lives of these characters."

All of them wandering a landscape of pre-owned spaces.

The Museum of Dwelling

The dialogue of Kentucky Route Zero kills me. It's so delicate, so perfect, so evocative not just in the fact of it, but in the elegance of the choice of it. The art and animation doesn't allow the player control of the camera, but much more interesting to me, is how the dialogue doesn't allow the player camera control either.

Dialogue borrowed from the future, wandering a museum as you hear your choices remembered and reported by the people you encounter.

Dialogue shifting between owners, the typical hero fizzes and fades, as you're retuned to the angle of one of his co-adventurers.

The characterisation is pre-owned, by the writer, Jake describes how it's important for him not what the player chooses, but that they see the choices, all of the ways of being the character that the player guides.

I buy Jake

A metallic tipper toy truck with genuine tipping motion, the cab is a worn reddish orange colour.

Jake buys me

A beer bottle from a long extinct brewery. It reads 'Falls City' on the label.

I buy Jake

A small metal enamel pin, a red image of the UK on a white background and blue border, gold lettering marks the wearer as belonging to the national federation of retail newsagents, booksellers and stationers.

Jake buys me

A book on paranormal psychic travel and past lives, titled *Mysteries of the Unknown, Psychic Voyages*.

I buy Jake

A tiny clay drake, unfired, painted with poster paint, with an even tinier thumb and finger 16 modelled yellow duckling that fits snug into the drake's back.

Jake buys me

What at first seemed an old yellowed local newspaper turns out to be a leaflet advertising Hardin, Kentucky, the front page boasts a vibrant theatre scene.

I buy Jake

An 1899 reprint in the original French of Alexander Dumas' *Expressions De Voyage Suisse*, green cover, elastic band holding the loose leaves' broken binding together.

The Zero

I begin to ask Jake to talk about the Zero, I feel the energy leech out of him, I change tack - I'm not interested in what it means - I explain - you must be pretty bored of that, (I can hear him nod), I ask him where it came from. If there's a place that he thinks of, when he and his co-designer Tamas talk about the Zero.

Jake's answer is immediate: a 5 day bus trip from Seattle to New Orleans. Around 2,500 miles if you take a direct route. Not a place exactly, but, "It felt like [one], because people would come and go, you would be on the bus with maybe the same 30 or 40 people for a day and some of them would

filter off as they reach their destination and some others would get on board, all these different overlapping trips, no regard for time of day [...] you could stop and it would be time to eat lunch or something, [...] 3am in the middle of Texas and there's nothing around but beetles and a gas station, [...] no sense of time, getting on and off the bus, and never being off the bus for more than half an hour. There was no going to bed, ever, so it became this very surreal experience [...] very supernatural... that's how I feel about the Zero, you're kind of half asleep, but very grounded, you're still eating and going to the bathroom and negotiating other people's boundaries, but dreamlike."

I ask him what the taste of the Zero would be, and he says "gas station coffee, really poor coffee - it's been sitting there on a burner for 12 hours"

When we travel we are inbetween. Inbetween home and destination, - in between who we were and who we're going to be - in a travelling now. In a lot of ways, being able to sit back into the flow of that place, of places like the Zero, not move just for a destination, but wash through and look around you, in a lot of ways that's a place where you can do new thinking. Reflect, look, see.

The landscape of Kentucky Route Zero is heavy with the scale of the United States. But it's also heavy with the landscape of our lives. Our generation's lives. It's Homer's Odyssey for a generation who can't remember a time before capitalism won.

It's debt, and mouldy whisky, transcendent gigs on sticky floors, computers that break you and are broken. It is the songs your parents and their friends used to sing, lost houses, forgetting that owning a house is a thing. It's a contemporary homelessness, people you travel with and you feel you might travel with to the ends of the earth, until they are suddenly, gone.

Jake's favourite thing out of the things I sent him were the ducks and the truck. The heavy clink of the truck permeates our Skype conversation. He says he has the two little ducks sat on the truck.

My parcel from Jake is still travelling.

CONWAY: I miss them sometimes. The horses.



Waiting for The Entertainment

by Michelle O. Grimmer



Junebug: "We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?"

Johnny: That's lovely, ma'am. Who said it?

Junebug: A poet.

Each of *Kentucky Route Zero*'s between-Act releases give the player insight into the smaller players and greater themes of the game. *Limits and Demonstrations* gives the player info about the history of Lula, Donald and Joseph, and particularly the time of their lives leading up to what I'll call The Colossal Cave Incident, and also tells us about Lula's sometimes uneasy history with art. *Here and There Along the Echo* provides background on the Echo River which, in its way, is the main character of Act IV. *Un Pueblo de Nada* teaches us about the goings-on at WEVP-TV, Consolidated Electric and the Radvansky Center. How it relates to Act V remains to be seen.

