

The Lexicography of an Abusive but Divine Relationship with the World

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The text that follows is a fragmented lexicon, and should be read as such.

At a highly condensed point in time and space, this text relays the thoughts of an unremarkable woman, whose un-profound influence has ceased to effect the slightest of causes. Her thoughts have little or no repercussions on the portraits, predicaments, or situations she has witnessed, or been victimized by. She is a fictional nobody, exposing the fraught frictions of contemporary life in a spew of memories, anecdotes and material translations.

Author's Note:

Pragmatic.

Line breaks: prag|mat|ic.

Definition of pragmatic in English:

ADJECTIVE

1. Dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations: a pragmatic approach to politics.
2. Relating to philosophical or political pragmatism.
3. Linguistics relating to pragmatics.

Arrangement of Black, Orange, Blue, White, and Gold

PRESSING MY FINGER AGAINST THE JELLO TRACK PAD. A BURST of light appears in a black sky (a drum roll kicks in), revealing Earth's horizon as a mound of shimmering orange light. We rotate around the earth's axis through the lens of a slow focus pull, revealing a burst of sunlight weaving through the permeable land surface, avoiding the blue. As the camera tracks away from the globe, the rays of light get more intense. A three-dimensional word reveals itself in a rotational, clockwise orbit. The word reads "*Universal*" and is formed of a sandwiched layer of metallic white and gold letters. The text centralizes in the frame as stars shimmer in the distance. My laptop has finally booted.

B-side Time Travel

MY NIGHTLY EXCURSIONS ARE GETTING LONGER AND LONGER. The city is a haze, a murmur. Dawn is yet to break. Laid out before me, the metallic box. Taped together and patiently waiting for me to pick it up. Placing the headphones over my ears, I flick the red switch on the side of the machine. As clouds churn in the uneven sky, there is no one in sight. No people and no cars. The rush of static is comforting and the crackles are unfamiliar somehow. I find comfort in the lack of clarifying sound. It plunges my brain into a lasting flux. Reaching for the dial, brushing the curved ridges across my fingertips, I feel my ears adjust to the nuances in the sound. Sometimes these nights are lifeless, sometimes not. Rain rarely falls, but when it does, it offers a soft applause.

Everything is ready. I turn on the tape machine, and press *Record*. The cog heads spin in their plastic window, and I drive.

Cockroach vs Rat

THIS WAS A RACE BETWEEN TWO SPECIES, OBSERVED BY A THIRD.

"Only arthropods and vertebrates have the means of rapid surface locomotion. In both groups, the body is moved forward by means of the legs. Because legs provide support as well as propulsion, the sequence of movements must be adjusted to maintain the body's center of gravity within a zone of support; if that center of gravity falls outside this zone,

the body loses its balance and falls. It is the necessity to maintain stability that determines the functional sequence of limb movements. During propulsion—which begins with footfall and ends with liftoff—the foot and leg remain stationary as the body pivots forward over the leg. During recovery—which begins with liftoff and ends with footfall—the body remains stationary as the leg moves forward. The advance of one leg is a step; a stride is composed of as many steps as there are legs. To ensure a cycle of continuous movement, friction-reducing properties of a stable surface (i.e. the ground) are needed to enable the appropriate and continuous transfer of weight from heel to toe.”

—Encyclopedia Britannica 2012

Antenna’s twitching. Fur’s statically charged. The push of thumb-sized lever: and they’re off. The cockroach takes the lead and in close pursuit is the rat. The overall pace was steady, and surprisingly well balanced. The two opponents would occasionally outmaneuver one another, switching positions as front runner. Through the perils and obstacles that lay in their path, the race concludes with the two species nose to nose, circling around one another, haplessly trying to avoid a discarded burger tray. For several minutes they thrust and parry until the rat submits. Neither one is injured, but neither one a clear winner. I am now owed a 60.

Division of Earth into Eight Equal Slices

BRANDISHING A KITCHEN KNIFE, FORCING IT BACK AND FORTH toward a glint of light, I cut into the flesh amid raucous claps and cheers. The mass was constructed of icing sugar, Victoria sponge, edible ink, and metallic cream (in fold). Four hundred millimeters in diameter, 150 millimeters in height, its face was round, with a printed top depicting the earth, set on black frosting at the highest resolution. It was a cake. We were celebrating.

