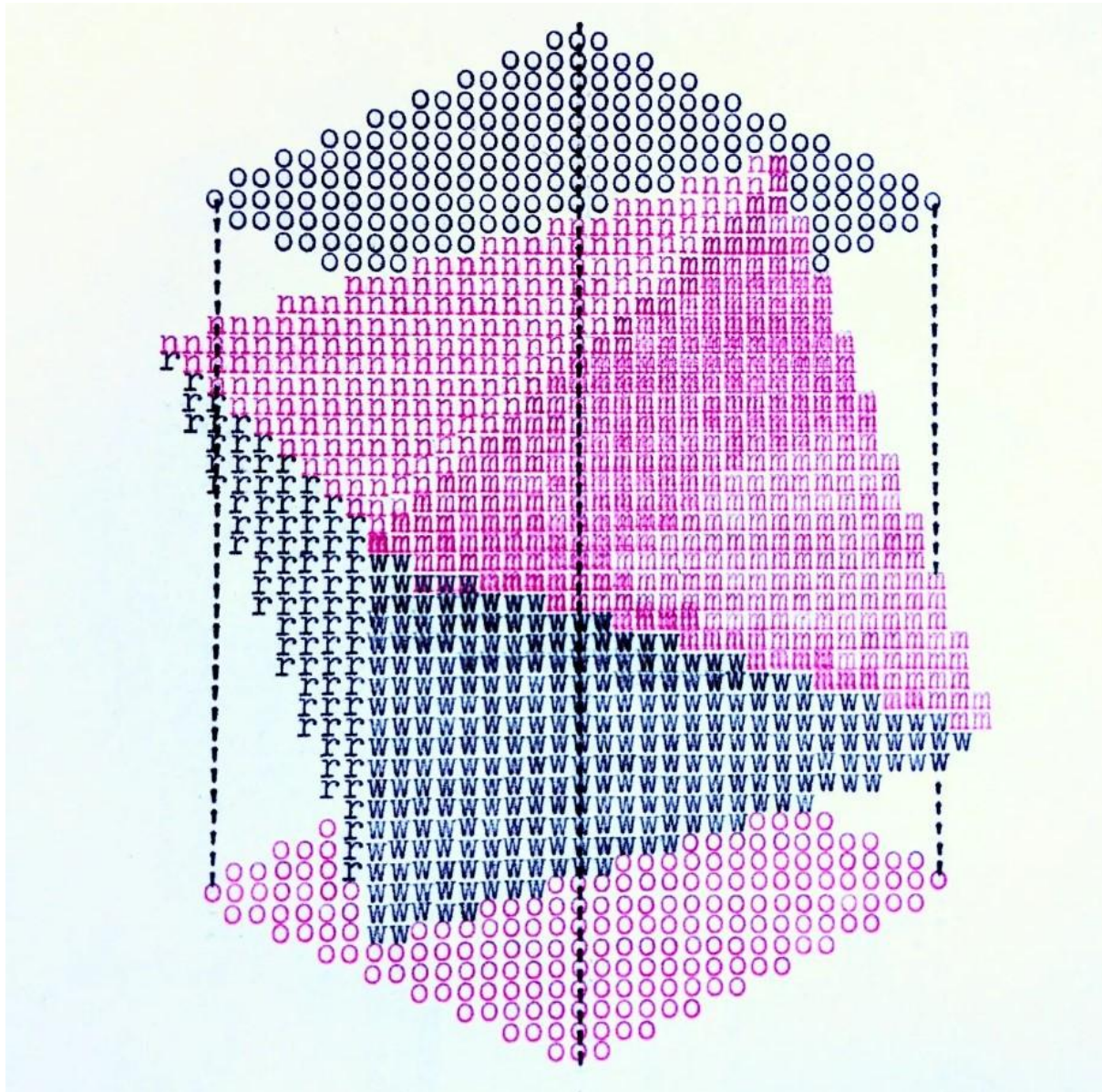


**THE STEBNERIAN WAY:
an encouragement
by
Kevin Stebner**



A guide to staying artistically strong and motivated amidst a world of indifference. Because you are bad-ass and punk and creative, and making stuff is great, and because you should.

0: What this book is about / Who I am / Why is this needed / how it's different / who it's for

Dear reader, I am writing to you under the assumption that you're a punk of some kind, that you understand DIY, you are someone immersed in subculture, you are someone who is dissatisfied with the culture that has been given to you. And because of all that you seek to either create your own, or at least immerse yourself within a culture that is outside of the mainstream one. If this is not you, I'm afraid we are not the same, and we have irreconcilable denominational differences. But if you are that sort of person, the sort of person that has an innate distrust and distaste of the blase, milquetoast art and media that's fed to you, then I feel kinship with you. I hope to bring you this message of encouragement and inspiration, from my heart directly into yours.

Speaking of myself, I have a reputation as a creative person. I have played in bands for two decades, released (I don't know...) 10 records, written and recorded literally hundreds of songs, booked and toured Canada multiple times, helped friends put out albums with my record labels, well over 50 releases of fully-independent music, I have helped organise music fests, organised arts markets. Written and published books of poetry, delved into the world of concrete poetry, putting out multiple zines and chapbooks of typewriter work, publishing with a vast array of small presses throughout the world, putting on my own exhibitions, and coincided those shows with other artists, I have built midi-controlled dancefloors, built glitch boxes for art installations, soundtracked video games, written a novel, have a book store run out of my shed. And I'm sure I'm missing a ton of other things. All that to say, I do my best to stay active and do some artful things.

So I get asked the question, often: ***How do you stay so creative?***

I'm hoping to answer that question here in this zine.