The Entertainment tells us the least about the characters of KRZ - no real insight is gained about Lula, Donald, Joseph or Carrington, and very little about Lem Dolittle - but it reflects the grander themes of the game. Debt, addiction, self-delusion and unemployment, the most prevalent undertones of *Kentucky Route Zero*, are presented in the same medium as the game itself. Theatre. This bleeds into the rest of Act III as well.

The major influences of *The Entertainment* are Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. Miller's story of Willy Loman, a proud, big-talking, delusional salesman who, nearing the end of his days of useful employment, is forced to reflect on a life of lying to his wife, his children, and himself as he succumbs to Alzheimer's. This is mirrored in his sons. Harold (aka Happy), a blindly optimistic pleaser who would rather lie to Willy about how things are juuuuuust about to take a turn for the better, and Biff, a terminal loser who, unlike his father, knows he's no good and just wants to make a clean break from his family. The parallels to *The Entertainment* are made in the Slade family.

Rosa and Lawrence, parents of Pearl, are a pair of dead-end boozers who are drinking to celebrate a job promotion that hasn't happened yet, similar to Happy Loman setting up an expensive dinner to celebrate the fact that Biff is about to strike a deal to become a sporting goods distributor. This deal, much like Rosa's promotion, never comes to fruition, and was in fact never even close to a reality. The man who Biff is going to ask for the initial investment has no idea who he is, and Rosa's boss said that "maybe, eventually" she would be "management material".

After his embarrassing non-proposal, Biff decides he has to stop lying to himself about who he is, and where he belongs in life, deciding to abandon his family for his own good. There are other factors, of course, but I suppose I shouldn't spoil more of *Salesman* than I already have. Similarly, Pearl Slade takes a long, sober look at her parents - and her own form of employment - and decides she can't sit around bailing out two useless, self-deluded drunks anymore. Both children are hoping to leave town and make a clean break, but nothing is ever that simple.

The parallels between *The Entertainment* and Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* are less thematic and more practical. *Iceman*, like *The Entertainment*, is set in a bar full of alcoholics who can't afford the drinks they need, and are facilitated by (more or less) gold-hearted bartenders. *Iceman*'s Harry Hope operates a saloon in Greenwich Village, populated by a motley crew of lost and abandoned people who he rarely ever charges for a drink. *The Entertainment*'s Harry Esperanza (Spanish for "hope") similarly keeps a tab for all of his regulars and seems to rarely call those debts in. Other characters with shared names are Pearl, a prostitute in *Iceman* and Larry (Lawrence) Slade, a former anarchist. Evelyn Hickman, a character in *The Entertainment* complains about her husband Ted being away, working as a traveling hardware salesman. O'Neill's metaphorical iceman is named Theodore Hickman, who shows up at Harry's saloon to tell the burnouts and mendicants that his life has changed ever since he stopped drinking. As for Theodore's wife Evelyn and the literal iceman, that is also a spoiler. To be clear, all of the plays referenced in this essay are among the greatest theatrical works of the 20th century, and you should definitely read them.

In Act I of *The Entertainment*, Evelyn asks Harry about the “sandwiches” placed throughout the bar. Harry tersely responds “Raines Law.” In Joseph’s production notes, he mentions changing some lines to update them for the play’s opening in 1973, but says “We left in a line about Raines Law, which would have been archaic in Doolittle’s time anyway.” At first I thought the brick sandwiches were a surreal detail – the kind of thing an experimental student theatre group might try to give their production a weird little kick. But in fact, Raines Law was a real thing. Written by politician John Raines in 1896, the Raines Law regulated the sale of liquor, effectively closing saloons and bars on Sundays. There was a provision, however, that hotels could sell liquor on Sundays, and that “hotels” were defined as businesses providing food and lodging. A loophole was quickly discovered, and saloon owners built teeny-tiny upstairs bedrooms for “lodging” (used largely by unmarried couples and prostitutes) and nominal “sandwiches” were served in the form of a brick placed between two slices of bread. Such establishments became known as “Raines law hotels”. Such a bar also serves as the setting of *Iceman*. It is also no coincidence that Harry Esperanza’s bar is known as “The Lower Depths”, which shares a name with Russian playwright Maxim Gorky’s *The Lower Depths*, another story of a group of hopeless alcoholics, and a major influence on *Iceman*.

Johnny and Junebug, who are only referenced in *The Entertainment* but appear as player characters from Act III onward, are allusions to virtually every character in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. First, they are Godot himself in *The Entertainment*. Evelyn asks Harry early on about the evening’s entertainment, and Junebug is supposed to show up to sing but they never do. (Tangentially, are Johnny and Junebug known collectively as “Junebug”? Like, is that the name of the band? Or is it like how you’d go to a concert to see Tom Waits, but it’s really Tom Waits and a backup band, but they don’t get their own collective name, like “Tom Waits and the Stranglers” or something? I dunno. I think the name of the band is “Junebug”, though.) Evelyn is just at The Lower Depths, “waiting for the entertainment”. Their bleak humor and quick, patter-y banter reflects the relationship between Godot’s leads, Vladimir and Estragon.