Our firm had drawn up the final Earth contingency proposition, or the “what to do in the event of the end.” When (A) resources have dried up and (B) there is nowhere left to turn. A prerequisite was to negotiate our eventual departure from Earth, a departure that includes the

carving up and packaging of Earth's assets. Enough gold sits within the outer sector of Earth's core to drown its surface in 10 meters of liquid depth. Like a loaded gun, we shall wait patiently to fire. This memory will be the first step of many; the blade of this knife cutting through the layers of sugar and sponge, then sticking in the middle upon hitting the single, proportional layer of gold cream frosting.

The text that follows is the single sheet of the president's address. The document reads:

“IN THE EVENT OF LEAVING EARTH:

“FATE HAS ORDAINED THAT EARTH, AFTER 4.5 BILLION YEARS OF life, of hosting men, women, and nature, will be left to rest in peace. Our great planet Mother Earth we know now has no hope for recovery. But we know that there is hope for mankind in its sacrifice. Our planet has laid down its life in mankind's most noble goal: the search for the truth, understanding, and prosperity. She will be mourned by the people of the world – our Mother Earth that dared send her sons and daughters into the unknown. In our exploration, we have stirred the people of the world to feel as one; in Earth's sacrifice, they bind more tightly in the brotherhood of man. In ancient days, men looked at stars and saw their heroes in the constellations. In modern times, we do much the same, but our heroes are in a planet of soil, minerals, and water. Others will follow us, and surely find their way to survival. Mankind's survival will not be denied. But this planet is the first, and it will remain the foremost in our hearts. Every human being who looks up at the night skies will come to know that there is some corner of another world that is forever in mankind.”

The president should cut Earth's surface, first drawing a circle followed by the division of eight perfect, equal sections to mark as a time immemorial. After the president's statement, at a point when the fleet of ships kiss the edge of Earth's atmosphere, a clergymen should adopt the same procedure as a burial at sea, commending Earth's soul to “the deepest of the deep” and concluding with the Lord's Prayer.

End of the World as We Know It

LOS ANGELES EMBODIED CERTAIN VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS: everything was a faded copy, of a copy, of a copy. The overworked visions of the architectural past had been re-created, but translated into parametric form, a growth of intertwined confusion, built at the height of the “data wank” era. The In-N-Out Burgers resembled large bird nests lined with giant foam, liquid red, and lightning bolts. Architects amalgamating the eclectic once again, drawing together mishmash monuments over the rug of melted asphalt and cigarette burns and the rotting smell of synthetic gasoline. L.A. is the proudest snake-pit ashtray in America, and I like it.

I used to write screenplays for Hollywood’s “shiny, shiny, smashy, smashy” elite, the kinds of films where you had wished the entire cast had burned alive in an automated drone strike. The films were predominantly male, and consisted of the subsequent equation: machines, slick wetted sunglasses, intravenous drugs, erections, electro-weaponry, women as wigged MacGuffins and innards jokes. But the decay of Hollywood saw government administrations buying out and liquidating movie studios. Unlike more obvious tactics, the liquidation attack strategy eradicated studios by genre.

The stretch from West Hollywood to Beverly Hills is a hollow husk. A ghost town of staggering bleached blond zombies with their ruptured sagging tits, leathery skin, and stained garter belts trundling up and down the smoggy Santa Monica Blvd. Movies are still being made of course, but they now belong to what critics have come to call the genre of the “hyperreal.” Films are gargantuan productions, federally funded. Or else they are small pirate broadcasts cast over the Neuro-Network, ironically named “Fantasia,” kitchen-sink shit from Europe or Mexico.