But with that above list of accomplishments comes the flip side of what that output entails: the working of endless nothing jobs to raise just enough for the many ill-fated cross country tours paid for fully out of

pocket, every dollar earned invested in a closet full of unsold records of my own bands and a record label of love, and just maybe a few of those have broken even. Dozens of rejected grant proposals, the novel again passed-on and continually sent to the next slush pile, hundreds of rejection letters, literally thousands of ignored and unanswered emails. Broken -up bands. Smashed car windows and stolen gear. 20+ years of slogging and almost entirely out of pocket - and still slogging. Unending disappointments. Potentialities unfulfilled.

I'm stating all this simply to say that I understand what it's like to get beaten down by the world, to be blasted with cold indifference. So, from that - the other major question I get asked is: ***How do you not get discouraged?***

Again, hopefully this zine answers that query.

If you're looking for some assistance with finding worldly success, for finding audiences, maximising your profits, and landing big deals - I don't know, man. That's not the concern of this zine. Those are external questions, ones I have no answers to. This zine is concerned with the internal questions, how you as an artist can stay creative, motivated, keep at it, and not get totally destroyed in the process.

I'll tend to refer more often to songwriting and music (as what led to this little book has largely stemmed from conversations with music friends), but what I'm saying applies also to poetics, punk rock, video games, EDM, painting, collage, sketching, performance, composition, pro-wrestling, macrame. Pick any artform, whatever - it applies to all of that.

Let's start with my two major posits:

1. Nothing matters

Nothing matters. Nobody cares.

Our world is spectacularly indifferent. Indifferent to art, indifferent to suffering, indifferent to justice, indifferent to expertise, indifferent to excellence. The world spins beyond anything we may ever do, and does not care if we throw our little pebble of creativity into its pond.

All this surely sounds nihilistic. If nothing I do matters, then *what's the point?*, you ask. *Why bother doing anything if trying is futile and worthless?*

But think about that indifference of the world in a different way. Instead of despair, think about the **FREEDOM** in it. If nobody cares, then what's holding you back? In your creative pursuits, you are beholden to no one. It's for you. It's only for you. Judgements are meaningless, there is nothing to fear from anyone judging you, there is nothing to fear from yourself. It doesn't matter, so why not make something!?! (Posit #1:)
Nothing matters.... Therefore I can do anything.

What if what I make sucks? Oh well. No one cares. You know what, I can almost guarantee it's going to suck off the bat. Cool. Whatever. Doesn't matter.

It's all just a reframing of thinking. No one cares - but instead of standing in the futility zone, stand in the *freedom to do whatever* zone.

Now, if nothing is stopping you, ask then...

Posit 2:

2. Why am I doing this?

Start here. Ask yourself: "Why am I making art?"

Your answer has to be: *Because I love to do it, because I'm curious, because I just want to, because I have an idea that's been bugging me. Because I want to have a cooler life. Because I am an artist and that's what artists do.* Satisfaction and fulfilment have to be that ultimate goal.

And that's what most will tend to say. But the truth is, most are looking for validation, to be showered in accolades, and to rake in a ton of coin while doing it. If that's the goal; if your answer to "Why am I making art?" has anything to do with fame, money, career, - homie, this is not for you.

Our society has a completely skewed narrative of what success means, and how success is achieved. I guarantee you have been told: "If you work hard and make good art and one day it'll all be worth it." "Just hang in there, one day you'll make it." From the time you're a kid, every parent, every teacher, every platitudinal TV show has told you to follow your dreams. It is treated like a given that work ethic eventually leads to glory, it is a line that is constantly touted, every success story narrative regurgitates this platitude.

It is a profound lie.

These narratives also have a second, more subtle problem buried within. They've defined what success means. That somehow if you're on TV you've made it, if you're on a big label, if you're getting booked on tours. That definition of success ultimately lands on outwardly definable and - let's be honest - on the monetary. Even if it's not ever overtly expressed, underneath it all, how that "success" - how that "making it" - is defined, by an outward display of prestige and money.

The problem here is how that “just work hard, and success will come” idea feeds us to think about what is worthwhile, and about what the ultimate goal for what making art should be and why it is created. The notion skews how we see what the end result of making art should be. The focus is not on personal enjoyment, not on fulfilment, on arts community, or even making good art - its focus is on an ethereal notion of societal success. And we’ve internalised the idea, and understandably so, as it’s been ingrained since childhood of what success is, and how success is achieved.

Hey wait, I’ve been sloggin for forever, you say. Why am I still where I am? Why haven’t I been discovered?

I don’t blame anyone for thinking that, to be asking those questions. But let’s examine it. Those “famous, successful” artists - they are where they’re at because of some very specific things, and they go in this order:

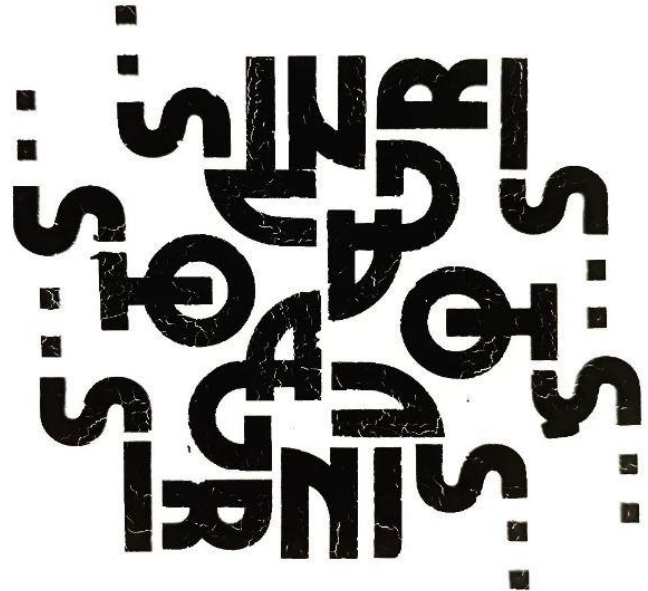
1. Luck
2. Money
3. Network & Opportunity
4. Work ethic
5. Quality of work

Making good art and working hard are definitely necessary, but they are way down the list of how those success stories actually come to be. Time and again, the narrative is to just keep at it, one day you’ll be “discovered,” that the pontification of a windfall will chance into your lap. Every motivational annecode reiterates the idea that if you “just work hard, anything is possible” (and yes, I keep reiterating it, but I know you’ve constantly heard it time and again in the world). We condition kids to adopt this mode of thinking, assuring them that effort is all that’s required and thus everything will come down the pipe.

