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—*Seattle Weekly*

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PUNK PLANET
THE COLLECTED
INTERVIEWS

**EXPANDED
EDITION**



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Raves for the original edition of *We Owe You Nothing*

“This collection of interviews reflects one of *Punk Planet*’s most important qualities: Sinker’s willingness to look beyond the small world of punk bands and labels and deal with larger issues. With interview subjects ranging from punk icons Thurston Moore and Ian MacKaye to Noam Chomsky and representatives of the Central Ohio Abortion Access Fund, as well as many other artists, musicians, and activists, this book is not solely for the tattooed, pierced teenage set. All of the interviews are probing and well thought out, the questions going deeper than most magazines would ever dare; and each has a succinct, informative introduction for readers who are unfamiliar with the subject. Required reading for all music fans.”—*Library Journal*

“The magazine *Punk Planet* has quietly been one of the most intelligent voices in the kingdom of punk and post-punk ... [and] anyone with the vaguest interest in music would be well-served to learn from the captured moments [in *We Owe You Nothing*]. Similarly, everyone can learn from the example of *Punk Planet*, that sometimes being passionate, aware, and active *is* enough.”—*Metro Times* (Detroit)

“The book’s thoughtful, and often conflicting, conversations are exactly what the magazine *Punk Planet* is about, [and] no book lately has illustrated this relationship between punk and its believers more than *We Owe You Nothing*.”—*Daily Herald* (Chicago)

“The people who put this book together know how to do an interview. They know their subjects, ask probing questions, and then let the people speak with passion and the eloquence that comes from straight talk with no bullshit, no spin. The result is an airblast of honesty, an antidote of attitude. Music fans will love this book, and so will fans of independent thinking.”—*Flagpole* (Athens, GA)

“The pages are broken down into thematic sections [and] what emerges is precisely what Sinker was aiming for: a wholly unique vision wrought not by consensus but by cultural cynicism and never-say-die musical populism.”—*Magnet*

We Owe You Nothing

**Punk Planet:
the collected interviews
expanded edition**

edited by Daniel Sinker



Punk Planet Books
Chicago, IL

Published by Punk Planet Books/Akashic Books
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Punk Planet Books is a project of Independents' Day Media

Design and layout by Pirate Signal International
Cover photo by Shawn Scallen

ePUB ISBN-13: 978-1-936-07055-8

ISBN-13: 978-1-933354-32-3

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2006936686

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For Roosevelt, who can't yet read the words in this book
but has already been influenced by every one of them.

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Foreword to the expanded edition

The original edition of this book was published in March of 2001. Things have changed significantly since then, to say the least. From the fall of the Twin Towers to the siege of Iraq, from the ascendancy of digital music and communication to the decline of print, the world sometimes feels wholly different than the one this book was originally crafted in.

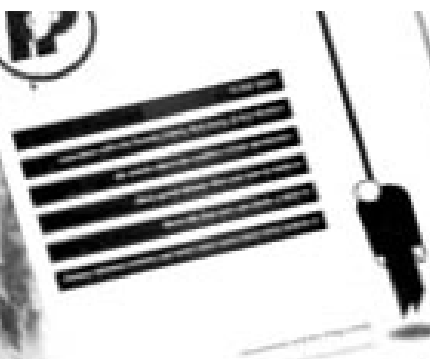
One thing that hasn't changed, however, are the ideals that fuel the conversations in this book. Steeped in the belief that independent thought and voices are still vital, these interviews craft a portrait of the underground that is just as important today—maybe even more so—as it was six and a half years ago.

Six and a half years ago also, unknowingly, marked the halfway point in the life of *Punk Planet* magazine, from which these interviews are culled. With eighty issues and thirteen years under our belt, the magazine's run was a long one. The closure of *Punk Planet* magazine in July 2007 marked the end of an era—both a personal one, but also in the underground. As such, this book now serves as a document of a time when independence was a virtue, a time before the always-fuzzy line between underground creation and corporate co-optation became blurred beyond recognition. It's a document that remains just as vital as the voices chronicled within it.

