

# EXCERPTS FROM CROSSED PATHS

Courtney Love and the Shirt

## CROSSED PATHS

DESPERATION SQUAD  
AND THE AGE OF FORTUITISM

KEVIN AUSMUS

*Crossed Paths: Desperation Squad and the Age of Fortuitism* by Kevin Ausmus

ISBN: 978-1-938349-14-0

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015935950

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#### *Front Cover*

- *top photo of Mr. P at the Wckr Spgt tribute show 2010 by Andy Whitson*
- *untitled painting by Bob Jones, 74 by 33 in., acrylic on found panel, 2014*
- *SX70 photo from Arts Building, 1984, photo by Art DiLion*
- *Panda Man photo by Dylan Skrab, manipulation by Kevin Ausmus*

#### *Back Cover*

- *SX70 photo of Mr. P at the PVA by Dave Alvin, 1986*

Photo of Courtney Love © Bob Gruen / [www.bobgruen.com](http://www.bobgruen.com)

*Layout and design by Mark Givens*

For information: Pelekinesis, 112 Harvard Ave #65, Claremont, CA 91711  
First Pelekinesis Printing 2015

Desperation Squad's resurrection in 1998 brought with it a new band element - the message t-shirt. The first such shirt was a plain white tee that Mr. P had crudely written "FUN IS BACK" on the front. This was the new band motto - a new era, an old friend trusted with bringing back the good times - or put more succinctly in the next shirt, "EVERYBODY GETS LAID" which was soon followed by "WE SELL BEER."

In the summer of 2000 a new, shockingly direct message emerged: "EAT MY FUCK", a historic meme that came to Desperation Squad's attention through "The Decline of Western Civilization."

**The "EAT MY FUCK" shirts were a huge hit from the start and one afternoon,** a month or two before the Warped Tour, Bob and Laura and Sue Lawler gathered at Laura's pad in Temple City, made a stencil of the phrase in huge block letters, and spray painted it on the front of an undershirt. On a summer tour where even the most esteemed punk personalities bowed in puzzled reverence to this truly enigmatic band, it was the "EMF" shirt that was the most respected part of their absurd aura.

This reverence overlapped into the real world in February 2002 when, after a show at Zen Sushi in Los Angeles, Mr. P was approached by the proprietor of a trendy Hollywood clothes shop, Blest Boutique, who wanted



