

The Rest of Your Life

When you first become sober
Unbounded time can cause anxiety
So set an alarm to go off
Every 3 minutes

No cocaine for 3 minutes
No cocaine for 6 minutes
No cocaine for 9 minutes
No cocaine for 12 minutes

An achievement
You should be proud of
Worth celebrating
With some cocaine

Here's an analogy:
Your artistic endeavor
Be it poetry, watercolors or pan flute
Is like your best friend

Who you decide to move in with
And cocaine is like that new boyfriend
Poetry has to hear you fuck
Through the thin adjoining wall

You told watercolors
You were busy tonight
And now watercolors has to listen
To the grunts and skin slaps

And feel the wall
Against which her head rests
Shudder violently as though
She herself were being fucked

You don't do cocaine,
so that analogy doesn't speak to you,
But substitute cocaine or any substance
to which not being addicted

You feel superior about
For Instagram or TikTok or Twitter
Who your best friend, pan flute
Has to listen to you fuck

This person who monopolizes your time
And makes you progressively miserable
Your screen time tracker says
You've already spent 4 hours today fucking

Time to rein it
By abstaining for the rest of your life
Starting with 3 minute intervals
12 minutes into the rest of your life

It's time to celebrate

A Diagnostic Touch

Can be more relaxing
Than a massage
As the doctor palpates
My lymph nodes

Enters my ear canal
With an otoscope
Has me turn my head
And cough

What is more healing
Than a hug from a friend?
The reassuring grip
Of a blood pressure monitor

A cold stethoscope press
Puts me at greater ease
Than being asked
Are you ok?

I'd rather be asked
Do you smoke?
When did the pain start?
What other symptoms?

Any big changes or stressors?
And what relieves the pain?
This, Doc, I say
This

Bay Area Life Cycle

The software engineer
who makes buttons
for a living starts therapy.

The software engineer
who makes buttons
for a living

feels anxious and depressed,
his life lacking
meaning and connection.

The software engineer
who makes buttons for a living
moved to the city

hoping to change the world
but ended up
making buttons,

working on ever bigger
more elaborate buttons,
finding himself among the legions

of intelligent, promising, well-paid
makers of buttons,
of the sort clicked on

by anxious and depressed people
lacking meaning and connection,
people who can barely roll out of bed

to go to dead-end jobs, much less seek therapy
who still find the motivation to click on buttons,
so well designed they are.

The software engineer's
therapist used to take insurance.
The software engineer's therapist

used to provide pro bono service
to anxious and depressed people
lacking meaning and connection,

back when she made
once-weekly outreach trips,
until one day she tired

of driving over the bridge
of searching frantically for her toll pass,
of inhaling car exhaust in gridlock,

of taping signs to her windows
saying "nothing valuable inside"
of filling out forms for insurance companies

with their diagnosis codes
and descriptions of services rendered
for every subsidized session,

whose writing made her anxious
and depressed and drained her
of the energy

needed to actually
focus on her clients,
which these days is made up

entirely software engineers
who make buttons,
software engineers who can afford

the out-of-pocket rate
the therapist feels justified in extracting,
since this allows her to focus on her clients,

rather than financial difficulties
like the skyrocketing cost of living,
or loans she took out and is still paying off

to attend a not-for-profit
but still expensive
school renowned for therapy,

loans which made her
anxious and depressed
and frightened

of ending up on the streets
like her pro bono clients,
anxious and depressed and destitute.

One day, years into therapy,
the software engineer who makes buttons
makes a breakthrough:

he needs to stop making buttons.
He needs to start helping people,
like he was helped by therapy.

He quits his job at a big tech company,
enrolls at the not-for-profit but still expensive
institution renowned for therapy.

He spends years after graduating getting
specialized accreditations, which alongside
the skyrocketing cost of living,

depletes his nest egg from building buttons
so that by the time the now former engineer
tires of driving over the bridge

of providing pro bono services,
of searching frantically for his toll pass
of inhaling car exhaust in gridlock

of taping signs to his windows
of filling out insurance paperwork
his client load will consist

entirely of software engineers
making the kind of buttons
clicked on by anxious and depressed people

lacking connection and meaning,
the kind of buttons
he used to make

before he became a therapist.

Vital Signs

I watched the patient monitor
Like a sentry observing
Blood pressure
Body temperature
Respiratory rate
Trying to interpret the readouts
Comparing an ash-colored face
To little green waveforms
Searching for correspondence
Between the numbers and the man
My mother and I had given the go-ahead
To stop the epinephrine drip
To cast off my father's chemical lifebuoy
Without which his heart rate would sink
His lungs cease conducting
Air of their own accord
I wanted to witness the moment
Like a stargazer waiting
Beneath a darkened sky
I wanted to pay attention
Like someone standing
In the quiet of an eclipse
When my mother wailed
The flatlines followed
Trailed by zeroes
Marking the passage of the moment
And I wondered had I missed it?
Been so preoccupied with signs
Like the bird watcher
Consulting his guidebook
Had I looked up too late to see
The rare specimen fly

Speed of Sight

Mankind hungers for more per second
As demonstrated by the demand
For ever higher refresh rate monitors
That enable gamers to shoot opponents
With twitch responsiveness

A laboratory experiment on mindfulness
Found that long-term meditators discern
Discrete flashes of color
Where control subjects see
Only an undifferentiated blur

A fine-grained perception of events
As when the high-refresh rate of a monitor
Meets the high poll rate of a mouse
And the pro-gamer pulls off a headshot
"pwning" his opponents in a livestream

During intercourse the Don Juan
Achieves high orgasmic resolution
Where other men count six to nine contractions
He decomposes his climax
Into smaller and smaller subunits

Like a mad lover the Astrophysicist stares
At a distant star system
With the response time of the pro-gamer
And glimpses a supernova
An achievement he brags about

The WHO implores handwashing
After using the latest game console
Whose haptic feedback is so nuanced
Young men everywhere contract
Venereal diseases from game controllers

Foodies begin to "tell it like they see it"
After dining at five-star Michelin restaurants
And contracting no-nonsense attitudes
From the no-nonsense chefs
Who prepared their meals

More and more information passes
In straighter and straighter lines
Our tools having turn our minds
To glass of higher refractive index

The wine connoisseur decomposes
The Sauvignon Blanc
Into finer and finer taste notes
Flicks his head back with closed eyes
Achieving ecstasy before swallowing

"You taste like Novocain"
She said blinking
Through sperm-stung eyes
A conquest the pro-gamer brags about
How he "pwned her in the face"

High energy particles
From distant supernovae
Bombard the retinas
Of insomniac astronauts
Creating closed-eye fireworks displays

Satellite sensors capture the nuances of fires
Can discern whether wild or manmade
We've come a long way
From anesthetized cats
In comprehending vision

And one day soon with CRISPR CAS-9
We'll sprout eyes on the back of our heads
Like the pro-gamer who need not turn around
To see us as we really are
Naked and vulnerable to gunfire