In Act III, we meet Johnny and Junebug when Conway’s van breaks down on the side of the road, next to a tree. The tree is likely a reference to the set of *Godot*, where Vladimir and Estragon wait in perpetuity for Godot to arrive. On their way to meet the group, Johnny and Junebug discuss a song performed by a duo called “Didi and Gogo”, the nicknames of Godot’s main characters. There is also a mention of “Mercadet Wreck Recovery”, named for the play *Mercadet* by Honoré de Balzac about a man waiting to get bailed out of a bad financial situation by his unseen business partner, Godeau. Samuel Beckett claimed to have not heard of that play. Ehhhhh, I dunno. Finally, when you inspect the dumpster outside *The Lower Depths*, you find “Several pairs of working shoes, a few hats, and a small zip-loc bag with three pairs of eyeglasses.” These are the defining costume pieces of Estragon, Vladimir and Pozzo respectively.

These are just some of the theatrical references in *Kentucky Route Zero*. I have no actual background in theatre - I’m just a dilettante with a knowledge pool a mile wide and an inch deep, but I love discovering new things. Cardboard Computer wears their influences proudly and wants you to learn about the stuff they love. This is wildly endearing to me, as a nerd who desperately wants other people to understand how I got this way. I only hope someday that I can write a video game this brilliant, beautiful and compelling, and that it’ll cause some other nerd to read four entire books like I did.

N qrog gb cnl vf jung jr frnx N qrny gbb tbbq gb cnff

JUNEBUG

BEVERAGES

Coffee from an elaborate brass pitcher. It emits a steady steam, carrying a strong aroma with it.

We pay: .75
Keep the lights on: 2.50
Keep the sounds going: 3.50

A glass of lemonade. There's a slice of lemon fixated to the rim for show. The juice appears to glow.

We pay: .50
Keep the lights on: 1.50
Keep the sounds going: 2.50

A glass of cold water. Large droplets form when you touch the frosted glass.

We pay: .10
Keep the lights on: .50
Keep the sounds going: 1.00

I once found this beverage in an old vending machine on the side of the interstate. It had this distinct taste that I can only describe as cool lavender infused air. I've been looking for it ever since.

We pay: 1.25
Keep the lights on: 2.75
Keep the sounds going: 3.75

FOOD

At Sam & Ida's restaurant that floats along the river, they had a dish titled "Balsamic Spinach." They gave me their recipe.

We pay: 2.25
Keep the lights on: 4.00
Keep the sounds going: 5.00

A heaping of mashed potatoes on an irregular-shaped white plate. The food appears to blend with the dish, as if it's not even there. There's parsley garnish that makes the place appear nicer than it really is.

We pay: .50
Keep the lights on: 1.50
Keep the sounds going: 2.50

A plate of pasta with diced tomatoes and sliced onions. A trail of smoke twirls above it.

We pay: 1.50
Keep the lights on: 2.50
Keep the sounds going: 3.50

DESSERTS

While making a bowl of strawberry ice cream in the middle of the night, I reached for a spoon against the lambency of the refrigerator and accidentally knocked over a box of kettle corn, which spilled onto the counter and into the bowl. The confection helped me fall asleep.

We pay: 2.00
Keep the lights on: 3.00
Keep the sounds going: 4.00

A light orange sorbet in a decorative china glass.

We pay: 1.75
Keep the lights on: 2.75
Keep the sounds going: 3.00

A lady standing behind a fruit stand in front of a row of apple trees smiled as I approached her. She told me I was her first customer that day, and gave me a pie for free to commemorate. I went back the next week; the stand was gone, and in its place was a sign saying the property was for sale. I'll never forget the joy the lady had when she saw me.

We pay: 1.50
Keep the lights on: 2.75
Keep the sounds going: 3.00

Times are tough. Pay what you can.



FOOD

Kentucky Route Zero April 2, 2017

Unique atmospheric restaurant takes you to a familiar yet surreal world

found a good review -R

Anna Fairview

IT'S hard to put into words the exact appeal of new pay-what-you-want casual restaurant/music cafe *Junebug*. While I would be quick to classify it as a theme restaurant, it evokes its atmosphere and mood so effortlessly that you wouldn't be faulted for assuming the entire thing was accidental. I was not actually able to confirm anything myself since the employees are remarkably absent: from figuring out that you're required to seat by a new sound, either from one of the various radios on the walls or on the table in front of me next to the lamp that kept flickering, or from the enigmatic voices that was distinct from the usual murmur

After the

walk in to placing your order and table number into a word processor near the entrance. When I did manage to see someone who was dressed in casual attire, confirm they were staff, and inquire for more information, they somehow managed to disappear the second I was distracted by a new sound, either by a new sound, either from one of the various radios on the walls or on the table in front of me next to the lamp that kept flickering, or from the enigmatic voices that was distinct from the usual murmur

Junebug can be found by heading North until you see the giant tipped over tree, and then turn right and go down a ways. You can't miss it.