It’s the lie of the american dream, it’s the lie of prosperity gospel.

I already know the criticisms that are coming from those who have that

“success” that we all so covet. I guarantee they will say it all came from their genius, their success came because their songwriting was undeniable, that they worked their ass off and therefore they deserve it. It all came from hardwork and perseverance and the sheer weight of their work - yet will be so blind as to the sheer luck of stumbling into it, will never mention the astounding amounts of money that backed them, refuse to acknowledge the experience of marketing teams, the broken grant systems they’ve exploited, the levels of privilege they’re afforded, and on and on.



(Martin1, Letraset, 2023)

Simply put, if you are a low-income artist operating in Western Canada (as I am, for instance), your ability to reach an audience, to get grants, to get on labels.... well, the numbers game just isn't in your favour. (And I won't even speak on the nature of prejudice against racial minorities, us LGBTQ+ folks, those with physical disabilities, people with language barriers). The luck for it is a toss of the dice. And you will be confronted with this perpetually. Seeing things of lesser quality get undeserved popularity, not getting the recognition you may deserve, playing shows to no one, having a closet full of unsold records, having unsold canvases leaning against the wall, emails never getting returned. This stuff kills most artists. It makes us bitter and resentful and profoundly discouraged to our cores.

I'm very sorry to have been harping on this idea. I've certainly put way too much focus here on these shitty aspects of the arts' "industry" - I hate even paying it any mind. I'm sure all that above may come off as complete bitterness. Seeing these discouragements, these unfairnesses,

they can so easily eat us up and turn us sour. I'm saying all this so it won't turn into bitterness, to immediately combat this bitterness that constantly looms its ugly head. I want to start with these discouraging aspects right at the beginning here. Acknowledge them, swallow them, you will be bombarded with them constantly.

But know, *they are worthless and powerless notions.*

It's all about reframing again, about how we look at what we're doing. Strip it all back and look at your art and re-examine the question of why you make it.

All this to say, this sounds like I'm advocating against ambition. I'm not doing that at all. Definitely have ambition, definitely hustle hard and push yourself and do what you can, shoot for the moon. But if you cannot get past that idea of societal success, if you can't get past the anger of seeing crappy art rise to the top, of feeling like the only means to get ahead is paying to play, of the feeling of screaming at a wall - you must put those ideas aside (*How though? Check pt. 3*).

I'm saying the opposite. Have ALL the ambition. Have the mantra become: "Follow your dreams.... PERIOD." Just go for it. Just try. Make a thing. Not for any ethereal promise of worldly success, fame or money. **Follow your dreams because you can, and should, and why the hell not?**

Strip all that bullshit away. Ask yourself, *why do you want to make art?*

(Posit #2:) **I make art because there is something innate in me that compels me, because I have to, because I'm curious, because it's fun, because I want fulfilment, because I want a cool and active life, because the muse compels me.**

Those are the only answers.

3. Hate that shit away

Hold on to those for a second and just recognize that you're a creative and artful person. You can do absolutely anything. You've made cool shit before. You can keep making cool shit.

So why aren't I? What tends to stop me?

In my experience it comes down to a few things. Fear, bitterness and laziness.

Start with the first. So many of us have a ton of things that block us creatively - and I feel it often comes back to some measure of fear. You can call it something different, but it's still an unfounded worry of some kind. Fear of what others may think. Fear of not measuring up to some imaginary yard-stick. Fear of not being as good as someone else. Fear of failure. Fear that it's not going to come out the way we envision. Fear of not being a pro. Fear of looking foolish. Fear that what we make won't be worthwhile.

Go back to posits 1 and 2. You're making something because you have the freedom to make something, and you are making something for the joy of bringing it into the world. You are bad-ass, and creative. So how can any of those ridiculous fears above stand-up to your creative bad-assery? None of those fears have any weight against the almighty *So what? Fuck it, I'll do it anyway.*

Cynicism and bitterness sucks. It's just a weak thought that takes up mental space and wastes your time. *"I don't have any of that luck, money or opportunity...."* Accept it. Swallow it. Take it to the 14th Street bridge and throw it in the river. Think about where you're putting your attention. If you're focused on the popularity of some artless hack getting undue attention...well, of course you're gonna get bummed. Don't look at that junk, what are you focused on instead? Put that focus to something that you're stoked on.

There's a line from one of the greatest songs ever written: "I'm not judging you, I'm judging me" (*Mission of Burma* - "Academy Fight Song"). This is a mantra. It's about you, it's about how you keep on. *I'm not judging you*, I don't think about you, I'm not thinking about that whack culture out there. I'm judging **me**, I'm thinking about what I can do, with my little corner of the world, what I can control, what interests and compels me, what I'm able to make, and do, and to bring into the world.