Think *Wall Street* (1987) set on the edge of Earth’s atmosphere, funded by the United States Treasury to soften the hostile takeover of two paper galaxies: Microsoft’s Stellar Sphere, swallowing McDonald’s McAirbelt Galaxy. This happens every day, though I wish we could revive the Roman gladiatorial games, stratospheric in scale. Pale-faced CEOs fighting to the death with planetary particle accelerators, violently hitting big, shiny red buttons, foaming at the mouth, and laughing into

their ear-crunching implants as the audience looks on, to cheer or grimace. Entire CG-enhanced galaxies are either amalgamated or deleted permanently from our mapping devices.

As the government bullet ripped through the skull of Hollywood, us screenwriters were hired by various federal departments – Defense, State, Justice. I was relocated at a federal insurance bureau. I underwrote the oil slick that coats the landscape and minds of the citizens. The plane that hit the sky-rise windows on your birthday. The sweat, flesh, fat, and hairs of the burnt human remains fused to the polyester seats of the driverless Volvo ... and the lipstick kiss of a walking bio-weapon. These are just some of my favorites.

False Evidence Appearing Real

THE CUT ON MY ARM IS GETTING BIGGER, NOT SMALLER. ALL DATA points to yes. All data points to triple. The clouds have illegally gathered. The birds are circling. The drones have eaten the birds.

Galaxy Pearls

SLIPPING AND SLIDING ACROSS THE MARBLED BLACK TERRAIN, REACHING for the bronze rail. My pearls had fallen one by one from their necklace, cracking against the floor and dispersing, like a galaxy of stars. Scrambling to pick them up on hands and knees, I count sixteen pearls of equal size, measuring just 12 millimeters in perfect diameter. Held between my fingers; mesmerized by the miracle of iridescence, I stare at it with a long pause, this beautiful space artifact, artificially grown on board Spalding's *Galaxy Pearl*. A spaceship owned by the basketball giant to artificially manufacture spherical products in zero gravity.

Inherent Vice. No, not the Thomas Pynchon novel or (at the time) the widely criticized film adaptation by Paul Thomas Anderson
Excerpt from a speech that was given at the 50th International Insurance Conference.

I sat in the audience, I recorded the presentation.

(image of broken eggs)

“Inherent Vice is the tendency in physical objects to deteriorate because of the fundamental instability of the components of which they are made, as opposed to deterioration caused by external forces.”

Next slide.

(image of a rendered black hole)

“All objects have some inherent vice as a result of the baseline law of entropy. In the future, at some point, this table, this machine, this cup, and this liquid will inevitably break the threshold of quantifiable value.”

Next slide.

(image of smiling technological figures: Branson, Zuckerberg, Page, Schwarzenegger)

“The route into the technological unknown is a blindfolded ascent into the dark. The darkness has yet to yield a scaffold with which to model any potential risk and its mitigation, which inevitably ends the economic lifespans of our visions, due to feared unstable volatility. We have seen this through interstellar space tourism, AI families, planet decomposition plans, and lava formation trading.”

Next slide.

(image of a Volvo)

“We have lost the urge to accelerate. Our assumptions of progress are of incomprehensible rational catastrophe and uncontrollable leakage. We are the swimming pool that refuses to hold water. Our utopias are gone. We have no mountains to climb.”

Next slide.

(image of a pale, barely visible American flag)

“Our future is fading; and what will become of it? It will be faded, like

it is today.”

Next slide.

(image of black)

“Inherent Vice has become its own inherent vice.”

Clap, clap, clap, clap, clap, clap, clap, clap.

Kill List Exit Lottery

“HAVE YOU BEEN UNLUCKY? HAVE YOU BEEN ORGANIZED INTO extinction by the U.S. government’s pesky, forever-growing tentacles of ‘the Disposition Matrix’? Well, today might be your lucky day! Through the random temporal alignments of satellites, cell phones, the World Wide Web, cloud networks, and the roll of dice, we are giving one lucky winner the chance to exit through our Lunar Grand Prize Lottery Draw. The winner will endure a race against time, filmed right here. Live from Los Angeles.”

