

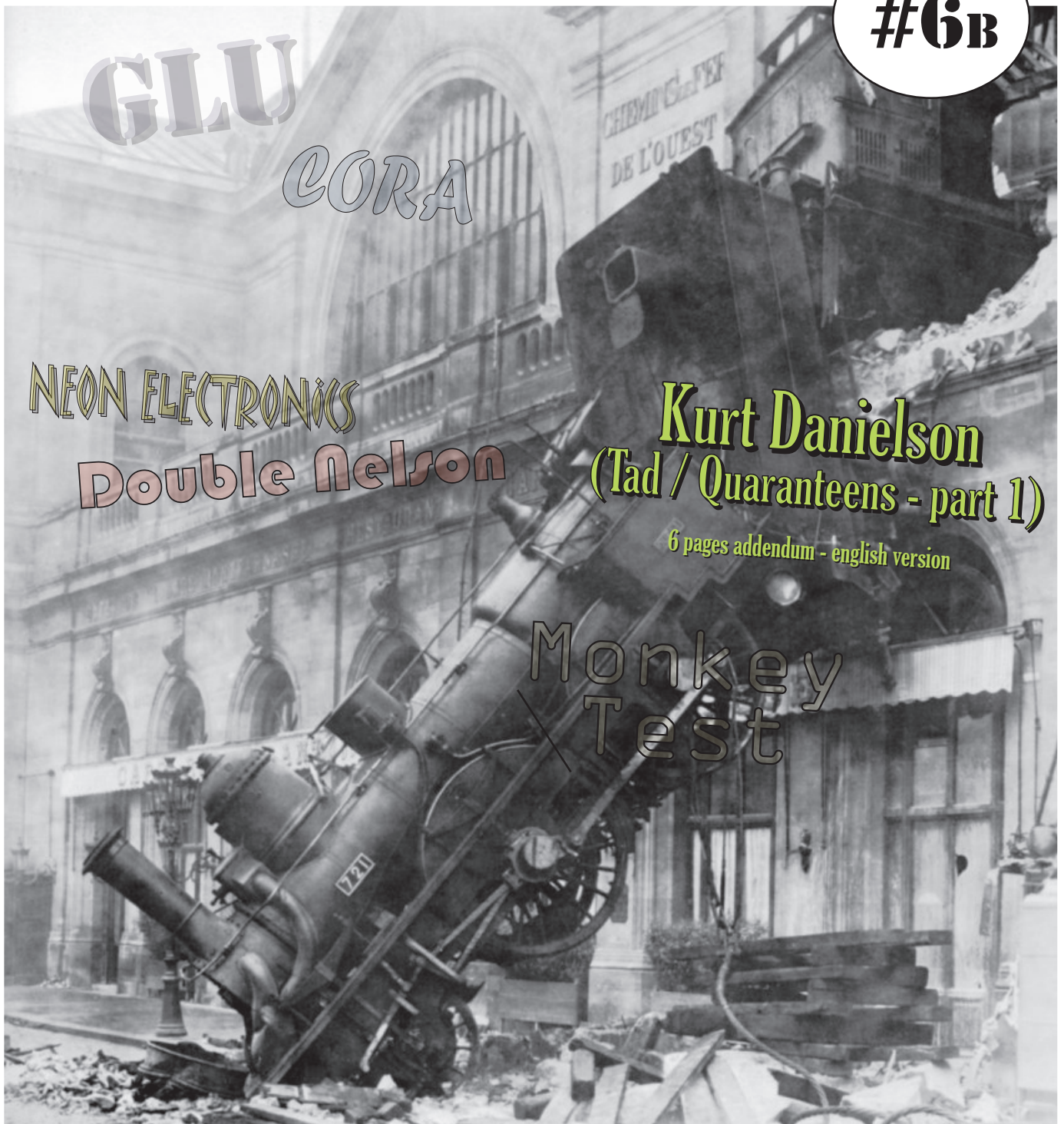
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PUNK

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#6B



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NEON ELECTRONICS

Double Nelson

Kurt Danielson
(Tad / Quaranteens - part 1)

6 pages addendum - english version

Monkey
Test



Kurt Danielson

(Part 1 : from Bundle of Hiss to Tad)



1991: Release of Nirvana's *Nevermind*, which disrupts the musical landscape, whether in the USA, France or anywhere else in the world. With Nirvana, many groups that had formed just a few years earlier start appearing on the front pages of music magazines. Among them is TAD, which originated in the same city as Nirvana, Seattle, to which now all eyes are turned. TAD is the evil side of Nirvana, copy negative: they're ugly, they're scary, and their music is rough and extremely tough. The raw seduction of TAD is neither immediate nor obvious. And yet, under their miscarriages of filth, violence and self-flagellation, TAD deliver the same message as Nirvana, one of deep anger coupled with real despair, more so perhaps than any of their American counterparts of this era, although they're quite remote in terms of time from what became the European new-wave. Unfortunately, TAD broke up in 1999. For approximately ten years, TAD gave no sign of life. Despite this, yours truly remained a fan, and a fortuitous meeting with their bassist, who emigrated to Paris in recent years (but who's today back in the USA), gave me the golden opportunity to take stock of what was TAD. By chance, it was at this time that TAD released a DVD that summarizes the career of the band. Here is the interview (seriously for once) with Kurt Danielson, an adorable, open and sensible guy, bassist of this legendary group..