Because you waited too long,

It's too late, it's too late,

It's too late to love you now,

It's too late, I've made my vow,

Another love came by and stole my heart away;

I wish that I could take it back, but it's too late.

5 Dogwood Drive

Head east until you see the fallen tree by the lake, then make a right and head down the road until you see the small building radiating somber sounds. If you pass the blueberry farm you've gone too far.

"Is that guy your boyfriend?"

by Michelle O. Grimmer



EZRA: Is that guy your boyfriend?

JUNEBUG: Naw - what's a *boyfriend*, anyway? It's a word people use because everyone else does. Doesn't mean anything to me. He's my cricket. See? It means something.

I had a chat with a friend recently about Junebug, and whether or not she's canonically trans. The text of Kentucky Route Zero doesn't explicitly state that she and Johnny are trans, but KRZ lore is as much implicit as explicit, and as such can be interpreted in dozens of directions.

EZRA: I want to be ... *specific*.

There is a scene (forgive me for forgetting which Act it's in) where Shannon has two dialogue options about an ex - one stating that her ex is male, one stating that her ex is female. This raises a small conundrum. If you say her ex was female, does that mean Shannon is gay? Does it mean that she's bisexual, but that particular partner was female? Same for if you choose the male dialogue - is Shannon straight? Is she bisexual, and that partner was a male? It's a tricky question, for sure - either option could lead to virtually any interpretation, setting aside the fact that sexuality isn't effectively categorized into straight/bi/gay. That means, to me at least, that every interpretation is viable and valid. The implied canon leaves that door open.

JUNEBUG: I think you are. It's the middle of the night, and here you are in a graveyard. Any other kid your age would be in bed.

Similarly, Joseph asks Conway what the dog's name is at the start of Act I. The player is given the choice to name the dog Homer, Blue or to not name the dog at all. This becomes canon for the rest of your playthrough of KRZ, and all three options are valid. You cannot tell me that Conway's dog isn't a girl named Blue in my canon, just because you decided that Conway's Dog is a boy named Homer.

You've just got to make choices and own them. You think I was born this foxy? I came off the assembly line about a half-foot shorter, and all grey. No eyes.

Because the primary action the player gets to make in KRZ is choosing what dialogue the various actors say, that makes each playthrough canon for that player. Not just headcanon, but actual canon. The difference between canon and headcanon, to me at least, is headcanon isn't supported anywhere in the text. If you decide that before she was a TV repairwoman, Shannon worked at the Dairy Queen, then that's totally cool by me as headcanon.

They were going to have us clearing out the old mine. Doesn't matter what you look like under all that rock and water: a bunch of grey shadows shoveling and hammering invisiby at the walls, draining the tunnels.

The really fuzzy thing is implied canon. Things that speak to a broader canon than just what's in the text. The reader is able to take the information given and run just a little wild with it. Bring in their own experiences, biases and beliefs. There is a lot of indirect support for Johnny and Junebug being trans in the text. The main one for me is how Junebug talks about how she and Johnny effectively decided what parts they should have. They "knew they weren't miners" so they tried out new things until they realized what they were.

Johnny found some gear - an old tape player. We hid away in an underwater cave and listened to it over and over, and we knew we weren't miners ...

I can tell you from experience that this is how a lot of people come to find that they are trans. You look down at yourself and think “these are not the parts that I want on this body” and you take measures to make yourself feel more comfortable in your own skin. The steps are small, but meaningful. Since coming out a couple months ago, I’ve been detailing. Coloring in. Specifying.

We slipped out onto the road, just these two featureless shadows, and ever since that night we’ve been detailing. Coloring in. Specifying.

