EXCERPTS FROM CROSSED PATHS

Courtney Love and the Shirt

CROSSED PATHS

DESPERATION SQUAD
AND THE AGE OF FORTUITISM

KEVIN AUSMUS
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.
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 nearly 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.
CROSSED PATHS
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
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.