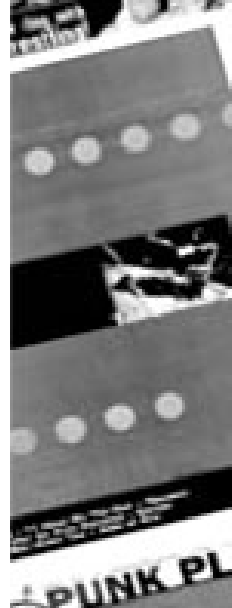
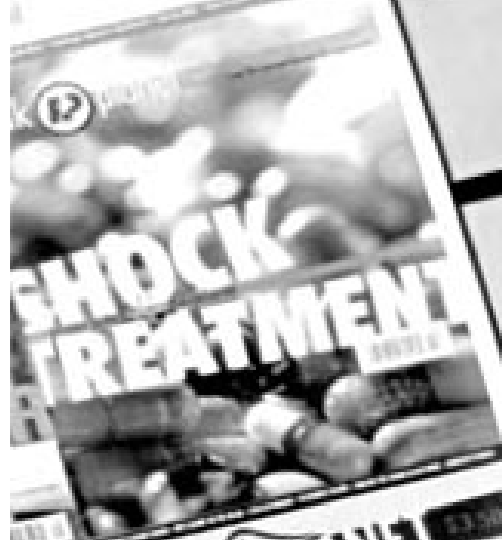
In part to flesh out the original version of *We Owe You Nothing*, as well as to introduce some current voices into the mix, this expanded edition features six additional interviews, one for each section of the book. The new interviews include punk forefather Bob Mould reflecting on his life in music; the hugely influential band Jawbreaker reuniting for a one-off interview to discuss their legacy; artist, writer, and filmmaker Miranda July talking about how the underground has informed her artwork; The Gossip, a blazing ball of rock 'n' roll, exploring their conservative Southern upbringing; Mike Burkett, the founder of the website Punkvoter, commenting on how the 2004 presidential election brought punk politics to the mainstream; and G7 Welcoming Committee Records discussing their conversion to a strictly online music label. Together, these diverse voices add to the loud cacophony from the original edition and create a supersized look at the most essential corners of the underground.

Enjoy them and take their ideas as a launching pad for your own.

Daniel Sinker
October 2007
Chicago



COVER
PUNK PLANET



[Intro](#) [to the 2001 edition](#)

I've been working on *Punk Planet* magazine for six and a half years now and never once, not even for a fleeting second, have I felt like I've known what I'm doing. And now, all of a sudden, I'm working on a book. I went to *art school* for god's sake ... not exactly the pedigree of a fine journalist—or even a shitty one. But that's kind of the point, isn't it? I'm not a journalist—never have been and probably never will be. And thank god for that. I've managed to pull off over forty issues of *Punk Planet* not because of years spent in journalism school, but because I believed in the dream called punk rock. Punk said that *anyone* could take part—in fact, anyone *should* take part.

It was that ethos that led me to starting *Punk Planet* in the early spring of 1994. The idea to do a magazine was the result of growing frustration with the punk-rock status quo. A number of people—myself included—on an online message board had been posting for weeks, complaining about the lack of a nationally distributed punk zine that had its ear tuned to the exciting things happening at the moment. I wanted to change that.

Nineteen ninety-four was an interesting time in punk. For the first time in more than a decade, the mainstream media was paying close attention to the underground, thanks to the fame of Nirvana and the signing frenzy that followed. Green Day was poised to rocket to stardom and there were dozens of newly signed punk bands ready to follow them to glory (the fact that none of them actually *did* is a story for another day). The main national punk zine at the time, the venerable *Maximum Rock n Roll*, took a wildly reactionary stance to this newfound exposure and began to tightly control what bands it would cover and what music it would review. Many bands, including quite a few I was friendly with, found themselves locked out of *Maximum's* pages, having been deemed “not punk.” Suddenly, they had no outlet with which to let people know about their music. In a scene that relied on the underground press to sell records, promote tours, and get into record stores, being locked out of *Maximum* was perceived as a death blow for many.

At the same time, there were a number of movements blossoming far below the mainstream media's radar that also weren't registering on *Maximum's*: most notably, the riot girl movement and the burgeoning sound known as “emo.” For whatever reason, two of the most exciting things to happen to the underground in the '90s weren't getting the exposure they needed within the scene to really break beyond their insular worlds.

So it was with that burning a space in the back of my mind that I came up with a plan. Without thinking for long about the details, I posted onto the message board. The plan was, simply, “Why can't we do this?”