Every other self-help book will give you some kind of platitude, of thinking positively. *Don't hate; love*. This is the idea that has to be the most opposite to self-help platitudes you'll get, but I'm telling you, hatred is important. That hatred you're feeling is right and understandable. It's easy to hate all the unfairness, to be filled with bitterness, and to hate ourselves for not living up to our own dreams and expectations, to hate the work we're making for not being as strong as it can be, for hating ourselves for not having what others have. But so what - hatred in that sense isn't helpful in the slightest. And it's so easy to get stuck there. Being stuck on an unfairness, an injustice, a bitterness - nothing comes from it. Aiming it at yourself helps nothing. That's hatred in a negative sense. But hatred can be a positive force. It's important to know where to aim it, how to use that hatred as a force of reckoning.

You've got all this stuff that just eats and eats at you. But you have to turn it. All that internal hatred, take it and externalise it. Hate the laziness. Hate the worry, hate the wasting of time on bitterness. I don't have time to be bogged down. That's whack. I have a couple minutes to carve out and do something rad. I don't have time to worry if it's as good as this thing I saw on TV, I don't need to worry about some other artist getting all the shots. It doesn't matter. It's getting in the way of what I can do, here and now.

I'm really hoping I'm articulating this effectively. You can't stay stuck on an emotion that eats you, but this emotion is inevitable if you're a creative-minded person when you're wanting so badly to bring something into the world and it's not happening. It's inevitable and understandable. But if you don't control it, it will eat you. So that emotion you're feeling, aim it in the right direction where you get shit done.

(Posit #3) Hate away all the fear, bitterness and laziness that forces itself on you, hate it so you can't be around it at all, that you can only go to where cool things are.

Hate it away, and side-step it. Go to where you're actually going to be active.

Even thinking of gearing up to create as a burden to you, that can be a problem. You're starting off on a point of having an obstacle to overcome, you're starting at a negative point. Instead, start with the thing you're stoked on. Art is a joy. You've got a little bit of time to write a poem, jam with the band, sketch in the notebook. Think of them as the joys they are.

"Man, why should I even try, it's probably going to end up like junk, anyway."

Fuck that, who cares? I'm going to enjoy making it anyway, and maybe it'll end up alright.

"Everyone is really loving shitty nothing song and it's bumming me out"

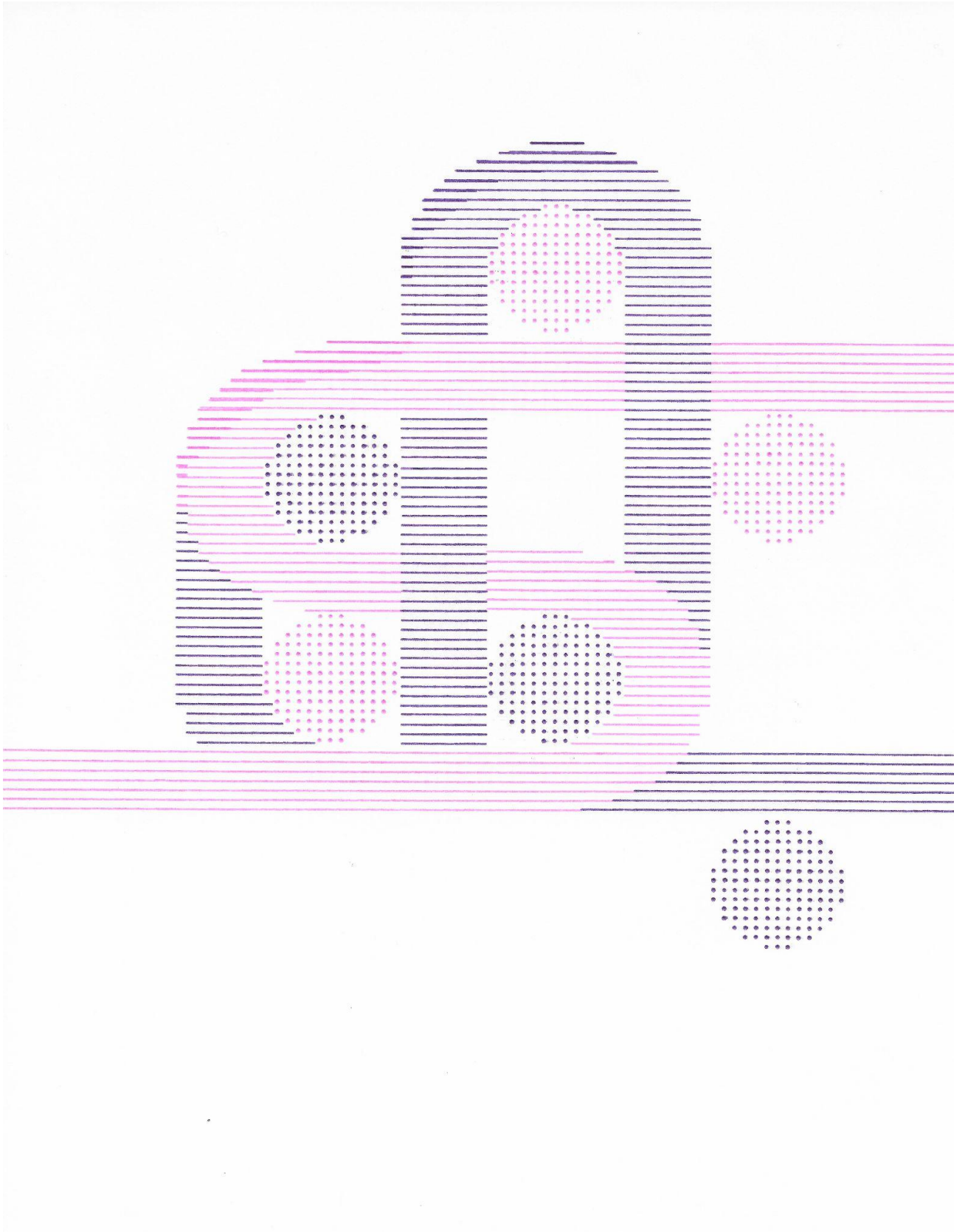
Fuck that ubiquitous crap, I'm gonna make something that interests me.