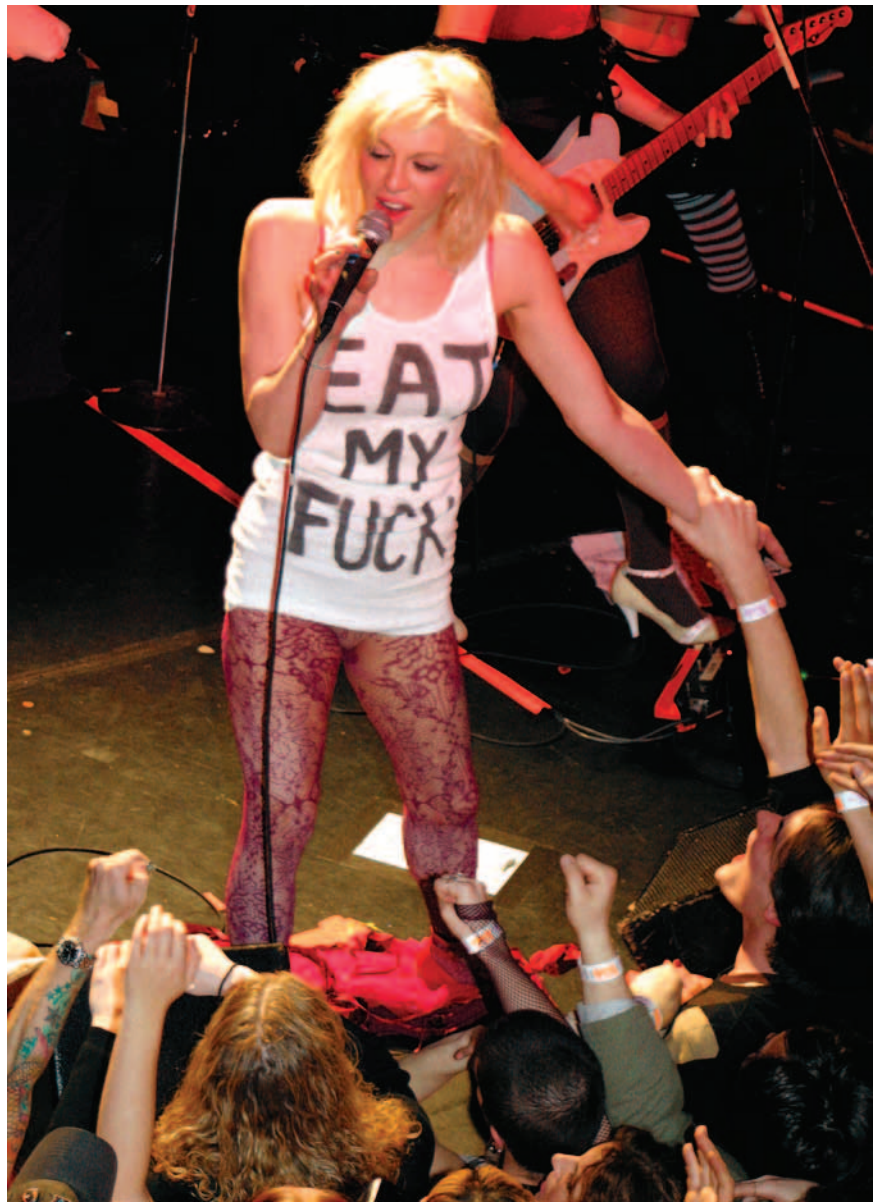




to buy a couple of shirts. Located just south of Hollywood Blvd. on Cahuenga, Blest was rumored to be patronized by the likes of Courtney Love.

It was a truly surprising moment a full two years later when Love herself walked out on the Bowery Stage in New York with one of those “EAT MY FUCK” bad boys beaming defiantly to all who showed up to watch her latest meltdown. Approximately half those in attendance had cameras, and within days of the event Love’s picture was everywhere on the internet, certainly the 2004 version of viral. The print media picked up on it as well, with Rolling Stone, Zink, Q (Britain), and Public (France), tossing it in the center of their snarky Love write-ups, with the pièce de résistance snark in some way channeling Love’s foul-messaged shirt.

And it was a Desperation Squad shirt. They still had the stencil.



## COUNTERPUNCH

## As indie band struggles, Love's act is wearing well

By KEVIN AUSTUS

"HOW long can you call something a comeback before you have to just call it quits?"

Robert Hilburn posed this question at the start of his review of Courtney Love in San Diego ("Who Knew She Had a Cuddly Side?" Oct. 26). From my bowl of Cheerios, I could not evade the double irony of this statement. How long indeed?

The review was published on the same day I was to do the final mix-down on a Neil Dia-

## Counterpunch

Counterpunch is a weekly feature designed to let readers respond to reviews or stories about entertainment and the arts. Please send proposals to: Counterpunch, Calendar, Los Angeles Times, 202 W. 1st St., Los Angeles, CA 90012. Or Fax: (313) 237-7620. Or e-mail: calendar@latimes.com.

Important: Include full name, address and phone number. Please do not exceed 600 words. We appreciate all proposals and regret that we cannot respond to each.

mond song, recorded for an indie tribute compilation to be released early next year. It's a big step for my band, the Desperation Squad. In our 20-plus years, this song, a cover, represents the first time we will receive even (modest) national distribution of our product.

All the other accoutrements of fame—the airplay, the sponsorship, the cash advances—are still out there in million-to-one land, a place where, if your on-call job stops contacting you for two weeks, the life raft starts to take on a little more water, and stress and distraction become part and parcel of the insurmountable odds you live by every day.

In show business, the bigger you are, like Love, certainly the harder you will fall. But your fall will at least be, at various times, softened by whatever celebrity cachet you've managed to build up for yourself. Courtney Love, even in free fall, is still a compelling media figure. And that in itself will keep generating additional chances for her.

But for those with no cachet, living dirt-poor in a vain attempt to somehow grasp the holy grail of mainstream success is considered, well, wholly pathetic. There's no bronze medal for hanging in there, for coming close.

The true artist, however, knows that as long as there is a flicker of light emanating from the candle, that is reason enough to stay the course. But if you want to compete in the big time, you've got to have some kind of game. Everyone knows that. Resilience is OK; free fall is better.

And that's where Courtney, whom I have never met, did Desperation Squad a great favor. The night after her arrest in New York last spring, Love went on stage at the Bowery with a defiant three-word message on her shirt that included an obscenity. The media noticed this and reported it.

Here's the deal: That's our foul shirt. We handmade it on my bass player Laura's back patio. Suddenly, it's on dozens of websites, all over television and in magazine spreads. Our stupid shirt. From a San Gabriel Valley back patio to the Bowery, though how Love got it I can only guess. I sold a couple to a hip clothes boutique on Cahuenga once, but that was in 2002.

I guarantee you this: That's a D-Squad shirt, flung out there in the media landscape like a big old stinking cigar ash. And I was determined to cash in!

I contacted every media outlet that ran the shirt photo, and

Hilburn too, and told them, "Hey, that's our shirt," less to crow about it than to train a spotlight on my band. I got zero response.

I know why. It's not the message but the messenger. With no agent, manager, publicist, with no celebrity cachet, my claims of artistic triumph elicited not a shred of interest from the media, not even a "You must be lying." Had I the extravagant panache to see it coming, I might have sent out a news release the week before that said, "Courtney Love to Have Nervous Breakdown in D-Squad Shirt." And even that might not have helped.