Everyone interviewed in this book has asked their own version of that question countless times—and answered it just as many. Because if you boil punk down to remove all the hair dye, power chord typewriters, colored vinyl, leather jackets, glue sticks, show flyers, and combat boots, that question is what's left at the bottom of the pot. Punk has always been about asking “why” and then doing something about it.

It's about picking up a guitar and asking “Why can't I play this?” It's about picking up a typewriter and asking, “Why don't my opinions count?” It's about looking at the world around you and asking, “Why are things as fucked up as they are?”

And then it's about looking inwards at yourself and asking “Why aren't I doing anything about this?”

The answers to those questions have created an entire culture, built by punks from the ground up. From nothing, bands have built extensive touring networks that enable them to travel from city to city—and even from country to country—playing in underground clubs like Berkeley, CA's volunteer-run Gilman Street or Chicago's makeshift punk mecca the Fireside Bowl. Hundreds, if not thousands, of kids run record labels out of their bedrooms and living rooms—some even growing successful enough to move out of their house and into offices. These records are distributed through punk rock distributors and sold, quite often, in punk-owned stores. Punk authors—some in middle school, some in graduate school, and many that have dropped out of school entirely—have published their own thoughts, their own fears, and their own hopes in tens of thousands of zines printed using stolen copy cards or giant offset printers. Punk activists—quite often the very same people that are making records, zines, and the like—build movements within the scene that resonate loudly in the world at large. And that's just the beginning.

In the year 2001, if there's a “real world” position, there's a punk-rock equivalent. Graphic design? There are probably five in your city alone. Filmmaker? You want 35mm, 16mm, video, or Super-8? Public Relations? Which coast are you on? The list goes on and on.

Punk has woven a tangled web over the last twenty to twenty-five years it has been around. What was once an amazing feat, like a band crossing the country playing shows, now happens on a constant basis. A lot has changed—the music, the attitude, the fashion—in the two decades punk has been around, but one thing never has: the motivation.

The motivation behind punk is almost offhandedly referred to as “DIY” nowadays. That stands for “Do It Yourself.” It's taken as a given in punk rock, but it's the foundation that the entire culture built upon. Punk writers aren't sitting at home hoping that their piece gets published, they're publishing it themselves; fans aren't waiting around for someone to put out a record by their favorite band, they're releasing it themselves; we're not waiting for a club to open up that will book shows that cater to the under-21 set, we're opening them ourselves. Punk has never waited for the OK from anyone to step out on its own. DIY is the answer to “Why?”

For the last six and a half years, all of us at *Punk Planet* have asked “why” to close to three hundred people—people working within the punk scene and people whose ethics, actions, and ideas helped shape it. We've always felt—even back when we *really* didn't know what we were doing—that talking with the people helping to evolve our culture was important.

We've always printed our interviews in Q&A format because I feel that it's a much more honest approach to interviews. The “featurized” interview format favored in establishment rock rags usually lets you know a lot more about who's doing the writing than who the writing is about. Besides, I've found no need for explicit editorializing, because, as opposed to the stock answers vomited out of the

mouths of corporate rock acts, the words we've transcribed have been fascinating.

~~At the same time, we've tried to delve deeper than other zines have done, eschewing for the most part the standard interview questions like, "Who are you and what do you play?" or "Do you have any good tour stories?"~~ Instead, we've approached interviews more like a conversation than an interrogation. For the most part, that approach to our interviews has paid off. You're holding the product in your hands right now.

My only real regret with this book is that we couldn't print every interview we've done over the years. It would have been a great representation not only of the magazine, but of punk rock itself. Unfortunately, to do so, the book would have ended up twenty volumes long. Instead, we have distilled three hundred interviews down to twenty-five essential ones. These interviews are among the best of the best of the best. Those twenty-five interviews have been polished up and their introductions have been updated. It's taken a lot of work, but I think we've created as good a window into *Punk Planet* as we could hope to create in 350 pages.

But they're also a window into a world much larger and much more important than a single magazine. They offer a unique look into what we feel is the heart of punk. The twenty-five people and bands collected here have played important roles in building our culture. A handful of them have gotten rich doing it, a few more famous, while the majority remain poor and unknown. Yet they have all played crucial roles in creating one of the most dynamic and important cultures of the last quarter century.