Little Death at Little Red House

ON MY DESK LIES A BLOOD-RED GLASS MODEL OF A TYPICAL American Creole style cottage, 1:200 in scale. It was given to me by the district attorney, as a sick joke for a case we filed. Its glass walls encase a membrane of cancer cells, incubated by a tiny temperature gauge set in fluid. It resembles little souvenir paper houses you might buy in gift shops, gas stations, or museums: the regularly watered paper produces a garden of growing watercress, to the delight of my grandmother or overly attentive children. This little glass beauty is supposed to visibly rot away from cancer over six months, dying from the inside out. Despite glancing at it several times a day and tapping on the tiny porch window with frustration, I’m yet to see any visible change. I think it’s broken. Such is life.

Meteorite, Asteroid Ash Trays, and Other Objects

THE LOBBY SAW GUARDIANSHIP OF THE COMPANY’S DIAMOND-cut marble sphere. A sculpture commissioned by the firm, to mark the

commemoration of the previously overturned Outer Space Treaty of 1967. Green, its veins a stony gray with flecks of silver; cut perfectly on two symmetrical axes and polished to a mirrored shine. A cylindrical hole burrowed straight through the center, at a 90-degree angle from the floor.

The symbolism of the object was less important than the composition of its materials. This “faceless” piece of corporate art, which all affluent buildings must have, is a fragment of the asteroid Poseidon, estimated at a market cap of about \$3.5 trillion. We commissioned not only this piece but six other spheres located in the lobbies of all of our global offices. The senior partners had “marble” ashtrays carved from the smaller asteroid fragments, which they used to catch the soft ash, dropping off the tip of the nightly stogie, washed down with a glass of Macallan 25.

It was better than a bank vault, as who would suspect?

Office Organs

THE ORGANS IN MY OFFICE ARE MOSTLY BOX-SHAPED, AND INDISTINGUISHABLE, moody tones of gray. A sea of vapid, overused, somewhat expired artifacts. Despite their age, they do sit on the network. It's not as grand as it sounds ... the organs were deployed within the firm to monitor patterns of work flow, but did nothing of the kind.

The philodendron is rubbery in texture. Its leaves recoil and flinch during the day. I think my philodendron is clinically depressed; it sits permanently wilted, lifeless, and sad in its posture. This advanced varietal is expensive. It's made of an engineered bio-plastic polymer that is, or was, supposedly semi-living. They're designed not to wilt or discolor. But, after six months of blowing smoke at it, stubbing out my filter tips on its leaves, and occasionally kicking it in place to block the air-conditioning hoses ... I guess that sort of abuse can destroy a fellow that chooses not to answer back.

Our Xerox occasionally expresses notions of limp consequence. The Xerox prints excerpts from Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* at random intervals throughout the day: “The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence. It was my own silence.” And commonly: “I was supposed to be

having the time of my life.” I’m still to witness a surrogate defense strategy on behalf of the philodendron. I don’t think the Philodendron and the Xerox are in cahoots. They may be simply at odds with each other.

Poodles, Pianos, and Limousines

DRIVING ON THE ONE-TEN AT 65 MPH, ALTHOUGH I WAS NOT sure about the accuracy of that. Since my speedometer had been broken for months, I presumed the magnetized cog had reversed polarity. My lazy thoughts were interrupted by the deafening traffic report kicking in through my semi-dead headset: “Beautiful sunny day here in Los Angeles and the heat is off the chart today. Drivers out there, we have been advised by the transit authority to warn drivers not to stop on the roads this fine morning, even for small children, cats, dogs, or women crossing. We’ve had several reports that people’s tires have been melting into the asphalt, and even that some vehicles are bursting into flames without cause, particularly on the five, the ten, and the one oh one. So if you come across a few stranded vehicles, please do not stop and help, we repeat please do not stop and help, just ignore them and go about your business.”

As the broadcast finishes, I noticed a block of slick black reflections spilling over my chromed dashboard. My car was suddenly but gracefully surrounded by a formation of black limousines. A motorcade changing its flocking direction, with my white Camaro centrally blocked in. As I waved down my window to confront them, I noticed, through the blackened windows, identical white poodles, attentively perched on each of the vehicle’s rear black leather seats. Their tongues lolled out and they were accompanied by men holding shock pistols.