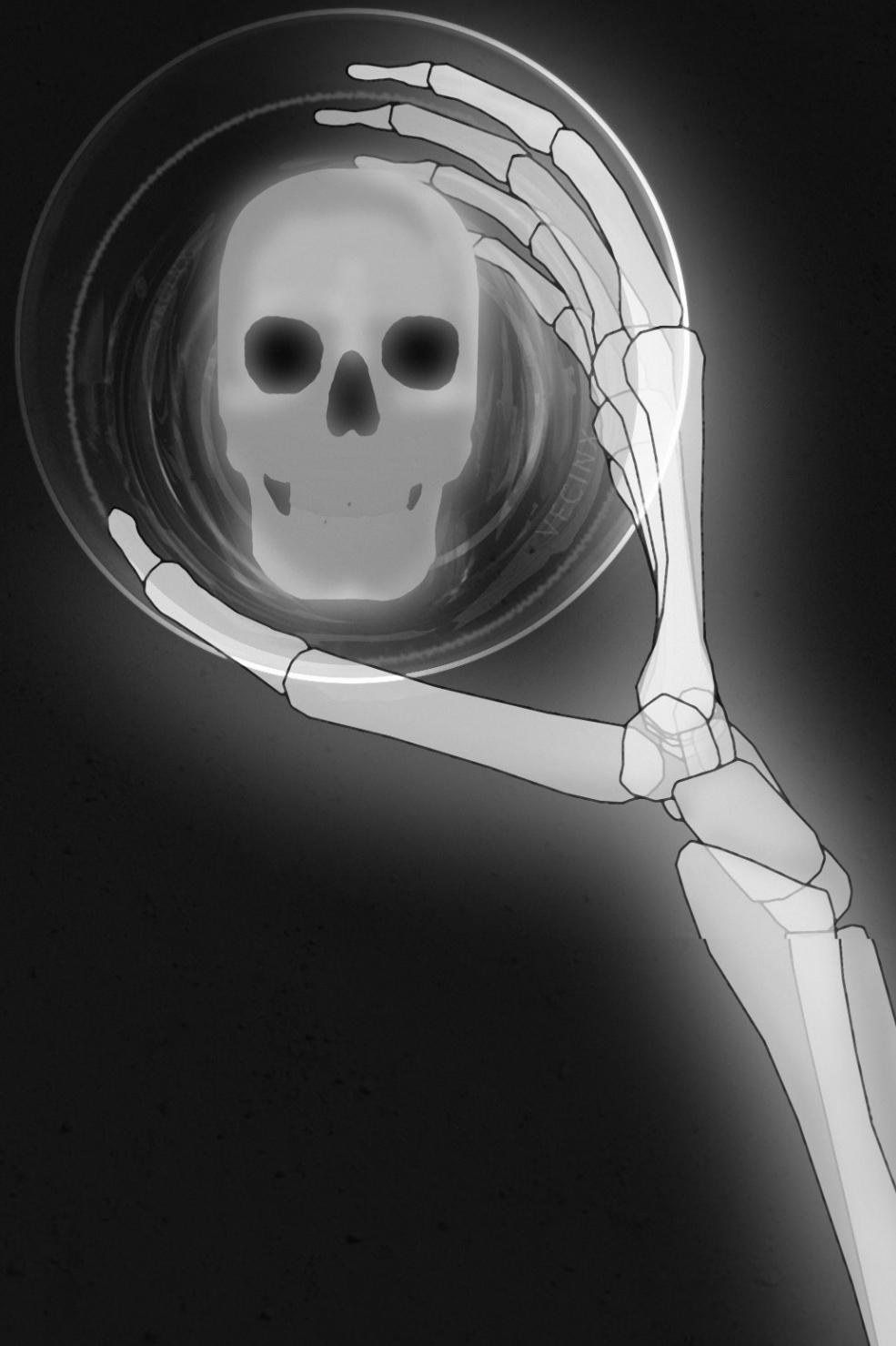
That's all the canon I need. I believe Johnny and Junebug are trans, or at least trans analogues. Transhumanism and transgender narratives have always been sorta conceptually handcuffed - if I can replace my arm with a robot arm, why can't I replace my genitals with something else?