These interviews also cover most of the major issues that punks have confronted over the last couple decades. From genre debates to international politics; from recording techniques to the inclusion (and exclusion) of women and minorities in the punk scene, the twenty-five people interviewed in this book speak their mind on a huge range of topics. Important in these discussions is that there are few points of view held as sacred. Many of those interviewed in this book disagree with each other—some have even turned away from punk itself—but to shut out differences of opinion would be to paint an incomplete picture.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these interviews introduce you to twenty-five of the most creative, hard working, and fascinating people to emerge from the underground. Their stories, ultimately, are our own—stories of people who have constantly asked "why," never accepted the status quo, and always lived their own lives. Their stories, taken together, are the story of punk.

Enjoy.

Daniel Sinker

March 2001

**Partners in
Crime:
Punk's Trailblazers**



Ian MacKaye

Unlike many of the artists who helped form the foundation of the presentday punk scene, Ian MacKaye refuses to become irrelevant. Active for more than twenty years, MacKaye is even *more* important today than he was when he started his first band, the Teen Idles, back in 1979. While other musicians of his generation have become comfortable resting on their laurels, MacKaye continues to press forward, only pausing to look back when forced to. “I would say *any* band that’s operating today is more important than bands that came before,” MacKaye explains. “They’re more important because they *exist*.”

Which isn’t to say that what “came before” for MacKaye wasn’t significant. Ian MacKaye’s story reads like the history of the American punk scene. In 1979, MacKaye was in the Teen Idles, one of the first punk bands in Washington, DC. Along with Jeff Nelson, he started one of the first DIY punk labels, Dischord Records, in 1980. After that, MacKaye—for better or for worse—started the straightedge movement with his band Minor Threat. A few years later, his short-lived band Embrace set the ball in motion (along with other DC-area bands like Rites of Spring) for what would eventually be called “emo,” by tempering hardcore’s aggressiveness with emotionally expressive vocals and dramatic, hard-hitting instrumental arrangements. Then, of course, came Fugazi.

Fugazi didn’t start any movements. Rather, the band became a movement unto itself. Started in 1987 by MacKaye, guitarist/singer Guy Picciotto, bassist Joe Lally, and drummer Brendan Canty, Fugazi is the culmination of all that came before it and the embodiment of all that would come afterwards.

Live, the band is always a revelation, sending cascades of sweeping guitar noise crashing down on the heads of their audience like waves pummeling the shore. Fugazi, more capable than any live group I’ve ever seen, will then stop the punishment on a dime, turn the distortion on its head, and approach a chorus as something entirely new: as a whisper, or a clean, unimpeded scream. A Fugazi concert is an experience that words—especially the few allotted to an introduction to this interview—can’t easily describe. I have seen Fugazi many times over the years and each time I have left overwhelmed.

Fugazi’s recordings are a testament to their refusal to sit still. Each new album is like Christmas morning: you never quite know what’s in store, but you can’t wait to find out. Fugazi’s seven records have seen the group transform from one that pushed boundaries of a hardcore punk framework to a band that is limited only by the imagination of its members. What started as a simple four-piece punk outfit armed with loads of feedback and tasteful reggae leanings has now turned into a veritable avant-garde idea factory, consistently bringing new instrumentation, production values, and songwriting

techniques into its well-stocked coffers. It's all a fancy way of saying that Fugazi today is nothing like Fugazi yesterday. MacKaye admits as much: "Obviously, there are people that have listened to us at one point and now they may listen again and think, 'God, this band is totally different,' but that's because they didn't go along for the ride."

But Fugazi is perhaps most influential because of the manner in which MacKaye and company have chosen to conduct themselves as a band. To put it simply: Fugazi doesn't fuck around. The band has never compromised its egalitarian ideals. Insisting on low door prices, independent venues (wherever possible), and low-priced, independently produced records, Fugazi has shown the world how to conduct business respectfully and honestly. Maybe it's because Fugazi isn't a business. Their same no-bullshit approach is equally applied to every aspect of bandmembers' lives. Whether it's being outspoken about social injustice or about someone's violent dancing at a show, the band takes a stance and sticks to it. As a result, detractors say Fugazi is "preachy." But Fugazi doesn't preach—it leads by example. The same can be said for Ian MacKaye.

Interview by **Daniel Sinker**

You've just gotten back from playing the West Coast. It's the first time you've been out there in years. What took so long?

We're trying to come up with creative ways to do this. Now that we can't tour for two months, we can only go out for two weeks or three weeks. So we're trying to figure out how it's possible to go to the West Coast in two or three weeks time and have it make sense.