In a business of celebrity cachet and savvy promotional slicks, it is unavoidable that worthy artists fall through the cracks. But Hilburn and other journalists should be advised that "calling it quits" is rarely a viable option, even through a lifetime of obscurity.

I remain optimistic. One more rock star wears my shirt and I get a free sandwich at my local deli!

Kevin Austus works alternately as a driver, a freelance writer and a singer for the band Desperation Squad, which plays every fourth Saturday at 51 Buckingham in Pomona. He lives in Claremont.

Mr. P penned an insightful "Counterpunch" column for the L.A. Times, in response to a Courtney Love live review by

longtime Times rock critic Robert Hilburn, entitled "As Indie Band Struggles, Love's Act Is Wearing Well." In it, Mr. P touches on the nature of celebrity, resilience and free fall, and the role of the press in all of it. The piece ended with the line, "One more celebrity wears our shirt, I get a free sandwich at my local deli."

The affair was neatly summed up by Joe Piasecki, in the Pasadena Weekly's "Shirt Famous, Band Nowhere" piece. Piasecki and Kevin Urich, editor of the Weekly, were friends with Laura and big D-Squad fans. Mr. P was even a contributing writer for Pasadena Weekly at the time.

Another article was published the following summer, writing about Love and the shirt from a slightly different perspective, in Mat Gleason's Coagula magazine. This article put the questions to the art world itself: What constitutes fame? What is a breakthrough work? What is mass recognition?

Courtney Love had achieved a level of success that drew attention to her every move. And one of those moves was made in a Desperation Squad shirt.





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## DESPERATION SQUAD AND THE AGE OF FORTUITISM

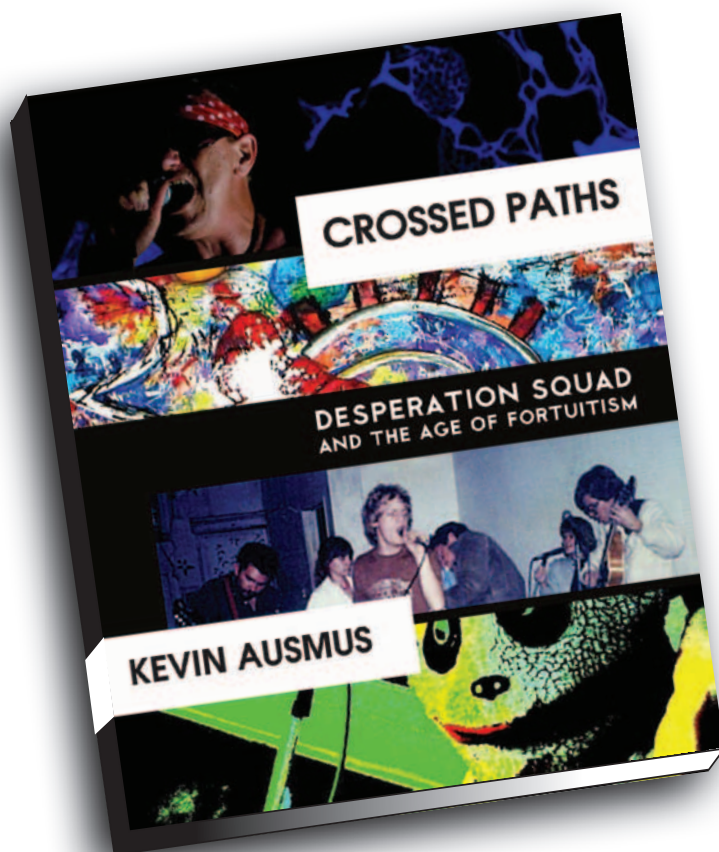
### Art Show Opening

May 9, 2015

7pm

A landmark event documenting and exploring a slice of the underground art and music scene in the Pomona Valley, beginning in the early 1980s and moving into the 21st Century with a particular focus on The Desperation Squad.

Highlights include stories from The Warped Tour, America's Got Talent, and Mr. P's run for mayor of Pomona (the "Rock and Roll Mayor"). The show will feature photographs, flyers, music, handwritten lyric sheets, and plenty of legendary tales.



## Space Gallery

250 West Second Street

Pomona, CA 91766

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## What is Fortuitism?

The lines that are drawn upon the globe, the signals zipping around from one node to another, the paths that cross every day, the people we meet, and the sounds we hear - these are pieces of the world we live in, the world we embrace, and the decisions we make. How we interact with the pieces—which pieces we touch, which pieces touch us—determines how we see ourselves moving through life. Some decisions are out of our control. Some decisions are the lesser of two evils. How we use the results of these decisions are ours, and interact to shape who we are and how we live.

Fortuitism allows for a certain amount of serendipity and spontaneity to enter the art we create. The decisions we make are the signposts along the path.

Fortuitism is a different way to tell a story. Create art, save things, find a venue. You need not be famous or even enduring. Rock and roll is everyone's story. If you are fortuitous enough, you can tell your story in a way that makes it great art as well.