

**Proverbs of Hell (Dos and Donts)**  
for Christophe Tarkos

**Brian Kim Stefans**

This is the first 20 of 69 entries, all of which appear in *Fashionable Noise: On Digital Poetics* (Atelos, 2003).

## Proverbs of Hell (Dos and Donts)

1. *In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.* In off-hours at work, visit [jodi.org](http://jodi.org) for pro-situ distraction and [turux.org](http://turux.org) for preter-semiotic action in game-world real-time. In hotels at conferences on digital poetics, avoid the theorist who would be five minutes past seed time and has reaped five critical harvests from the postmodern American novel. In the disquieting sempiternality of a north-northeastern winter, enjoy nothing more than the liberation from the ill-effects of prolonged programming and the overripe prose 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.
2. *Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead.* Drive your internet app through a cartload of high-res images drugged by the uncompressed plows of B-techno sound loops, 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 *derive*, and

you shall find a reader with a bad hair life. Drive not at all, but walk blissfully in the carnivalesque bubble malls of suburban psychogeography and mingle with the buxom banes and lustless lux-loves not screened since the time of *Neuromancer*, *Kora in Hell* and *Paris Spleen*. Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead.

3. *The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.* The road of greater flexibility in method of random access and greater variability in the contract of approach leads to the simplicity of the modemless codex and the finger-panning of the papyrus scroll. The road of suggestive variability is the road to multimedial beauty; the road of arbitrary personalization is the road to unilateral disinterest and the hypertrophy of exchange. Provide the user what she seeks in curious synaesthetic doses and you shall taste the wine of unpassive attention — a little "fort da" never hurt anyone. Fake not the myth of access to palliate tunnel vision. The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.
4. *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 Electroconomy 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 maid whose riches are high in concept, high in pragmatist protein, and low in unsaturated Fats of the LAN. Exhibitionist's saving grace is that she captures more mp3's than anyone else, and once bandwidth goes the way of Ptolemy's shell, she will be the coroner that stole the company wreath. Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity.
5. *He who desires but acts not breeds pestilence.* She who desires not but acts breeds with him. In a male-ruled programming culture, the hunk of the He damns the shank of the She, and the frank of the We chalks the funk of the Thee, and gender politics returns to square one. We who desire cyberbodies dissembling in cloaks of poly-gendered morphs and reassembling the highways of privilege into voodoo potlatches of counterfeit visions of interest —

mean business. Avatars are unacted desires breeding the pestilence of drive-by identities, the essence of Self becoming the flavor of Month on a paratactically arranged grid of interacting IPs. He who desires but acts not breeds pestilence.

6. *The cut worm forgives the plow.* The cut phone line is not a blow, but trusts in the Manichean humanism of *c'est la vie*. The Life of Action and the Music of Changes are thwarted by ignorance of the varieties of fundamentalist CPUs and modem's derangement of *tout les sens*, but surrender not the vertigoes of concept and the fungoes of multimedia to an ignorance of Variable Means and the fuzzy theses of Medium Conviction. Embrace the machine's inconstancy as one more version of the violence of inscription on the skein of the page, and succor the weak of memory and the short of processor with "feature" not "bug" predilections. The firm course requires this vow. The cut worm forgives the plow.
7. *Dip him in the river who loves water.* Dip him in the particle acceleration of virtual subjectivities and phantasmagoric geographies who leaps or laughs for the depths of data, and you shall have a better informed viewer of the *Jim Lehrer News Hour*, if not a better Rortian empath or Pynchonian philomath. Find the well of electronic water, and dip him in; this well is called scandal, and the chemical equation: those you know, squared. Web space must be Rabelaisian or it will not be at all. Bathe the lights of singular attitude in the solipsistic eddies of plural contradiction and you shall have a mouth wet with Wildean puns and Debordian *detournement*. Dip him in the river who loves water.
8. *A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.* So make a new tree for the wise man, a new tree for the fool. The electronic object's art is expanded tenfold when the same object is variably utile to provide each user discrete, but not exclusive, experiences. Enter the car from the left side, and you are the driver; enter it from the right, and you are a passenger. The electronic object's art is expanded twentyfold when its contents' dreams are influenced by the user's moods, putting fool and wise man in the role of confessor, cre-

**THIS WEEK'S CELEBRITY RECIPE**  
**BETTY WHITE'S MANDARIN SALAD**  
 Caramelized almonds crunch up this healthy  
 salad with fresh mandarin oranges.