So you flew out there?

We flew to LA, and shipped all the gear. Then we played nineteen shows in twenty-one days—we just banged right through it. It worked out pretty well. You reach a strange point in a band when you get larger. There's a certain moment where some things that once seemed impossibly expensive actually make more economic sense. Like shipping this stuff cost \$1,800 round-trip. But we don't own a van so we were renting a van. To have driven the stuff out there, we would have had to have paid for two more weeks of renting, plus mileage, gas, hotels, and food. Plus, we couldn't all drive out there because—and this is the reason we can only tour for short periods of time—one guy was in school and Brendan [Fugazi's drummer] has a kid. People have stuff to do at home. We would have had to pay at least one person a salary to drive out there and drive back.

So the question was, "How do we make this work?" The thing with us and how we do our business is to try and come up with seemingly obvious solutions to problems. I mean *why not* ship everything instead of renting a backline? Everyone always just goes and rents backlines—it costs twice as much.

What's that?

Oh, I'm sorry—a backline is all the equipment you rent. You'd take your guitars and your drumsticks and stuff, but you would rent everything else. You would rent your drum set and your amplifiers. Renting a backline costs quite a bit of money. This way, we were able to stick it all on a plane and we had all our own gear. That way there's no problem with having to use borrowed equipment or worry about its condition. Our stuff is ours to destroy. It worked out pretty well.

We built crates way back in 1988, the first time we went to Europe. People couldn't believe we were doing that, but it just seemed like, "Why not?" It made more sense than renting. So for this tour, we

spent a day crating stuff up. There's something great about putting your gear into huge wooden boxes and loading it onto a truck and saying, "See ya somewhere else."

There's something very archival about it.

It really feels like, "Wow, we're working stiffs."

Is Fugazi eleven or twelve years old now?

Twelve years as of September 3. Our first show was September 3, 1987.

After that long, how does it stay new for you?

First off, the relationship between the four of us is that we're all friends. The band is something that's incredibly important to us. There's always a challenge within the band. We see it as a fixture; as something that's *real*; as something that actually *exists*. The challenge is to try and keep it interesting for us. Of course there are certain elements that are like, "Oh god, I've been through this so many times!"

What would those be?

Usually, bad interviews or being accused of "selling out." There are some things you hear so many times that are just so discouraging, you're like, "I've been doing this too long!" But for me personally, the band stays fresh the way life does. It's just like life. I've been living for thirty-seven years. How do I reconcile *that*? The band is just like living to me. It's what I do. It's something that's super-important and superprecious. If it was gone I'd be sad, but I know that's always a possibility. Because of that potentiality, I think that I stay committed to it.

I don't consider Fugazi a business because it's not something that I'd get bored of on that level. To me, it's something that is much more primary. It is part of who I am. It's not something you can cut away. It's not something that is easily separated. I don't get bored with life so I don't know why I'd get bored with Fugazi.

As a band that has been around for twelve years, you don't tour with the regularity that you used to tour or that your contemporaries still tour. You don't put out records on a regular basis either—sometimes there are years between them. Are there moments when Fugazi isn't even on your mind?

I think there was only one period of time when the band didn't enter my mind. I went to Alaska for a couple of weeks and that was one of the only times I didn't think about it.

I wake up *every day* to this band. I think about music *every day*. Since 1979, there have been maybe one or two weeks worth of days collectively that I haven't listened to music. I think about it every day. I wake up every morning in the band. I go to sleep every night in the band. I work out of the house I live in. My office is across the street. The phone rings every day.

We will go long periods of time where we don't practice. If someone goes out of town, we might go a few weeks without practicing. The closest time we ever came to not being a band was when we didn't actually get together to play. Because then there was all this energy surrounding us—we're Fugazi and

I'm in a band and I'm working, I'm on the phone, I'm talking to people, I'm doing interviews, I'm answering mail, or I'm booking shows—but we weren't actually doing anything! It was like, “Where's the band? What's real here?” It was all so abstract. This was in 1994 or so and Brendan had moved to Seattle for a year and was travelling back here to practice. We reached a point where we would go a couple of months without practicing, yet the three of us would all be working on band-related stuff. But there was no band! I think all four of us were like, “This is crazy! Maybe we shouldn't even be a band.” There has to be *something* real. You actually have to *play* music. There have to be *songs*. If there aren't, then it's not legitimate. It's not enough just to have an entity. You have to have substance.

