

I sit here, melancholy for a rusting and rotting Americana that I do not know. It is a sad world, with people who have every right to be sad, but many of the denizens do not exercise that right. They are not hopeful—No, hope left when Consolidated Power decided that combining your electrical bill with your parent’s post-mortem debt reclamation just made too much business sense. So not hopeful, but instead, present.

A funeral for two unnamed—regrettably so—horses crowns this bizarre game, *Kentucky Route Zero*. These horses were known just as “The Neighbors,” and they occupied a run-down barn in the middle of an unnamed town. The Neighbors’ (as I write this, I just now noticed the pun) neighbors hadn’t really thought it necessary to name the horses. They weren’t really theirs to name, after all. Wouldn’t it be strange if one of your neighbors decided how you should be called? Only after their interactions had come to a close and people were trying to capture those living memories, the Neighbors earthly journey at an end, do characters come to regret their namelessness.

Their town might currently, or definitely was, or possibly could later be called Un Puebla de Nada. Its current residents seem unaffected by its lack of nomenclature. The town is both less than a town and more than a town. Loose membership and fluctuating (though seemingly always in a downward trajectory) number of residents keeps commitment loose for these freewheeling yet nevertheless caring people, but this land is also situated on old “native” land, as denoted by the spiral mound that makes up the center of the town. Either way, in recollections of past residents or interactions with those present, it was never about the town. It was about the people.

I took part in what could generously be called a spirited attempt at redefining fraternity organizational practices in the hope of decentralizing the right to legitimacy in Greek life. In

reality, I joined a group of peers who were equally unenthused with the other social opportunities at my university, and together we joined what amounted to a fake fraternity.

It was once a real fraternity. House, service hours, secret handshake, whole thing. Irresponsibility would prove cyclically prophetic (at least on my own part later), and the on-campus, legitimate version of the fraternity would force nationals and the university to revoke the charter. Someone familiar with the unfortunate realities of fraternities in America might assume horrifically grotesque actions which prompted the revocation. Part of the reason why I joined this group, however, is because they were so different from others in the Greek system. What got their official status revoked was not a criminal act, but a late payment on a hotel bill. Go figure.

Undeterred and determined to keep the party going, they kept recruiting and succeeded for a number of years before I ever arrived at the school. They were a fixture of the university's social scene, both in spite of and in part because of their unofficial status. Under my own year's tenure, the university, wary of an unregulated yet still organized body having such an influence on the students, cracked down. Some, though definitely not all (will not name names but they know who they are, and I am not one of them) tried their best. Ultimately for naught, the off-campus fraternity disbanded.

It was not an immediate dissolution. Though we ourselves knew it would never be the same, we kept some operations continuing. We threw some house parties, until our landlords received so many noise complaints that we would have riders attached to our rent agreements that stipulated expensive (and excessive and illegal, mind you) rent hikes if noise complaints were lodged against these addresses. So, we stopped the house parties. We organized bar nights, which were essentially like our house parties but with much more expensive drinks. These

measures only worked for so long, however, as each closing year meant another class of friends leaving to continue their lives. By my senior year, it was just 10 or so of us. The majority of people on campus had no idea what “Sig” (the name of our vagabond group) was. We had succeeded at keeping up appearances for a time, but the Hard Times distillery man had come to collect his I.O.U.

No, it was a slow dissolution. I would meet someone new, and they would ask if I was in a fraternity. I would smile sheepishly and say, “Well, yes and no. Have you heard of old Sig-Ep (a telling microcosm of our own impotence was that most people, even while we were in full swing, did not know of our preferred nomenclature, Sig, and my best bet at recognition was calling it old Sig-Ep)?” More often than not, the response was “No, sorry, what’s that?”, and I would change the subject. So while it is true that I have not lived in a small artistic commune unable to sustain itself with new members, or drove for an antique shop limping along on its last leg (or delivery), or worked as an old-TV repair-person whose very supply was being phased out by newer and newer models, I do have experience with the entropy of a group and the slow decay of what once I recognized.

It was those memories of Sig, both good and ill, that surfaced during the horse funeral. Fun nights spent playing drinking games. Tearing down the roof and a post-game reception where everyone in the room was a generational talent at dancing performing at the absolute peak of their abilities. But there was also the pain of realizing that we would not have another pledge class, of letting down the guys who came before us. When the shades of the previous residents phased in and joined the mournful dirge for “the Neighbors,” I thought of the old members of Sig who lived before me, both ones I knew and those I didn’t. I thought of the quieter nights my senior year, not worse in quality but just altogether different. And I thought of the people who

now live at 2147 Maple or 912 Hamlin. Do they feel our shades joining in their own revelry? Would they ever know what fond memories were made before their own times?

If I remember, would it really matter if they do? I hold dear these memories, but memories they will forever be. What truly matters is the present. The epilogues of *Kentucky Route Zero* hammers home the human emphasis of a society rotting and rusting from the inside. A young man with nowhere to go is welcomed back by an estranged former employer who himself can no longer afford to compensate the boy for his lackluster custodial services. “Be kind,” the playwright Carrington reminds our overstretched bartender.

Waxing poetic about college parties is silly. I know that. The state of a town’s, and by extension society’s, entropy obviously dwarf my own experiences with entropy. The more I reflect and read this piece of writing, I am struck by its quaint struggles when entire cities flake away block by block in the “real world.” Yet, no matter how small and petty my own experiences with this concept of social entropy, I still cried during that horse funeral. Hard.

All things fade, some more gracefully than others, and some with more volition than others. As much as I wanted Conway to shake off the chains of his addiction and turn bright-eyed into the next chapter of his life, working off his debt at a distillery leads him to the same end as everyone else. I just had hoped, since I had invested part of myself into this man, that he would make a better decision. That optimism is, unfortunate as it may be, naïve.

We, ourselves, all fade. But despite the sadness in the world, the stories of Conways becoming mired in debts that are barely yet still wholly of their own doing, there are still other stories. In my playthrough, many of the characters had decided (through my own influence, of course) to stay in the unnamed town.

But, ultimately, whether they stay or not doesn't matter. There are other endings, iterations, of the game where no one stays, and the town "dies" there. But, so does everyone else, anyways, and though the shades will always be there, shades they will remain. We're all heading for the same place, but that does not mean there isn't value in what we have to experience here and now. Junebug and Jonny still found joy in performing their music, even if there was no one there to listen.

From "*I'm Going That Way*":

"I'm going that way, I'm going that way /

Yes dear, the savior I adore is with me each day /

I'm clinging to him and never to stray /

Just singing praises all day long, I'm going that way"