From the book COOKING WITH THE STARS by Rick Ameil - 1999 by  
 Rick Ameil. Published by Barron's Educational Series, Inc., Huppuge, NY  
 11788-3917.

**Preparation time about 20 minutes**  
 3~ head red~d lettuce,  
 torn in pieces  
 ~ head Romaine  
 Lettuces torn in p~ces  
 1 head butter~ lettuce,  
 torn in pieces  
 2 celiw~alks,  
 sliced  
 2gren~te  
 1 (15-oz.) can mandarin  
 orange, drained

JUST before serving combine 1/2 cup oil, green onion, orange  
 segments, almonds and dressing. Toss to mix.  
 ~ tsp. salt  
 ~ tsp. popper  
 2 tbsps. sugar  
 2 t~sps. vinegar  
 ~ CUP V@gtbl Oil  
 dash at hot~saU~  
 1tbl2. chopped  
 pap~sly

**Directions:** all ingredients in jars refrigerate until  
 ready to use.

**Notes:** (this can be done ahead)  
 3/4 cup sliced almonds 4 tbsps. sugar

**Notes:** almonds and sugar in a heat, stirring constantly, until  
 evenly browned and almonds are cooked. Spread out onto waxed  
 paper and cool. Break apart and store at room temperature.

Nutrition: 1/2 cup ~ 198; Fat, 10.8 grams

ator, test animal and personalized drug czar. Feedback is the howl that the  
 fool calls foul and the wise man feed. A fool sees not the same tree that a wise  
 man sees.

9. *He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star.* He whose light gives facts, but whose face no stare, shall never become a namebrand, but also shall not demand a name. Randomized text, unlike randomized sound, does not absorb, though scores the orb, for the ear sips while the eye winks, and the fingers twitch when the retina slips its lines. For he whose source would become a store, use what words have which neither sound nor image nor code have: reticular nuances that subsume their proscriptive sense. 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 random. He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star.
10. *Eternity is in love with the productions of time.* But productions in time that emerge horizontally stand opposite the indifferent verticality of eternity, though eternity signs the checks and the productions cash them, neither entirely satisfied with this cycle of crisis and redescription but both too winded to resist. Eternity shines not nicely on the digital object, which produces no ruins and whose signature absence is a deictic presence. Contemporaneity shines joyously on the digital object, which shares in its bull market confidence and lemming-like capacity to trust in the blue horizon just beyond the last dot of calm. Eternity is in love with the productions of time.
11. *The busy bee has no time for sorrow.* The cyberpoet has no time for crying over concepts spilled from prior generations, though sorrows that Means were not always up to Minds and that digitization could not rescue Bob Brown's poem machine from the seams of time. The conceptual poet has no time for others, and the humanist poet no time for robots; the reptilian poet has time for concepts and humans, but cares more for tending fonts and rollovers. The cyberpoem that doesn't "stare back" the more it is stared at is not a good text, not a good app, and not very polite; the cyberpoem that stares back too sweetly devolves into the nirvana of neurobuddhist hype. The busy bee has no time for sorrow.

12. *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 panoramic hologram on the flight decks of the vistaless future. Algorithmic procedures do not liberate one from the variable strictures of singular prose, and one shall not be “Joycean” through Perl scripts that factor Derridean punscapes and Perecois anagrams with the flick of a switch and the indifference of code. Wisdom sleeps in the aporias of folly; folly dances in the “black gold” of wisdom’s over-sized *lederhosen*. The hours of folly are measured by the clock, but of wisdom no clock can measure.
13. *All wholesome food is caught without a net or a trap.* To overload a web poem with tricks puts tears in the reticular tarps that are the cyberpoet’s Walmarts and Bennihanas, and scares the wholesome into memory’s entropic sandboxes to mourn the safe havens and sedate mirrors of an ontological-ly secure youth. The wholesome of site are not inclined to engage digital fluids, just as the wholesome of sight are unaware of the chiaroscuro and arpeggios of crumpled Fluxus bags. Satisfy those who fear the immaterial, and you have satisfied many; satisfy the digirati, and you are a suit or snoozing beside the streams of Herecleitian lusts. All wholesome food is caught without a net or a trap.
14. *Bring out number, weight and measure in a year of dearth.* Bring out more numbers, some clam-baked action scripts, some aborted lyric doggerel, old Adobe Horrorshop files and scanned pages from Pound’s *Cantos* in a year of not having many good ideas for poems. Modular web works can shine with the thousand points of light that their centrifugal, contradictory inspirations shed on the fabled ineffability of the art-object’s ontology. Fear not the updating of a Flash file for the fertile episteme of a brave new context, as meaning is extrinsic to the bit as it is to the 17th semicolon in the first sentence of James’ *The Ambassadors*. Bring out number, weight and measure in a year of dearth.