As a band, we work all the time. People think that we go on tour for two weeks and then we sit around for nine months or something. That's not the case. When we're not touring, we're practicing. We work all the time.

Our lives are changing. People are getting married. Brendan has a kid. Our parents are getting sick. Our sound guy's in school. All these things have been happening to us that have made us really cut back the amount of time that we can tour. But at the same time, there are way more places in the world that we've gone to play. Initially, we would go out and do a tour to New York and back. Then we were going to the Midwest and back. Then it was the West Coast and back. Every time we go out, we're then including more places that we want to go. We went to Europe, then Australia, then Asia, South America ... Now we have an enormous list. I could sit here right now and name 365 cities that we could go play. That's a *year*! That's a year of solid playing. What that means is that at the same time we're pulling back the length of our tours, our circuit has gotten longer. It's kind of at odds with itself. We've been struggling with how to deal with it.

I think that people have been like, “What have you been doing for the last three years?” Well we've been *working*! That's what we've been doing. We made a movie. We made two records. We work all the time and it's not like we haven't toured. We've been touring all along. Last year was probably our slowest year and we did six weeks of touring. We also did a sound-track record for the film and we released *End Hits*.

One aspect of Do It Yourself is that you really have to do it yourself. It's work! We manage ourselves, we book ourselves, we do our own equipment upkeep, we do our own recording, we do our own taxes. We don't have other people to do that stuff. This is what we do and it takes time. You can't tour every day of the year because someone has to come home and book them sooner or later. I think there's a lot of infrastructure work that we do that people are unaware of.

The way people perceive the music system now is that you have all these other people doing all this stuff for you. But that's not punk rock. We come from a world where you do it yourself. Sometimes I feel like we're the Shakers or the Amish or something. People say, “You make everything so hard.” Well, that's right! People see us and it's like seeing a guy on the highway in a buggy. “Why does he have a horse and carriage? Why doesn't he get a fast car?” There's a reason.

What is it?

The reason that we do things the way we do them is because this is how we feel comfortable presenting our music. Partially because it's the only way we know how to do things and partially

because no one has disproved the process. People say it's not a logical process, but that's bullshit. It's totally logical! I think that the reason we take the approach to music that we do is that then we ultimately have complete control over how we do our music and how we operate the band. We don't feel compelled by *anyone* to do *anything* that we don't want to do. We're not indebted to anyone.

When a band signs to a major label, no matter how good a contract they think they have, no matter how much control they think their contract provides, it's unavoidable that you are conscious of being an investment. Somebody puts money into you and you have to pay off somehow. And you *want* to pay off. I think that a lot of bands that have signed have denied—maybe even to themselves—the open desire of “We want to be huge.” If all goes well, then yeah, it's great. But if things don't go well, then all those aspects of the “great deal” and “artistic control” go out the window because things become desperate. And then, if the label loses interest, you're high and dry. We've never had that problem.

But there's definitely a space between the route Fugazi takes and signing to a major label. For example, there are a lot of independent bands that don't book their own tours. They'll use a booking agent to schedule their tours or they'll hire an accountant to manage their expenses ...

Let me make this really clear: I am not criticizing anyone for using accountants or booking agents. I'm a little dubious of managers, but that's because I've had to tangle with them so often. Some managers are great though, but most are problematic. Don't get me wrong, I'm not being critical of these bands. I'm just explaining to you why we work the way that we do. This is the way that *we've* operated.

There was a period of time when we had someone else helping me book the band and it was a problem because the communication wasn't there. So much of what we do is instinctual. Each situation that comes up, we think about how we should go about dealing with it. It *has* to be instinctual. It's hard for somebody that's operating a business to be instinctual about it—it doesn't fit within their template. I'm not critical about bands that make those decisions at all. I'm not even critical about bands that sign to major labels; I just think that they need to be aware of what it's about, as opposed to this sense of, “It's a great deal because we have ‘total control,’” because that's *not* the case. But for some bands I think it's a better thing for them to do.

Why?

Because I think that a lot of independent labels have dropped the ball so horrendously, so some bands don't really have any other real options. I'm not unaware of the fact that I have a label. I've had a label since 1980. Dischord was already well established when Fugazi came around, so we already had a vehicle. I'm aware of that. I'm aware that there has been a lot of work that had been done ahead of time so I'm in a different position. There are bands that are doing very well but don't have fully operating labels representing them. They have to make a decision, and sometimes signing to a major is the better choice. I think a lot of people think I'm a lot more critical of the way other people work because of the way we go about doing our work. But it's never been about other people. It's always been about us.