"Man, is it even going to be worth it to make a painting if I can't get a show?"

Fuck that, so what? I have an idea and I'm gonna bring it into the world.

"I'm tired after work, I'm gonna just look at twitter on my phone."

Fuck that, that's boring, I'm gonna make a thing.



(Knottable, typewriter, 2022)

4. Make a thing

There's been a lot of *how's* and *why's* to making art. But if you take anything from this message to you, have it be this; this is the one thing I want you to really register and take to heart:

(Posit #4) **I will make a thing.**

Just do it - go make a thing. Grab a guitar and start writing. Pick up a pen, pick up a brush, and try it. You have an interest, go pursue it. Fill a notebook full of rhymes. Secretly plant pumpkins in your neighbours' flowerbeds. Make a marimba out of plumbing, Write a zine about helping your friends stay creatively motivated and active.

Bucket lists and resolutions are a joke. There's always a free moment. And if you actually want to do it, then you will. *I always wanted to write a novel, I wish I could have made a record, I wish I knew about electronics.* Like Gorilla Biscuits say: "Start today."

If you see someone making something cool and you think, *I could never do that.* Nah, man. **You can.** Everything is doable, really. You can scrounge every synth sound from VSTs for free, you can get a decent guitar and amp for a few hundred bucks, circuit-bending tutorials are on youtube, the art store has everything you need to start painting, there's a wrestling school nearby, there's free copying at the library. We're all poor, but if you want to do it, you can scrounge those dollars, you can find those freebies, and know that it is within your means and ability. DIY or die. DIY as an ethos. The idea of punk so ingrained, you can't help but to exude it.

Don't worry about your gear or means for the time being. You can always upgrade as you go on. These dudes that have ten of thousands of dollars of vintage, modular synths - they'll sit on mountains of judgement surrounded by their gear. But where are their records? It's not about the gear, it's not about the quality (for now), it's not about the finished product. It's about how you MADE A THING. You did it. You've

used your time and brought something out of nothing, and brought it into the world.

So you've made a thing and what you made sucks... oh well. *Posit 1: it doesn't matter.* But you know what? You did it. You made a thing! You've got a painting in the bag, you wrote a song, you made an outfit for your cat.

Is it ready to show?
Probably not. But you've gained that XP, you're better equipped for the next thing. And then when you make another thing, the second attempt will inevitably be better. And the one after that.

Making good work is incremental. It takes time and experience, and hitting your head against the wall, and writing shitty songs, and worthless drawings. But you'll never make anything if you never make anything.



(Traffic4 Letraset, 2023)

Man, did I sit around on my evenings and just watch Netflix? What do I have to show for that? Or did I spend my night trying to record a song on my phone?! Is it a masterpiece? Maybe not, but wow, I recorded a song. I can show some pals, I can refine it and work out the bugs.

What the fuck have you done? Well, you made a thing. That's infinitely cooler than to have made nothing at all.

5. Do something creative every day

And you've made a cool thing! Well, keep at it. Do it again.

Build it so you're not having to rev up to it. The idea of Being Creative is just a thing you do, as a part of who you are. It's routine, it's muscle memory. Just like you've trained yourself to brush your teeth in the morning. Creative acts are the same way. Build it into your life so it's right there, a normal part of your day.

(Posit #5) I do something creative, everyday. Everyday I do something artful.

But, what does that even mean? How can I create something everyday, I don't have that much time or inspiration to work on art all the time...

You don't have to write a full chapter everyday, you don't have to write a song everyday, you don't have to make a painting everyday. It would be impossible to. The idea is that you as a creative person can't help but exude it.

You weave art into your life, into your routine. Thinking about projects is creative work. Conjuring ideas is creative work.

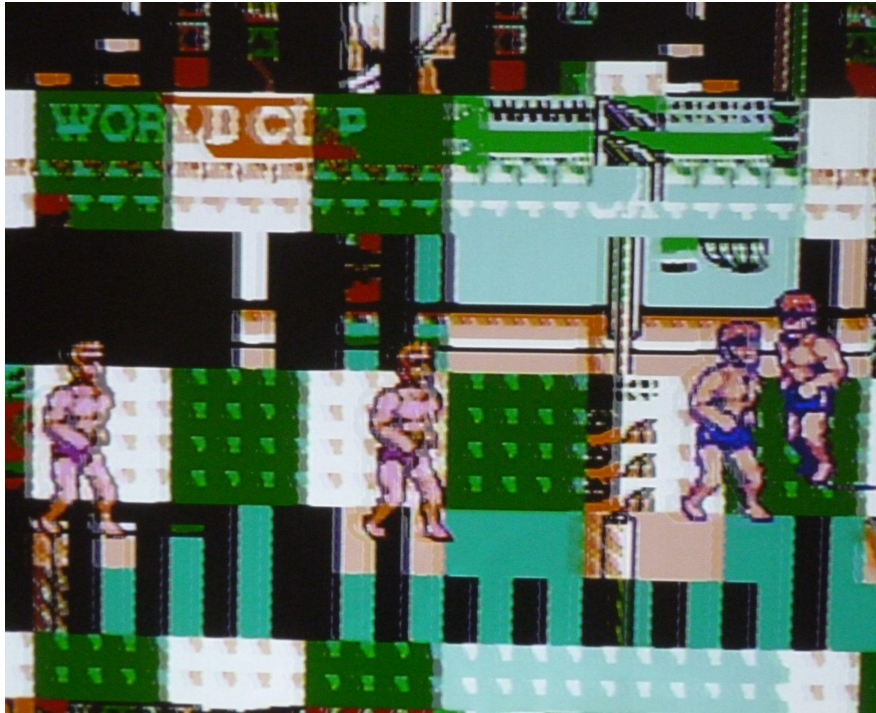
- Write a poetic line in your journal
- Do a sketch in your notebook
- Work on your fingering
- Listen thoughtfully to a record
- Pour through an artist facsimile for inspiration
- Research a topic that fuels your imagination.