I’d heard of the poodle limousines, but never actually seen them. A Chinese ambassador a while back insured his prize possession—a rare white color-matched Himalayan Poodle. But, alas the poodle perished of a heart attack in transit to his master’s Beverly Hills summer chalet. Rumor has it, the ambassador had the poodle in question escorted by a drone-protected motorcade of white limousines. The poor beast started hyperventilating. Help was alerted; the paramedics arrived but had no idea which vehicle the dog was in. When they eventually opened

the correct car door, the dog was found lifeless and pronounced dead at the scene.

I had also further read that the ambassador had his former companion Seymour cloned. I'd like to believe in coincidences, but I'd never actually seen one. That is, until now.

As I turned to look back toward the highway, pulling down my sun visor, dust spit up into the air, in a billowing cloud of tiny reflective particles higher than my line of sight. A huge wooden white carcass hit my windshield, forcing a crack that split in seconds and grew like ivy. My back wheels thudded over this broken construction, throwing my head into the steering wheel.

When the skull moves, the brain moves with it. The brain is forced up against the skull's cavity and compresses. The result of such an incident is concussion. Concussion can result in heightened sensitivity to sound, and is often associated with the sound of rotation or circling, chirping birds and engine noises. A large object, for example a piano, falling from a great height also produces a sound. This sound is oddly reminiscent of the sound of a flute, a wood thrush, or more precisely a piccolo.

I didn't stop the car, I kept driving. As I looked in the rear-view mirror to spot the perpetrator, I saw that I had hit, or been hit by ... well ... a white piano. Someone had thrown the piano from the highway overpass. Glancing upward, I spotted the head of a palm tree in flames, spewing ash in a thick phosphorus pink cloud, concealing the assailants clambering into a pickup truck. I pushed my glasses to the bridge of my nose, and pushed my fingertips against the spiderwebbed, pliable windshield glass. The poodle-armed limousines had disappeared without a trace, unaffected by the mayhem, a figment of this city, Los Angeles.

Smoke in the Eyes of Mickey

THE OFFICE BUILDING IS IN ANAHEIM, SOUTHEAST OF LOS ANGELES. It consists of a singular high-rise built directly into the old Disneyland amusement park after the Disney Corporation's blood-curdling bankruptcy back in fifty-two. The pink, shimmering glass high-rise protrudes from the iconic Magic Kingdom castle, the south-facing of-

fices overlooking a forest, littered with the ghostly silhouettes of faded animatronic characters such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and that silly rat-looking thing, or was it a dog? Their giant, laughing face were dirt-marked in the creases of their rippling fiberglass smiles, barely visible in the sun-bleached landscape, dotted with whited-out, hot-dog-shaped monoliths and flagged ticket turrets.

I stare quite frequently at them, sometimes for hours; Mickey Mouse's pupils are very close to my window, almost close enough to touch if I leaned out far with stretched fingers. I carefully blow smoke rings at the window with one eye closed, trying to align the two circles—the black dot of the pupil and translucent gray smoke ring, overlaid one on top of each other. As they merge, I imagine a life without the glacial pace of drowning. We aren't supposed to smoke in the office, but no one cares, because the building's carbon filters will suck the living shit out of the toxins.

My lungs haven't felt the sharp consequences of industrialization in quite some time, so I induce them myself. My cigarette, often noticed by coworkers stapled between my fingers, is lit from a concentrated refraction of sunlight that hits a small piece of carpet. The carpet there is scorched, darkened from the rubber transfer off my heel from the repeated stamping out of the small fire that regularly burns in that spot, just after the sun's peak. I could tell maintenance about it, but I choose not to; I'd rather watch my carpet burn through the vaped horizon of my morning coffee. I normally wait until the flames begin licking before I lift my foot.

The Property Line

IT WAS THE PERFECT CONSTRUCTION. PRECISION-PLANTED. ALGORITHMICALLY SEEDING. My bioengineered lawn was perfection. But the plat, my plat, was unnerving me. Despite its perfectly articulated yield of erect, soft, tapered grass strands, when looking out of my window I could see a shift, an overlap of indignant chaos. Laid out was a careful parade of wooden pegs, hammered into the ground, marking out a site, a carved plot, sectioned off with cobalt-blue rope.