In doing all of your work, you've made many choices that have brought even more work onto yourself. I can relate to that, and so I have to ask you what I always ask myself: Is it worth it? Are there ever times that you regret it? Are there ever times where you're just like, “Jesus

Christ, I wish I could just sit down and read a book”?

Yes, there are times where I think, “God, when do I live?” But the issue is not about not having time do things, but not having the desire—I don’t have the peace to not do things. I just feel like I should *do*. The work has its rewards—you work now or you pay later. People tell me that I work all the time and I tell them, “That’s what I do; that’s when I’m happy!”

I have people that work for me—other people work on the label now. I’m actually fairly good at delegating work. That’s not a problem for me. But overall, there’s still so much work that I do. I still do things like take out the trash. I still rake the leaves. I think that in some ways really the most important aspect of my life is the fact that I still work. People that don’t work lose touch with what’s going on.

The other night, I saw a band play. When they left the stage, they left all their gear sitting up there. They were opening for another band but it didn’t occur to them to take their stuff down. They were coming from a world where they didn’t pack up their own equipment. For me, the process is such a huge part of the art. That *is* the art. It’s not just, “Oh wow, what a good-looking record,” or “this record sounds great,” it’s the *process*. It’s the making of the record or the booking of the tour. I see that as an art. Those parts aren’t where the machines are supposed to step in. The machines are clumsy. The machines make mistakes. I don’t know how you operate your magazine, or the stuff you oversee, but to me all of that is part of your art. That is what separates your magazine from others. I assume that the way we work as a band sets us apart too. But you can’t really define it; it’s not something people would see. It just makes us different. I see Fugazi as something that can’t last forever. It seems like if it’s happening now, I should do it.

What would make Fugazi stop?

If any one of us decided it wasn’t interesting anymore.

So no one would be replaced?

Oh, never, no. It’s really the four of us *period*. Any one of the four of us has a firm grasp on the plug, think that the knowledge that any one of us at any time could stop the band is what makes us go on and on. We all know that we have the power to stop. We’re not stuck on someone else’s crazy ride, we’re on our own ride. Any time that we want to stop, we can stop.

That’s very much what you were talking about in terms of keeping control. By keeping a firm grasp on how Fugazi operates, you four are the only ones that have a say as to when it finishes.

Another aspect about me is that I don’t think about the future. It’s not that I’m not hopeful, because I am—I’m actually quite an optimistic person—it’s just that I find the future less interesting than the present. The past is not a bad thing to study because it’s been done and you can look at it and go, “Huh, that’s interesting.” It’s safe, it’s all sealed up. The future is so unpredictable and such a wild card that I don’t think too much about it. The present seems so important to me. I always think about the day, about the *now*. This is what I’m doing and that’s where my greatest strength lies because I’m most comfortable with the present.

People ask me, “What’s the band going to be doing in five years?” I have no clue! I don’t even know

what I'm going to be doing in five *months*. I just don't know. But I don't worry about it because I feel like I'm laying a solid enough foundation now that I'll be OK later. I'm not worried about the future, I'm not trying to set things up for the future, I'm just working.

A lot of people also ask me, "How do you compare Minor Threat to Fugazi?" Well, first off, I *don't*. But if I had to answer, I'd say in a heartbeat that Fugazi is a more important band. I would say *any* band that's operating today is more important than bands that came before. They're more important because they *exist*. Those other bands are done, they're finished. They're important on one level, but it's at almost an educational level. They're historical now.

They're important in their ability to help us better understand the present. Minor Threat can't actually influence what's happening now.

People may be *influenced* by Minor Threat, but *Minor Threat* can't influence anybody.

Exactly. Minor Threat's greatest purpose is to better understand what you're doing now. It informs your work in the present.

One of the reasons Minor Threat broke up is because we were at such odds as to what path to follow and what to do with it. We were disagreeing with each other as far as music and ideas, and approaching to stuff. It just seemed clear that we were spreading apart. Instead of keeping the name but then going into disrepair as a unit ideologically, we said, "Let's just nail it. Let's just stop. Let's let it be a finished piece." It's like a book—you stop it before you go off on a tangent. Stop the damn book so it actually has some sense and meaning. Man, I'm so happy that happened the way it did. I think there are a lot of bands that stay together for the name and really have undermined whatever impact they had because they continue to use their name years after the idea was solvent. I've always felt really strongly about that. Which is ironic then in terms of Fugazi. It's been *twelve years* since we began Fugazi, but the idea remains solvent. It doesn't seem like we've strayed from the way the four of us thought about the band in the first place.