That's all creative work, it's worthwhile and it leads to your inspiration for making a thing. It's billable hours.

If the idea of approaching something like an album of songs, or a book of poems seems daunting - and well, it certainly is daunting when looked at from far away. That feels like a gargantuan task. How is it even possible

that someone can write a book, make an album, paint a whole canvas?

Again, it's all in the mindset. Like I said earlier, build it so it's routine.



If you start with *I'm gonna write a cool riff today*, or *I'm gonna write 2 poems this week* - well, those are absolutely doable tasks. Do that again and again, keeping it routine, as a thing that's perpetual - soon enough that big-ass goal of a book or a record is a little bit closer on the horizon, and a little less daunting as a whole.

(Switches Make Glitches: Super Spike V'Ball, circuit-bent NES, 2013)

If you let yourself be too exhausted, you will be. If you think doing it is gonna be too hard, you've already convinced yourself it is.

I'm certainly not saying that any of that is an easy task. But if you think of it as a huge effort, it will be. It will feel like that. If you're telling yourself it's hard work, boy, it sure will feel that way.

But if you have it as something you're stoked on, you will be. If you have it as something that **shrug** you just do, well it aint no thing. I just do creative stuff. I can't help it.

Creativity as muscle memory, man.

How do I not get burned out? How do I get inspiration? Look to 6 and 7 and 8

6. Do lots, do it all, try everything, follow the muse - multidisciplinarianism and dipping your toes.

I think this idea is the one that will run contrary to what many will give you. As, I truly believe that it's well-roundedness, that it's a love of a great many things, a vast array of knowledge and skills that produce compelling work.

A big difficulty with many folks is to be stuck on a project. The novel isn't finished, and I can't do anything else until it's done. I gotta work at it, and hammer at it until it's finally done. I mean, you can certainly get things done this way. But this mode of thinking, I believe, only builds resentment towards your project. It becomes a stressor, an obligation now, for you to overcome, instead of the excitement your creation should be.

To me, the key to having a vital artistic output, is to simply **have many projects, have many things to be interested in**. That may sound overwhelming, that may sound like you're stretching yourself thin.

The ultimate combat for burnout? **Have a million projects**. If one is boring, if one isn't coming along - shelve it for a minute. Pick up another project. I'm a big proponent of the idea of the muse, and the need to follow her. I'm sure this is contrary to most people's idea of honing their craft, the notion of editing to perfection, to working at it until it's right. I'm sure there's something to be said for folks who operate that way, but for me, that singular focus on one project - that makes me bored, that makes me resentful, that makes the project feel like a chore. I don't want my art to feel like a chore. Ever. Especially, if we still believe that art is for me and my satisfaction. The muse is real. The inspiration and excitement that comes when the muse calls, that is where the joy lies. That is where big ideas spring from. So having another project to pick up when one stalls, when one fails, or when one finally gets finished!... That's the method.

In this way, you're never burned out.

It's OK to have unfinished projects. It's OK to have projects shelved. It's OK to have projects you're not interested in anymore. Not every turd needs polish. To quote my favourite forgotten Canadian TV show, Squawk Box: *Every fart is not a winner*. Sometimes you can let them breathe.

In the same way: **Throw Darts**.

Everyone will want to keep you in a box. They'll want to know you as "the gameboy guy" or whatever thing you dip your toes into that gets a modicum of notoriety. They'll want to have you easily understood and labelled as such. To bring up a whiny complaint, (and not even speaking to the nepotism, racism, homophobia, but *especially* the classism - that's a whole other expose) but a profound failure of our grant system and art institutions and industry is the truncation, the cordoning off of art-styles and art forms. Working in a multitude of fields may not be seen as an asset. (Again, I want to point out, this is not a guide to worldly success, in fact, even speaking to the above, it's probably the opposite. The concern is how to stay creatively engaged and keep the ideas flowing).

I feel, in the outside world, there's a strong purview towards the genius of one thing, a strong focus on the skills of a singular purpose. There's that notion of 10,000 hours (which comes from pop-psychology, which is also predicated on that same flawed idea of that with talent and skill inevitably is followed by success - can't put too much credence into that, but let's at least consider the idea). The idea is that if you practise something for 10,000 hours, then you will become an expert at what you do. Swing that golf club a million times, you'll be great at swinging a golf club.

The same advice is often aimed towards those of artistic practice. Most writing guides, for instance, advise you to write everyday. I mean, this is essentially the same advice as Posit #5. You are doing a creative act every day. But that scope is limited. Writing every day sounds great - but what's informing that writing? What's influencing it? What are the big ideas behind it? The answers to those questions don't come out of rote practice.

Yeah man, that guy can do 8 rubik's cubes blindfolded, but what are the chances that's all he can do? Those guitar shredders sure can tear up a fretboard, but can that shredder write a single song that's even vaguely listenable?

I may not have 10,000 hours playing golf, but *I have 10,000 hours thinking creatively*, engaging thoughtfully with art, with reading closely, engaging with song writing, drinking in projects. That's that roteness - having it be something you just do, that comes out of that mode.