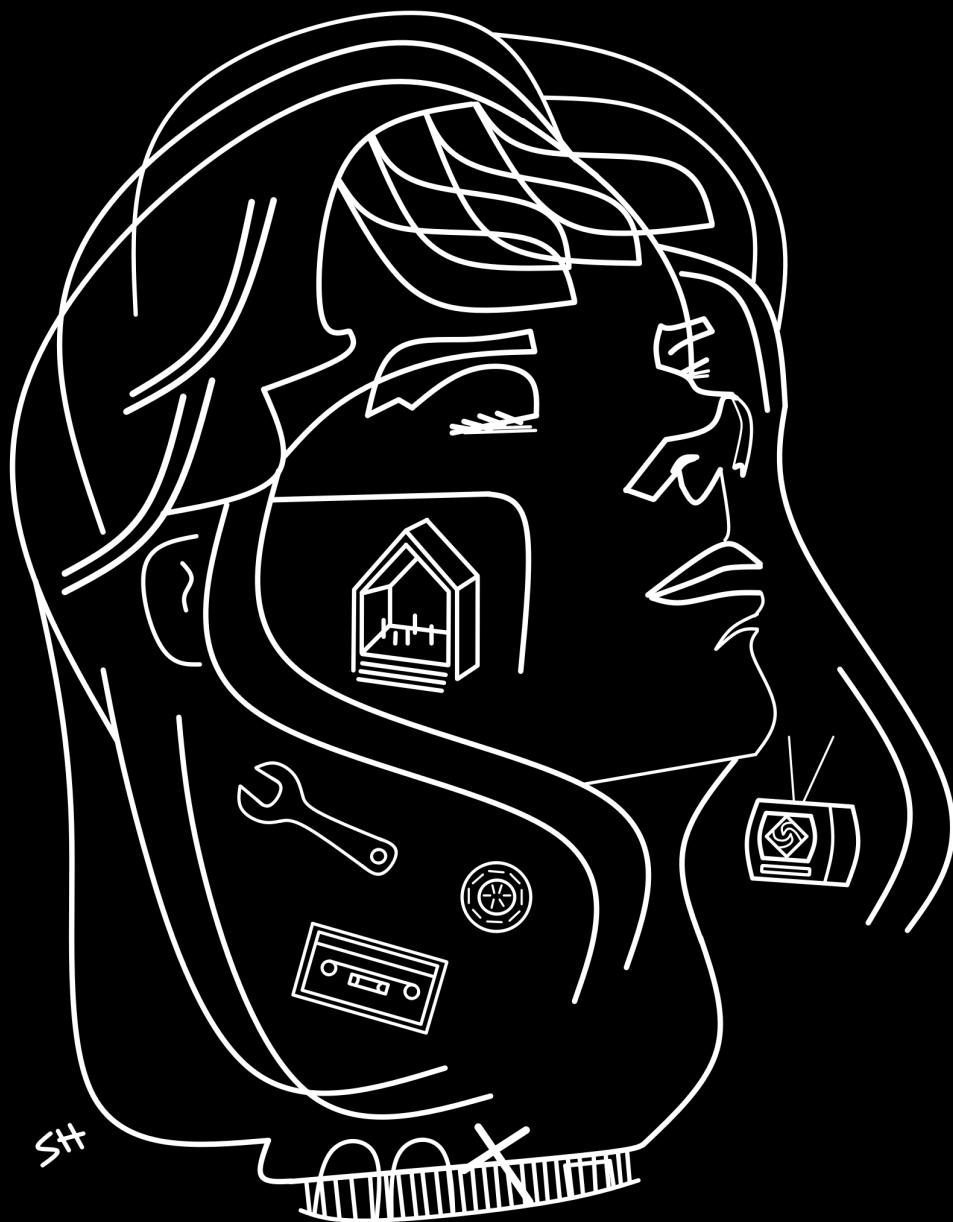
If you want to believe that Johnny and Junebug aren't trans, that's your prerogative. There's plenty out there to support your interpretation of the canon. Robots, one could easily claim, aren't gendered at all. But for me, they are trans. They figured out what their genders were and have lived their lives presenting as that gender. That is so resonant that I don't think I could honestly believe anything else.

I feel more like myself every day.

N zna jub fbzrubj ybfg uvf jn1

zvfyrq ol gvagrq tynff





Time and Space in the Zero

by Benedict Lee



I used to dream about my neighborhood. When I saw the Zero, and its strange spatial twists and turns, it reminded me of those dreams. I don't live in America, but it's still the suburbs, and with the influence of years of media it inevitably still feels American. The neighborhood is the subdivision of space. The land is no longer continuous. Instead, we draw maps, etch lines on paper, creating cells next to cells, parceling them out to families. All of us living in our own little cells, alone but not alone - alone together. Do the residents along the Zero feel any different? The strange distortions of the rules of space and physics simply lay bare the truth that the land has been torn asunder, split into pieces, not by nature but by the machinations of humanity.



As a kid, my neighborhood felt endless. The ground was flat and as a consequence, the horizon was invisible, concealed by rooftop after rooftop. How far do they go? Who can say for sure? The end of my road leads to a fork with roads that lead to other forks. The suburbs creep out in all directions, entire streets within walking distance yet left unexplored. Do the suburbs ever end? Does the Zero ever end?

I used to dream that there was a hidden path in my neighborhood - a small gap between the houses, concealed by shrubbery, perhaps only visible when the angle of sun aligned at the right moment. If you listened hard enough you might even hear the wind whistling through. The path was too narrow for cars or even bikes - you had to squeeze through it. Claustrophobics were clearly not welcome. You were fenced in on either side. Through you gaps you see into the houses of strangers. Did they know you were there? Did they know of this secret path?

Through the path was a small clearing, perhaps only a few yards across. The sun was clear here - not too bright, not too warm. If you wanted shade, there was a tree in one corner. The air held a gentle breeze. It whistled gently - the only source of sound beyond the gentle rustling of leaves. For some reason, even the birds did not know of this place. The clearing was bordered by houses on all sides, but they could not see us. They could not see this clearing. Here the rules of physics were not quite the same. The clearing occupied only a tiny sliver in space - a hidden pocket between layers of atoms. We could see them. They could not see us.



