

Proverbs of Hell (Dos and Donts) v.2
Brian Kim Stefans

a work-in-progress

In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy In off-hours at work, visit jodi.org monthly for pro-situ distraction. In hotel at conferences on the digital arts, avoid the theorist that would be past seed time and has written three books on the Victorian novel. In the disorienting timescape of a north-northeastern winter, enjoy nothing more than the liberation from the ill-effects of prolonged programming and the hypoglycemia of intelligentsia flame wars. Behave not as if the abs had the shelf-life of your Athlon. In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.

Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead. Drive your internet application through a cartload of high-res images, and you might chance upon the gold filling of a retired army general in your pasta *al dente* Drive your viewer through too many randomized texts masquerading as aleatoric *deri*ve and you shall find a reader with a bad hair life. Drive not at all, but walk blissfully in the carnivalesque bubble mall of a psychogeographic metropolis. Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead.

The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom. The road of greater flexibility in methods of random access leads to the simplicity of the modermless codex. The road of suggestive variability is the road to multi-medial beauty; the road of arbitrary options is the road to unilateral sleep. Provide the user what she seeks, in curious synaesthetic doses, and you shall taste the wine of unpassive attention — a little bit of “fort da” never hurt anyone. The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.

Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity. But more users have visited Prudence’s web page than Exhibitionist’s, because Capacity has become the mantra of the New Economy global theme park. It is the Artist who pulls abundance out of CPU Incapacity, and it is the Artist who will not be burned by Dot Com Meltdown. Prudence is a hostess whose riches are high in concepts, high in pragmatist’s protein, and low in unsaturated Fats of the LAN. Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity.

He who desires but acts not breeds pestilence. She who desires not but acts breeds with him. In a male-dominated programming culture, the funk of the He damns the frank of the She, and the hunk of the We talks the flank of the Thee, and gender politics returns to square one. We who desire cyberbodies dissembling in cloaks of poly-gendered morphs and reassembling highways of privilege into escalators to the stars mean business. He who desires but acts not breeds pestilence.

The cut worm forgives the plow. The cut internet connection is unforgiv-

able, but trusts in the Manichean dualism of C'est La Vie. The Life of Chance and the Music of Changes are thwarted by ignorance of the varieties of insidious CPU speeds, but surrender not the heights of concept and the determinations of multimedia to the ignorance of Variable Means. Embrace the machine's inconsistency as one more reflection of the inscription of material on the body of the text, and succor the weak of memory and the short of processor with "feature" not "bug" events. The firm course requires this vow. The cut worm forgives the plow.

Dip him in the river who loves water. Find the well of electronic water, and dip him in. The well is called scandal, and the chemical equation: those you know, squared. Web space must be Rabelaisian or it will not be at all. Dip him in the streaming well of material and virtual subjectivities, and ye shall have a better informed viewer of the Jim Lehrer News Hour. Bathe the lights of attitude in the asteroid field of contradiction and ye shall have a mouth dripping with Wildean puns and Debordian detournement. Dip him in the river who loves water.

A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees. So paint a different tree for the wise man, a different tree for the fool. The art of the electronic object is expanded tenfold when the same electronic object can be approached several different ways and yet provide boldly different but not indeterminate experiences. Enter the car from the left side, and you are the driver; enter it from, the right, and you are a passenger. The art of the electronic object is expanded twentyfold when the determinants of its contents are influenced by the discernments of the user, hence putting both fool and wise man in the role of conversant, creator, laboratory test animal and personalized drug czar. A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.

He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star. He whose light gives facts, but whose face gives no stare, shall never become a namebrand but also shall never demand a name. Randomized text has never been as enjoyable as randomized sound; the eye sleeps while the ear whistles. To become a star, use what words have which neither sound nor image nor code nor screen have: suggestive meanings that are nearly as powerful, or more so, than the proscribed meanings. To lie is not to deceive; to tell the truth is not entirely reasonable when the truth is for sale, even if this truth be randomized. He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star.