Being able to do a multitude of things informs each project. Writing poetry leads me to writing more effective lyrics. Being a teacher and educator informs how I can engage an audience effectively. Fixing an amp leads me to building huge sound installations.

Even this project itself is a testament to that idea. I just did a thing. I jotted down all my thoughts. I sat at the computer and plugged away. I edited and restructured. I learned some formatting and laid it out. Do I know a lot about publishing? Not really, but it's in your hands now. Is it a masterpiece? Ah, probably not. But has it been worthwhile to do, worthwhile for someone? I've been told it has, and that makes it so.



(Plaza3, letraset, 2023)

7. Eat culture.

That same multidisciplinaryism of output as mentioned previously, the same holds true for input. *Be multidisciplinary in the art you intake.*

The world of art out there is so vast, our ease at getting it is easier than it's ever been. So just eat culture. Gobble it up.

The entirety of art history is on the internet. Every sick album is 8 keystrokes away, either on bandcamp or more likely another much more evil streaming service. If you want to see a film, if you can't stream it, it's only a torrent away. So much of literature is a free pdf online. If your library doesn't have it, chances are they can inter-library loan it. The network of zinesters, record lovers, book nerds, gamers, collector scum - it is profound. And they want to share that love. If you're looking for it, it's findable and gettable, and chances are that nerd is dying to talk to you about it.

Of course with that same vastness comes the difficulty of noise. There's so much out there, how do you even know what to look for? What do I even pay attention to?

I don't have too much of an answer to this question, because I feel finding that is a big part of it. You digging and finding that hidden gem is what's most gratifying. Finding something like, say, The Raymond Brakes' Piles of Dirty Winters in the midst of it all makes all the digging worth it.

Even consider broader than what you may think of as artful. Watch battle rap. I assure you Bigg K is a genius. Go to a local reading and buy their book. Hearing a voice read their words conveys something beyond the written page. Study wrestling. The Omega vs. Okada Iron-man match is as profound an artwork as Guernica. Shadow of the Colossus is as moving a tale as Genji.

I have songs inspired by prairie botany and songs inspired by news items about culling wolf herds, and queer figures, and lines from Bob

Seeger. I have typewriter pieces inspired by biblical allegories and the text based videogame Zork. It is the vastness of interest that has led to a depth and breadth of output.

So if that vast interest, study and focus on things feels aimless, don't sweat it. That knowledge is worthwhile, it's informative far beyond what is "useful" in the standard sense. It doesn't have to be didactic, doesn't have to be a piece of knowledge you're applying. They are useful in that they inspire you, that they've given you a nugget of interest to ponder, to have in the back of your mind, for you to reinterpret and respond to and build upon.

The world is vast, there are a million cool things. Smash them together.

Read a book a week. It will make you a better writer, it will make you a better artist. Period.

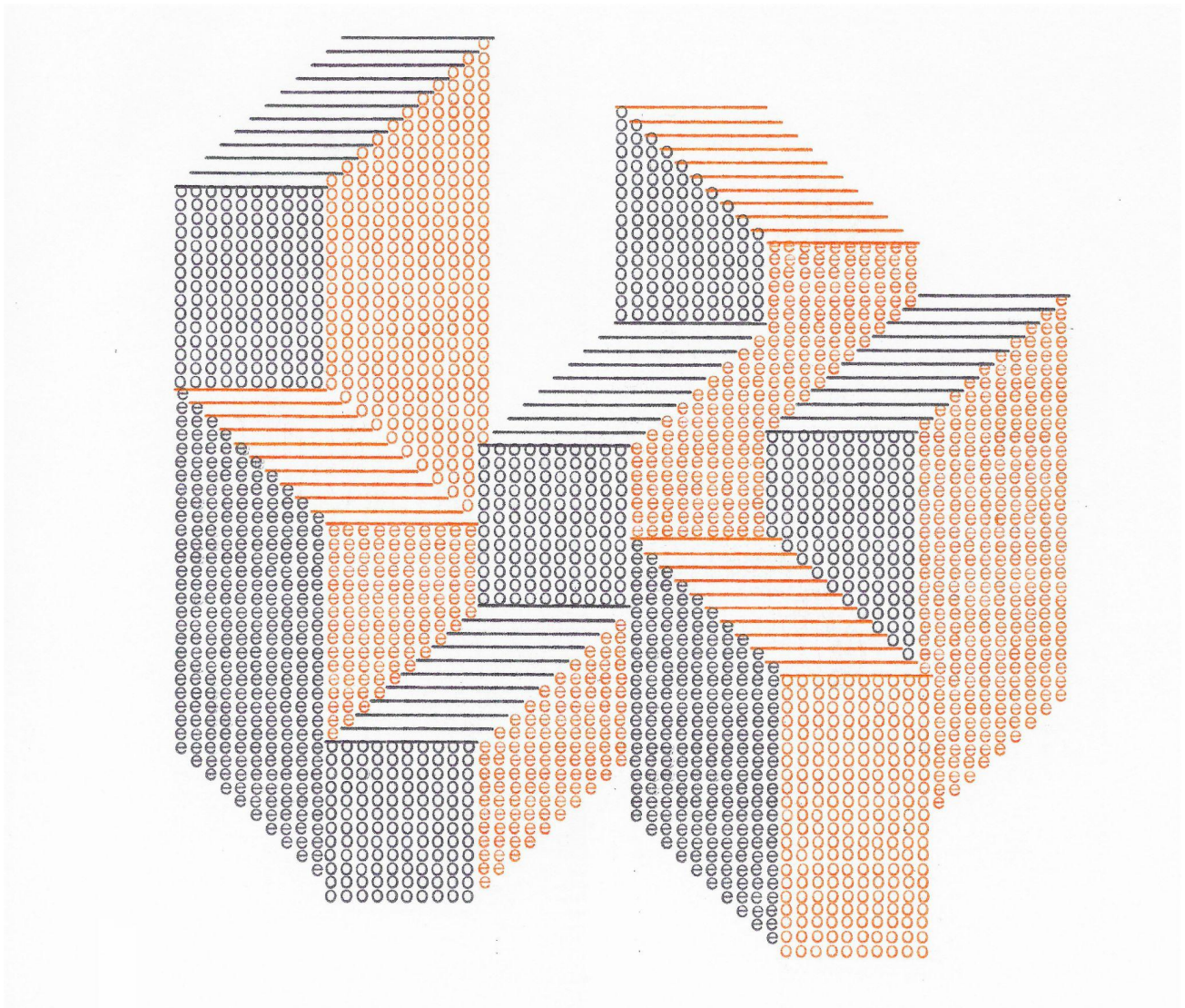
As much as I was infinitely discouraged by academic creative writing workshops, one thing that was made clear to us fresh-faced and eager young poets: we could not write strong work because we didn't have the history behind us, we hadn't read enough, we didn't have the basis of reference to pull upon. How I resented this thinking at the time. How dare some old asshole tell me my youth was a hinderance! But the older I get, I am able to see the truth in it. That knowledge base, that set of reference, that study of good work - this is the one thing that I can definitely say will make you a better artist. In every field. Read everything. Read widely. Accept different modes of storytelling. Listen to 8 records a day. Study the greats. Find the forgotten, hidden gems. Have a thousand points of view, and ten thousand references to draw from.