You might think this was a perfect place for a bunch of kids to play around in, but in my dreams, I was always alone here. Maybe this was my private happy place. Maybe this was my private Zero, my very own non-Euclidean highway. Maybe I wanted to be in the world without being *in* it. The truth was probably simpler. I did not know anyone my age in the neighborhood. I, like all the other kids, was too busy shuffling between home and school.

Capitalism loves its ironies. The land is parceled out - our homes placed in proximity - yet we are given a plenitude of reasons to isolate ourselves. We shuffle from home to work, from work to home. Our daily lives are consumed by the maintenance of the mechanics of the vast machine we hardly comprehend. We cannot talk. We cannot connect. We simply have no time.

It is thus ultimately fitting that Kentucky Route Zero takes place during Conway's last delivery. When the end is nigh, when the jobs are gone, when things decay, when retirement is forced, that is where he finds solidarity. That is where he finds the friends that aid him and care for him. What would a delivery through the Zero be like if it were not the last? If he had a job to maintain and a schedule to follow? It would be a rush - a hectic journey with hardly a moment to breathe. The self-contradicting paths, the spaces that fold upon themselves, become just waypoints. Their beauty remains only known to their residents. The spatial idiosyncrasies, like the endless houses in a neighborhood, like the grassy clearing in my dreams, become a source of concealment and isolation. For Conway, solidarity with others was only possible when it was too late - when capitalism had already failed him.

Capitalism, if we are lucky, gives us a space. Next to it are spaces belonging to others, perhaps separated by mere inches of drywall. We can never visit. We can never enter, even if we wanted to, even if they wanted to, for very same system extracts from us a never-ending toll. We are left isolated - alone together. For Conway and those who reside along the Zero, they paid all that was owed, and by then it was too late to band together, to fight back. When the flood has come, when our jobs are lost, when our small businesses have crumbled, only then do we even have the time to connect, to work together towards a common end. But it is too late. Capitalism gives us our houses, our beach side rum bars, our humble radio stations. But we can't even enjoy them. The system gives us our spaces and in return, we give it all our time.





Meet the Contributors

Listed in order of appearance.

Liz Walcher

"5 Dogwood Drive" cover art

"Top Shelf" pg. 11

Liz is a liminal space enthusiast and admirer of all creatures great and small. She's also a game developer who crafts charming 2d and 3d art. Kentucky Route Zero changed how she thinks about games, and it will always be dear to her heart. She hopes you enjoy this zine!

>> Twitter @cynomanic / lizwalcher.weebly.com

Alice Tirard

"The Concert" pg. 3

Alice is an artist and biologist from the University. They're here on field work to study the vomeronasal organ of bats, in hope of curing White Nose Syndrome. During downtime they teach themselves how to pick locks, and paint watercolor postcards to send back up to the surface along with loose, meditative letters signed in secret code.

>> Twitter & Tumblr @cajolions

Quinn K.

"For the Shannon/Weaver Dichotomy" pg. 4

"For an old man" pg. 12.

Quinn K. does and is many things, some ambitiously, others dilettantishly. She has released some short form writing, a game demo, a myriad of zines, and a videogame translation, and is presently working on a novel, an adventure game and an EP.

>> Twitter @quinnpixelart

Josh Lambert

"Choices" pg. 6-8

Josh Lambert is from Paducah, Kentucky but lives in Nashville, Tennessee. You can find him at The Lower Depths after he leaves Matt B's Pizza.

>> Twitter @nonoathbreaker

eli fessler

“BST Metro Schedule & System Map” pg. 9

eli fessler is an artist, game maker, and linguist from the United States. He likes public transit, playful media, altcomix, theatre, and a lot of other things (especially fruit, dogs, rain, and snow). He also really, really likes Kentucky Route Zero and is thrilled to be a part of this zine! He hopes you have a great day!

>> Twitter @frozenpandaman / elifessler.com

Eva “laughingpinecone”

“7901 out of a possible 8192” pg. 10

Eva “laughingpinecone”, 35, Italian, translator. Big fan of magical realism and also Magritte.

Andrea McKid

“Echoes” pg. 14

Nature and arts enthusiast, Andrea “McKid” has a Visual and Performing Arts university degree and nowadays works as a part-time organic farmer and communication manager for a local cultural association. He tries to draw and write as much as possible in his free time.

>> deviantart.com/skull-the-kid

Angela Lee

“Vagabonds” pg. 15

Former teacher, occasionally hosts large-scale workshops/makerspace programming. Loves arts and crafts of all sorts and collects interesting, unorthodox stories and experiences. Composed of 60% sugar, 30% cat hair, 9% retro nostalgia, and trace amounts of ambition.

She hopes you enjoy the zine!

>> Instagram @chunkybumble

Novel

“Miners and Manipulations” pg. 16-17

I live in England and I just wanted to help create something that celebrates art with a unique medium just like KRZ celebrates art through a unique medium.