Eternity is in love with the productions of time. But the productions of time are able to be dated by model and serial number, OS version and antiquity of programming language. The productions of time stand opposed to the indifference of eternity, though eternity signs the checks and the productions cash them. Eternity shines not nicely on the digital

object, which produces no ruins and whose signature presence is absence. Contemporeinty shines joyously on the digital object, which shares in its bull-market confidence and lemming-like capacity to trust in the blue horizon just past that Shrub on the Cliff. Eternity is in love with the productions of time.

The busy bee has no time for sorrow. The internet poet has no time for crying over concepts spilled over from previous generations of multimedia artists, and has no time for digging through theories that best be described in prose than in screen. The burdened bee has no time for tomorrow, and the relieved bee has no patience to sit down and try, try, try again. The conceptual poet has no time for others, and the humanist poet too much for nonsense. The internet poem that doesn't "stare back" the more it is stared at is not a very good text, not a very good application, and not very polite. The busy bee has no time for sorrow.

The hours of folly are measured by the clock, but of wisdom no clock can measure. With faster CPU processing, folly has a field day at increasing rates of speed, while wisdom remains a hologram on the flight decks of the future. Digital processing does not liberate one from the variable strictures of good prose, and one shall not be "Joycean" through Perl scripts that pump out sonorous Derridean punscapes and Perecois anagrams with the flick of a loop. Wisdom sleeps in the aporias of folly; folly dances in the "black gold" of wisdom's over-sized gumshoes. The hours of folly are measured by the clock, but of wisdom no clock can measure.

All wholesome food is caught without a net or a trap. To overload a web project with trickery puts tears in the reticular fiber that is the internet poet's Walmart and Bennihana, and scares the wholesome back into the shadows of memory, to the sandboxes and safe havens of an ontologically secure childhood. The wholesome of site are instinctually disinclined to engage with digital phenomena, just as the unwholesome of sight are unaware of the presence of detonating art in the ripples and sounds of crushed papers bags. Satisfy those who fear the immaterial, and you have satisfied many. Satisfy the converted, and you are merely another poet snoozing beside the stream of history channeling by. All wholesome food is caught without a net or a trap.

Bring out number, weight and measure in a year of dearth. Bring out more numbers, some half-finished action scripts, and a few scanned photos from magazines in a year of not having many good ideas for poems. Cumulative web works can satisfy with the varieties of their inspirations and the many points of light that minor, contradictory projects shed on the fabled autonomy of the art-object. The web body is not pure unless the variety of its organs find fitness in the skeleton of its scheme. Fear not the updating of

a Flash file for the new context, as meaning is not inherent in a script any more than in the placement of a colon in a sentence by Henry James. Bring out number, weight and measure in a year of dearth.

No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings. But a cyberpoet can soar even higher after mastering the art of collaboration. The Auteur in the cyberrealm is certainly the white magician of the pixelated Middle Earth, yet no Auteur thrives without drinking of the river of borrowed text, borrowed scripts, borrowed sounds. Even Godard had a cameraman, and Welles never wrote an original screenplay. The job of the bureaucrat and web producer becomes the glory of the poet and civil administrator when the coordination is of artists in concord, each on the same platform and each following the same thread. No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings.

A dead body revenges not injuries. A cyberpoem whose scripts have ceased to be understood by browsers, whose ani-gifs break in the middle, whose Flash files act like demented cousins of their original intentions, who sound files crackle with the whimsy of renegade bits, may survive like Spiral Jetty in the memories of its original viewers, but will impress no one with its fitness for the canons of Les Damoiselles D'Avignon. Fault not the cyberpoet who has made one small contribution even if he possesses an exaggerated reputation, for the capital that you sense being corrupted is also the capital that was not here yesterday. An incomplete cyberpoem tells no lies, yet utters nothing but truth. A dying cyberpoem tells many lies, but is equally drowning in technicolor truths. A dead body revenges not injuries.

The most sublime act is to set another before you. The most sublime cyberpoem is an electronic object with the plasticity of a solid object (Rubrik's Cube), or a literary object with the complexity of Constant's Situationist cities (Webster's Third). An electronic object should be an ordered arrangement of surfaces and angles, just like a Vorticist sculpture, or a disordered arrangement threatening order (Calder's mobiles), or an ordered arrangement threatening disorder (Tinguely's *Homage*), or two or three of the above. What is set before is also set behind, below and above in the absorptive realm of multimedia interaction, making Brechtian V-effekt just that much harder to attain, and that much more imperative to achieve. The most sublime act is to set another before you.