As I was treading up and down this line of contention, my neighbor

appeared at his window. “Geometries of the void!” he screamed from his south-facing balcony. “Geometries of the fucking void!” his wife echoed, while pointing directly at the slither of cross-contamination. Both completely indignant, despite the fact that their infernal “void” was overlaid on top of my property, my lawn.

My hope is that at some point, amid their fiery passion of madness, one of them will slip and fall, striking flat surfaces and sharp corners, arms and legs instinctively tucking in for protection, picking up speed, and landing directly into the void.

U n f r i e n d l y F i r e

KILL HIM FIRST.

Vantage Point Spies

1. Right turn, Left turn, Right turn, Left turn. 2. Left turn, Right turn, Left turn, Right turn.
1. Stop. 2. Stop.
1. Zoom in 3,000 pixels. 2. Zoom out 3,000 pixels.
1. Focus. 2. Focus.
1. Scan 40 meters. 2. Minus scan 6,000 meters.
1. Face recognition (negative). 2. Heat recognition (negative).
1. Pivot upward. 2. Pivot downward.
- 1 Face recognition (positive). 2. Face recognition (positive).
1. Heat recognition (negative). 2. Heat recognition (negative).
1. Bounce back. 2. Bounce toward.
1. Lock vision sight. 2. Lock vision sight.
1. Heat recognition (positive). 2. Heat recognition (positive).
1. Rotate clockwise 180 degrees. 2. Rotate counterclockwise 180 degrees.
1. Scan 10,000 pixels. 2. Scan 10,000 pixels.
1. Rotate counterclockwise 180 degrees. 2. Rotate clockwise 180 degrees.
1. Bounce toward target. 2. Bounce back from target.
1. Pivot downwards. 2. Pivot upwards.
1. Heat recognition (positive). 2. Heat recognition (positive).

1. Motion detection encountered. 2. Motion detection encountered.
1. 360 scan rotation. 2. 360 scan rotation.
1. Alert! 2. Alert!
1. Request to engage. 2. Request to engage.
1. Launch sequence initiated. 2. Launch sequence initiated.
1. Counting down. 2. Counting down.
1. Launch. 2. Launch.
1. Connection lost. 2. Connection lost.

Worry Club, the Mechanical Turk Hotline

DO YOU WORRY ABOUT THINGS THAT YOU RECOGNIZE MOST PEOPLE do not worry about (such as the little things around your home)? Do you find it very difficult to stop worrying, and cannot relax as a result?

Does your worrying rarely result in you reaching any solution for a particular problem? Do you worry about relationships, family, or friends? Do you worry and have stress related to work?

Let's face it, your stress and worries are making your life hard. It is affecting your life and those around you. For just a few dollars, you can speak to a professional who can help make your life more manageable. We can help you feel better, and offer you a neutral ear to help you regain your life. Unburden yourself, and let us worry for you.

Dial 1-866-WORRY4U.

XXX

"NO COMMENT."

Zzzz Network

THE SOFT GLOW OF BLUE FLICKERED BEHIND THE SKIN OF MY eyelids, massaging my pupils in haze of gentle vibrating serenity. The gentle voice of the narrator whispered in steady, soothing rhythms.

"She yawned, wondering silently if she would ever dare to gaze upon the enchanted fountain of milk and honey gushing quietly in the moonlight. Look at the soft, fluffy sheep, she thought: their woolen bellies breathing in and out. In and out. Murmuring with their gentle

whispering sighs. I wonder how many sheep there are, she thought. So she started to count them: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, 13.

“She walked slowly, very slowly toward Sleepytown. Everything was soft and slow. Buildings made of feathers and white cotton. Plump fluffy sheep, sleeping in clusters. She could see stars twinkling in the silent, black night sky; she began counting them: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. She could hear music. The sound of a harp echoing gently in the distance.”

“Perhaps I’ll sleep too.” The surrounding sheep agreed with a nod, and approached her. Curling up they all laid down, creating a soft cloud of warmth and comfort. A deep breath of relief. All was calm. All was good. Not a care in the world. ❧