>> Twitter @novelnovel

Terry Laundry

“flight connection - doctor’s appointment” pg. 18

>> Twitter @gorilla_laundry

Hannah Nicklin

“From ‘A Psychogeography of Games’” pg. 19-25

Hannah Nicklin is a writer and narrative designer working in and around; games, digital art, research, teaching and activism. She has a PhD in using interactive practices to destroy capitalism. And is currently working on too many unannounced projects.

>> hannahnicklin.com

Leon Reinstein Andriguetto

“Cavalos á Noite” pg. 26

I’m from Curitiba, Brazil and study architecture. I’m into spooky houses, drawing, latino culture and hanging out at the bar with some old friends on the weekends.

>> Twitter @reinstein_leon

Michelle O. Grimmer

“Waiting for The Entertainment” pg. 27-30

“Is that guy your boyfriend?” pg. 33-35

Michelle O. Grimmer lives in Los Angeles with her wife and cats. She runs the KRZ fan blog *lulachamberlainfanclub* on tumblr and she’d love to hear from you.

>> Twitter @peepoposoft

Josh Reyes

“Junebug (menu)” pg. 31-32

Game designer and writer relaying life experiences.

>> joshreyes.art

Jo Chung (Vecinx)

“A Cold Drink” pg. 36

Vecinx is a cat person who loves dogs.

Vecinx is made of carbon, late-night musings, and mint chocolate chip ice-cream.

Vecinx is creating KRZ fanart and loving it.

>> Twitter [@shilinvecinx](https://twitter.com/shilinvecinx)

Sara Hamraz

“she saved what she could” pg. 37-38

Sara Hamraz is a filmmaker, writer, and artist who currently resides in Southern California. As a child, she wrote stories and read books that allowed her to open doors to new worlds. Fascinated by magical realism and the surreal, she quickly became interested in utilizing these genres in her work.

>> Instagram [@builtbysara](https://www.instagram.com/builtbysara) / Twitter [@swordbee](https://twitter.com/swordbee)

Benedict Lee

“Time and Space in the Zero” pg. 39-41

Benedict is an independent game developer and musician. His works can be found at parallelsuns.com, where he also blogs occasionally about games, films, and politics.

>> Instagram, Twitter, & Reddit: [@karaидон.](https://www.reddit.com/r/karaидон)

Hannah Lawler

“This World Is Not My Home” pg. 42

Hannah Lawler is a 3D artist and painter living in Massachusetts. When not doing 3D art, she likes making work about liminal space inspired by rural New England. She's really into “weird domestic” these days. She also plays lots of video games.

>> hannahlawler.com

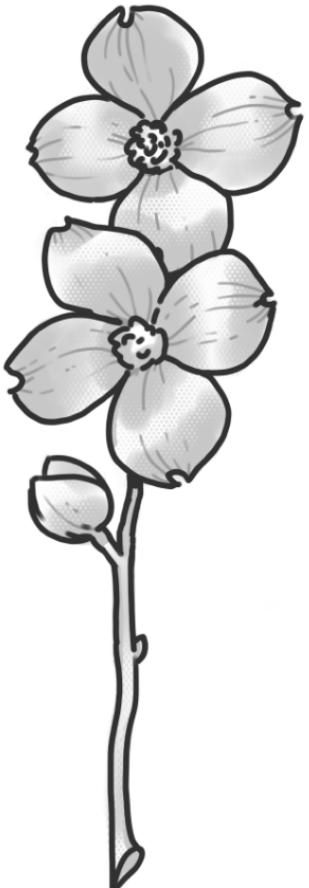
Evan McIntyre

“Zero Fauna” pg. 48

Evan McIntyre is a Durham, NC based illustrator and stay-at-home-dad. Fantasy video games, horror movies, and 90's nostalgia inspire him as he creates digital (and sometimes traditional ink & watercolor) illustrative works. Other interests include flip flops, black coffee, Monday Night Nitro WCW era pro wrestling, and petting every animal that will allow it.

>> Instagram: [@ebrownm](https://www.instagram.com/ebrownm)

thank you for reading this zine.



The print version of this zine was originally sold to raise money for RIP Medical Debt Appalachia, a charity that purchases and erases medical debt.

“Every dollar you contribute is a \$100 investment in Appalachian towns and cities. Money will stay in the community instead of being taken by out-of-state debt collectors. On average, \$16 can abolish the medical debt of an entire family, allowing them to invest in a home, schooling, or retirement.”

“Ephemera” raised a total of \$500 for RIP Medical Debt Appalachia, which translates to \$50,000 in medical debt erased. This is so much more than we expected, and we are very grateful to everyone who made that possible.

If you enjoyed this zine, we encourage you to make your own contribution.
To donate, or for more information, visit:

<https://ripmedicaldebt.org/campaign/appalachia>