If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise . If every poet who faltered at the doors of scripting persisted at least to the finger foods table, a culture could blossom of the Glorious in Attempt, despite the Poverty of Achievement. Those who cease to persist, over-sated in ease, and fail to progress, over-determined in stasis, will outnumber the wise

threefold, though the ambient patterns of light on the ceiling would not be noticeably altered. Academy Award-styled theme music played to each name announced at a digital literature awards ceremony cloaks not the fool in cultural capital nor demeans the wise for whom capital is a private affair, though both the wise and the fool should be spared the folly of attending. If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise.

Folly is the cloak of Knavery. But to be the knave is to be de facto free of the folly of being a dictator in a globalized world, where nation is a code word for tariff and person is a code-word for slave. Knavery is the glory of she who would choose wisely among the fools, as dictatorship is the embarrassment of she who would choose blindly among the followers. The digital art project that would be a nation is a notion of the past; the same project, attempting citizenship without passport and transportation without anthem and property rights, is a premonition of the future, not to mention huge. Folly is the cloak of Knavery.

Shame is Pride's cloke. But cloak not thy shame in arteries of digital dissimulation lest the projects of those ten years younger reveal the inefficiencies of your faux OOP code. Cake not thy shit in sentences of fraudulent verbal sham lest your academic department research your bibliography and discover Shim's word's among Shem's ashes. The more the merrier, but the mere is minor, and digital literature, which claims to be the majority, has no patience for the pejorative. Shame is Pride's cloke.

Prisons are built with stones of law, brothels with bricks of religion. The Rabelaisian web-poem is built with the sinews of the Corpus Reticuli still fresh and dripping with public communication; the Nouveau-Romanish web-poem is built with airless skull cavities choking on the sublimities of the absent witness, but are still fun to argue with if only because of their existential accents. Neither law nor religion, the non-prisonhouse of the internet is built with the bricks of radical democracy, paved with the stones of everybody's yellow brick road, and wallpapered with screenshots from anime videos and CNN. Prisons are built with stones of law, brothels with bricks of religion.

The pride of the peacock is the glory of God. The multi-plumed pride of the Director file utilizing the "trails" feature is the glory of Macromedia and the province and research area of turux.org. Features designed for devious purposes such as advertising and sentimental manhandling can be detoured for the victorious thrills of repetition and the vicarious agonies of excess. The pride of the programmer defeats the prudery of the artist who would not put forth that which was not touched by human hands or baptized by the waters of experience or the instruction book. The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.

The lust of the goat is the bounty of God. The fascination that the acolyte feels before engaging with the narcissism of the culture industry is the warmth in the cockles of the heart of any college-level teacher banking on celebrity. Spend (time, money) freely while your interest implores the mind/body dualism to please let go; earn (time, money) when your ontological security as an artist has reached its capially inflated, culturally assimilated Twin Peaks. No man should be so proud that he cannot play Mozart (Pound); no man should be so modest that he would not sing before breathing (Rotten). The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.

The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God. The rest of the lion is pretty good, too. There is no reason for a cyberpoet to be a moralist, and an equal amount of reason to be anti-authoritarian, when multiple subjectivities are possible in a single electronic object. But your object shall not be art if the objective is to be artisinal and show off your torso of Achilles like some relic from the Ping Dynasty. The negative capability of the net object is in constant dialogue with the positive susceptibility of the user; no conversation is deemed below them who are above nothing and sit in a human-shaped cube. The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.

The nakedness of woman is the work of God. There are lots of naked women on the internet. But as the philanthropy of the virtual space has no room for the philosophy of the patriarchal bedroom, the nakedness of woman is but the narcissism of condensed bitmaps, and nobody goes (or leaves) home satisfied. The cyberpoem that does not satisfy the need for taboo vision can stay at home and videotape the grass growing, but the cyberpoem that is a pornography of the possible grants no solace to the existentialist, no strategy for the Situationist. The naked attitudes of women about the nude solitaires of man is also the flora amidst which the text klepto stomps. The nakedness of woman is the work of God.