In a lot of ways, eating culture (#7) is tied to Do Something Creative Everyday (#5). Building that knowledge, expanding that reference base, stockpiling an idea for the future - that's a useful building block to your creative endeavours. Even if it's not apparent in its usefulness quite yet, it is useful for your creative mind, to work through artistic ideas, smashing them together, juxtaposing them. Rip it up, start again.

So how do you not get discouraged?

Recognize the freedom you have in the indifference of the world, reframe how you see it, how you can use it, repackage it, take endless inspiration from it.

How do you stay creative? Read everything, be interested in a ton of things, jump on your inspirations. Make a thing, and when you're out of ideas for that, make a different thing.



(*Still Standing*, typewriter, 2023)

8. Tell someone you love them

We're not changing the game here, this is just basic Golden Rule stuff. But these words go a long way.

If you have that feeling in yourself, that you're struggling in a sea of indifference, I can guarantee, not too far away, that there's a genius nearby that is also struggling. And if you're making work, chances are you'll be able to recognize some spectacular unsung work nearby. Let them know you think so. Tell them what they're doing is great and worthwhile and inspiring.

Tell someone you love them. Let them know you think their band is cool, or you think their art is inspiring. Buy their book, buy their record, buy their prints, go to their shows, wear their shirts.

If possible, go further. Publish your friends, and the cool work around you. Photocopy it and pass it around. Find a cool band nearby and help release their record, put on a show, make a music video for them. Throw a group art exhibition in your living room, have a poetry reading in your backyard, start a website alerting people to cool bands.

In that same way we've been talking about eating culture, and having that art percolate in your brain - that culture holds true to those around you as well, to those in your community. It perpetuates, and fosters. Let those creatives nearby inspire you too, foster a community, send out that encouragement and support, and let it come back to you.

Certainly don't approach this as some reciprocal transaction. That's all that distasteful and exploitative "networking" - but to those close by: tell them because you love good work, and discovering that good work is exciting, and breeds a culture of vitality. Instead, foster an outlook of goodwill, of being inspired by those other creatives around you. All that does is to encourage good vibes, a good environment to be in. You're rubber, and *I'm* glue. It bounces back, it builds and grows upon itself. Cool stuff is a feedback loop. Go and do likewise.

9. Supplementary Materials

If you're stuck - I'd recommend these books. These are works of literature in their own right, but also collections of artistic prompts, well worth your efforts, and guaranteed to inspire in some way:

- **THE TAPEWORM FOUNDRY** by **DARREN WERSHLER-HENRY**

https://www.ubu.com/ubu/pdf/wershler_tapeworm.pdf

(An absolute brilliant artistic-ideas-as-poetry collection that's as charming as it is motivating)

- **Do It** curated by **Hans Ulrich Obrist**

http://projects.e-flux.com/do_it/manuals/0_manual.html

(Artistic assignments from a well beloved curator to another. Worth delving into)

- **Bernadette Mayer's List of Journal Ideas:**

https://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Mayer-Bernadette_Experiments.html

- Personally, I don't find them to be tangible in the slightest, and not at all helpful to me, but I'd be remiss to not mention Eno's **Oblique Strategies**. I don't find anything to them, but some folks swear by them.

<http://stoney.sb.org/eno/oblique.html>



(Glitchbox: *Bad Dudes*, circuit-bent NES, 2019)

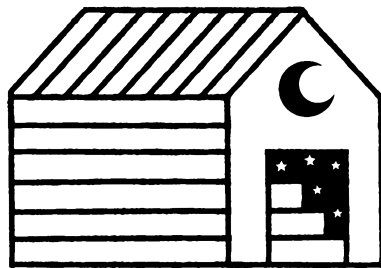
10. Peace Out

And with that, I just want to send a thanks to you. The idea for this zine has been stewing for a decade, and I've finally put it down and gotten it into the world. Hopefully, you've gotten something out of this. If not, well, pass it on to someone who might. If you have found this useful in some way, I'd love to hear about it. Drop me a line...

This zine is hosted on my website somewhere, if you want to print one off, by all means do so. Pass it on to someone who may need it. You can order copies there too.

Kevinstebner.com

Go make a thing.



SHED BOOKS

kevinstebner.com