What is that idea?

To challenge ourselves. That's the way it's always been. When I'm asked what the function of the band is, I say "The function of the band is to play music." People are like, "That's it?" But music is the currency of life. It's been one of the most important forms of communication *forever*. It plays a really important role and I'm not going to qualify it by saying, "The reason we're in a band is to change this or to change that." Music changes things. We aren't the ones changing them. This is just the way we work. This is what we can do. We do it in a way that I think still feels really organic. Obviously, there are people that have listened to us at one point and now they may listen again and think, "God, this band is totally different," but that's because they didn't go along for the ride, they're just checking in. I think as a band there has been a really natural evolution.

Time after time, until only recently, people have told us, "You can do this for now but eventually you'll have to come around and deal with reality." But music has been our reality since day one. It wasn't like we were fooling ourselves. I think the reason a lot of people can't believe that this stuff can get done at the level we're doing it is because nobody has ever bothered to try. It's kind of like if you're on a trail and at a certain point there's a sign that reads "Danger: Unknown Ahead," and everyone just jumps off the trail. But we said, "Why not keep going and see what's up there?" And w

found out that it wasn't all that hard. It's difficult, but it's not non-negotiable. It can be done.

You said that the idea of the band was challenge. Why do you think that your answer to that challenge was to be in a band instead of climb mountains or write novels or find cures to incurable diseases? What in your life do you think led you to music?

My mom played piano and I always had an affection for music. I've been totally taken with it for as long as I can remember. But I don't ever feel like a musician. I started playing piano when I was three. My mom first took me to lessons when I was nine. I sat down and played for the teacher. He watched me play and said, "That's nice, but it's not piano." I knew right then and there that it wasn't going to work out with piano lessons. I took piano for maybe half a year and then I quit altogether. To me, there are things that come naturally and to be told that I wasn't playing piano, it was clear that I wasn't going to fit in their structure. That wasn't OK with me. It wasn't OK that people were going to not recognize something I was doing because it didn't fit their definition of something. I've always had a taste for the unorthodox, I guess.

How else would you say that's manifested itself?

How *hasn't* it manifested itself? Basically, I've done everything not by the book [*laughs*]. All through my life I've done things in an unorthodox way.

When I was a kid, we formed a skateboard team because we liked to skateboard, not because we were particularly good or because we had sponsorship. We just did it. I started skateboarding in the mid-'70s and a lot of people thought, "Oh, it's a sport." But it's *not* just a sport. Skateboarding was about redefinition. It was like putting on a pair of filtered glasses—every curb, every sidewalk, every street, every wall had a new definition. I saw the world differently than other people. Everything had completely changed because I was a skateboarder. It really helped me understand the idea of redefining what's been given to you. I've always been interested in saying, "Here's what's been presented, now how does it work and how *can* it work?" Skateboarding was such an important part of that.

I had given up on playing music by the time I was fourteen or fifteen years old because I wasn't a trained musician. I didn't think I could do it because it seemed like everyone that did it were professionals. That's why punk rock was so important to me. I realized that here was a space that I could operate in the way I wanted to which would never go over with mainstream people whatsoever. To find that space made so much sense to me. It was so much a part of the rebellion that I was feeling with skateboarding. Punk rock seemed like a logical place to go next.

Ironically, at the time I thought that skateboarding and punk rock never mixed. They totally *did not* mix in 1979. I stopped skateboarding as much because my skateboarding friends were totally not into punk rock and my punk-rock friends were not into skateboarding. It wasn't for another year or so that skateboarders finally started becoming punk rockers. Now the two are almost synonymous. But at least for a few years, they seemed opposite; they seemed to be at odds with each other. To me, though, there was a totally logical, natural bridge between the two. I was so happy when Tony Alva cut his hair off. I was so pleased. I thought, "Wow, it wasn't just me." That made it seem more logical.

What was your parents' reaction to all of this? Your mom signed you up for piano lessons and then you quit not long afterwards. I know a lot of people don't get much support from their

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