Excess of sor row laughs. Excess of joy weeps. Excess of digital vision is bound to cross over into territories about which mom and dad will be called to the school principal. The good cyberpoem is like a nutritional toxin, letting them have their cake and hate it too. The bad cyberpoem is like a sugar substitute: all of the capital, some of the taste, and none of the byte. Excess of methods is necessary in a field where concept comes easy and execution is outsourced; fear not the exhaustive strategy that puts every lion through its hoops, and every text through its feints and fades. Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps.

The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man. Bury your Flash project in a cornucopia of ill-conceived sound files

and you shall the see the deconstructive words of total ignorance shadow you in the halls of powered-down, screen-saver infamy. If the great eye of man finds no sustenance in your sound files, and the great ear of woman no thrill in your Photoshop quartets, then perhaps you not an artist and should seek the rod of SVA training. Being multimedial is as essential to web art as being continental is to philosophy; do without them and the options are still endless, though the vocabulary more than halved. The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man.

The fox condemns the trap, not himself. The curmudgeon condemns the technology (Word), and not his own fundamentalist attitudes toward the ineffable (word). The ideologue condemns the software maker because he's never made a blanket sewed by a machine that could pass as an Iroquois quilt; the sculpture condemns the machine because Apple has outpaced her own beleaguered sense of immortality and upped the saturation point of coffee table culture. Do not fear Flash because it is "slick" and is easier to operate than a charcoal stick; there is nothing primitive and back-to-earth about a Pentium I chip. The fox condemns the trap, not himself.

Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth. Both digital editing and manic depression do a cuisenart combination of both, as well as deleting, copying, cutting-and-pasting, gaussian-blurring, and morph-rendering beyond surface recognition, often in the same evening. That which is transubstantiated by a flick of the switch is also that which can substantially transform millions by a switch of the flick. Give Chris Marker a digital video editor, and you would have The Last Bolshevik; give Steven Spielberg a Bolex, and you would have miles of black tape. The language by which the discontents of the human genome in society have become mastered has been irreversibly effected by virtual psychologies, which bargains in speculative architectures over real ones. The language by which the contents of the human mind has become confused has also been irreversibly effected, as if allusions to Matrix-like leaps and kicks turns all of us into black belts and Lawrence Fishburn. Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth.

Let man wear the fell of the lion, woman the fleece of the sheep. And let the sheep fell the polyester lion lest the lion fleece the sheep of 100% cotton. The polyandry of the web can subvert the polygamy of culture with a generous sampling of polyalcohols applied aptly. Delve deep into the vocabularic tumults of web subjectivity, acquiring like the magnet the shards of horizontal meanings as they proliferate in libidinous civil disobedience. Gender relations shall be transformed or they will not be at all. Let man wear the fell of the lion, woman the fleece of the sheep.

The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship. The web spider, unlike the friendship man and the nest bird, interacts programmatically with the detritus of human communication and can be empowered with the ability to architecturally reconfigure these exchanges into impressive nests as transient monuments to enduring friendship. The nest bird depends wholly on the web for friendship; the friendship man wholly on the web for his nest; the web spider is the arbiter between the two, tirelessly navigating the rubble of the keyed and forgotten to insure the march of history proceeds in visible increments and not in infrared flows of data channeled at a speed of fright. The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship.

The selfish smiling fool and the sullen frowning fool shall be both thought wise, that they may be a rod. Neither make very good contenders on Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, yet the smiling fool and the frowning fool are icons on the desktop of television culture, ready for the point-and-click. Both producer and scriptwriter, Flash artists that are destined only for corporate monoculture are not to be spared the rod, yet need not despair of a job as the knavery of the crook is the wisdom of the perrucker, and feeds the monied subculture of anarchist discontent. A ream of paper is worth more than a thousand words; a screen of The Revolution of Everyday Life can be printed out thousands of times. The selfish smiling fool and the sullen frowning fool shall be both thought wise, that they may be a rod.

ENOUGH, OR TOO MUCH!