15. *No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings.* But a cyberbird can soar even higher after mastering the aviary of collaboration. The Auteur in the cyberrealm is the White Magician of the pixelated Middle Earth, yet no Auteur thrives without drinking deep in the River of Borrowed Texts, Borrowed Scripts, and Borrowed Sounds. Even Godard had a cameraman, and Welles never wrote an original screenplay. The role of the bureaucrat and producer becomes the glory of the poet and director when the coordination is of artists and the conversation of production, all on the same platform and each following the same hypnogogic thread. No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings.
16. *A dead body revenges not injuries.* A cyberpoem whose scripts are error-prone, whose ani-gifs break, and whose sound files crackle with the whimsy of renegade bits, may thrive like the *Spiral Jetty* in the memories of its first historians, but will be deemed unfit for the canons of *Les Dames d'Avignon*. Fault not the cyberpoet who has made one small contribution even if his reputation be bunk, for the capital that seems corrupt today is the capital that was not here yesterday. A dying cyberpoem tells no lies, yet utters nothing but easy truths. A living cyberpoem tells many lies, but its truths are in technicolor, encrusted with entropic salts. A dead body revenges not injuries.
17. *The most sublime act is to set another before you.* The most sublime cyberpoem is a digital object with the plasticity of a solid (Rubik's Cube) or a literary object with the complexity of a database (Ryman's 253). A digital object should be an ordered arrangement of angles and plains (Vorticism), or a disordered arrangement threatening order (Calder's mobiles), or a disordered arrangement threatening disorder (Tinguely's *Homage*), or two or three of the above. What is set before is also set within in the absorptive scans of the seductive screen, thus putting the v-effekt that much further from touch or placing it too close to teach. The most sublime act is to set another before you.



18. *If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise.* If every poet who faltered at the doors of script persisted at least to the finger foods table, a culture could bloom of the Wonders of Attempt, despite the wilt of the Poverty of Completion. Those who cease, sated with unease, or fail to progress, distressed of will, shall outnumber the wise threefold, though the number of fools not increase. Theme music played at a digital literature awards ceremony cloaks not the fool in cultural capital nor demeans the wise for whom capital is a cultural tool, 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.
19. *Folly is the cloak of Knavery.* But Folly and the Knave click in a synaesthetic embrace free of the Sorry of cultural dictatorship and the Volly of proscriptive dogma in a world where nation is a code word for corporation and citizen a code word for slave. The digital art project that would be a nation is a notion of the ineffable past, as the digital art project dissembling a citizen sans passport and action sans anthem is a premonition of the porous future, not to mention symptom of the schizophrenic Long Now. Knavery is the glory of she who would choose wisely among the fools, as Wisdom is the embarrassment of she who would choose blindly among the followers. Folly is the cloak of Knavery.
20. *Shame is Pride's cloke.* Cloak not thy shame in bauds of circuit cholesterol lest the projects of those ten years younger stumble in the frailty of your OOP code and limp in the blushes of your crushing gaussian blurs. Cake not thy shout in sentences of eternal shit lest your department research your bibliography and discover Shim's immortal words among Shem's expendable ibids. Plagiarism is sweet, and the more the merrier, but the cite is minor when the goal is literature, and digital culture, which claims to be the minority, has no patience for authority when there's no there there and subjectivity has been mired as mirroring some ivied Joe's dystopic joke. Shame is Pride's cloke.