BUNDLE OF HISS

I grew up in a small town located north of the Seattle suburbs, a very isolated place that didn't even have record stores at that time. When I was young, I had to get someone old enough to drive to take me to the record shops in the nearest big town, which was about thirty kilometers away. My brother and I read all the music magazines we could get our hands on, and so, despite our isolation, we knew about Punk music and its derivatives as well as all the music that led up to it at a fairly young age. When the Sex Pistols and the Clash first came to our attention, we were already listening to the Beatles, the Stones, the Kinks, the Zombies, Jimi Hendrix, The Who, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Pink Floyd, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Eric Clapton and his various bands, Neil Young, Aerosmith, Iggy Pop and the Stooges, David Bowie, early Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, King Crimson, various blues artists (B.B. King, John Lee Hooker, Leadbelly), old R & B records (Wilson Pickett, Sam & Dave, Smokey Robinson, Sam Cooke), old '50's rock and roll (Eddie Cochran, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Elvis, Buddy Holly), and even some country western (Hank Williams, Sr. and George Jones) when we saw a documentary about the Sex Pistols on Public Television. Immediately inspired, we got someone to drive us to the nearest record store, where we bought "Never Mind the Bollocks" as soon as it was available; but at the same time, we were still listening to stuff like Van Halen's first record. For awhile, we liked it all, all the music that came our way, everything from British Invasion bands to Acid Rock to this new music that we'd just discovered, which was of course Punk Rock.

However, when I got to be about 14 or 15—this was in about 1978—I decided that there was a marked difference between this new music and what had preceded it, and I consciously began making a distinction between what was obviously new and fresh and exciting and what now seemed, somehow, to have grown stale and flaccid and flabby and dull: all the bloa-



ted '70's bands, with the exception of the Stooges, David Bowie, and a lot of the British Invasion stuff, which I believed then (and still do) transcended all categories. I remember going to parties where I'd put on the Kink's version of "You Really Got Me," expecting the people I didn't know to recognize its superiority to Van Halen's cover version; instead, these people would mock me, calling me a "punk rock faggot," because I didn't worship at the altar of Eddie Van Halen and instead preferred the spare beauty of the original to the needless excess of Van Halen's bullshit pyrotechnics.

At about this time, reveling in all the new music that was then exploding from New York, England, Ireland, Los Angeles, San Francisco (not to mention Athens, Georgia) and elsewhere, I felt the undeniable urge to somehow become a part of this new sound. I had always been interested in writing, and by this time I was writing short stories and poetry (my Dad was a journalist who owned and ran the local weekly newspaper). I realized that the most immediate way to access an audience would be to write lyrics for a punk rock band. Being young and shy, I was afraid to try singing my

own words; instead, I hoped that I could get someone else to sing my lyrics. But to do this, I realized it would help if I learned an instrument. So I started to learn what I believed then to be the simplest instrument, the bass. My goal was to put together a band in which I could—I hoped—find a vehicle for my lyrics.

For this band, I turned to my high school friends, all of whom were also discovering the immediacy, passion, and the DIY ethic of punk music. My best friend, also named Kurt, could sing, so I asked him if he'd like to be the singer in my band. Another best friend was already playing the guitar, and he taught me the fundamentals of bass playing. Along with another close friend, a drummer, we started what would eventually become the first version of Bundle of Hiss, which would go through many changes throughout the eight years of its existence.

All through the rest of my high school years and then my years of college, Bundle of Hiss remained a living outlet for my creative energy and passion. Throughout this period, many of the band's original members left to pursue other careers, but the band continued to exist, evolving as new people joined and old ones left. Eventually, the original drummer and I were the only remaining members, but by this time the former had migrated to the role of lead singer. The new drummer was a fifteen-year-old kid recommended by a mutual friend; his name was Dan Peters; later he would become the drummer for Mudhoney. It was 1986, and Bundle of Hiss had evolved into a four piece that played its own brand of post punk that was heavily influenced by Gang of Four and Joy Division, among other bands.

At this time, a regional sound began to develop in Seattle, where I was then graduating from the University of Washington with a degree in English. Bundle of Hiss felt the currents of this music, and we allowed it to shape our songs. At this point, our lead singer left to pursue his own career, and our guitarist became our lead singer/guitarist, and we became a three piece. Somehow, this reduction in personnel became a major factor in the ongoing evolution of the Bundle of Hiss sound. No longer did it sport the angular rhythms and stark arrangements of its biggest post-punk influences; now, it began to become more indulgent, distorted, and much heavier, reflecting the punk/metal elements of what would later be recognized as the Seattle Sound; still later, it would be labeled "Grunge," a label even more offensive than most, because it seemed to demand that those who played it remain within the confines of a certain dirty, deliberately rank genre. We didn't care at the time; we did not approach our music self-consciously. We merely let it happen to us.

In any case, Bundle of Hiss recorded two major sessions: one as a four piece in about 1986 and the second as a three piece in the following year. The combined sessions yielded a CD now available on Loveless Records: Sessions: 1986-88. If you listen to it, you can hear the band evolving from its post-punk roots into an early example of what would come to be called, perhaps for lack of a better term, grunge. What set Bundle of Hiss apart from the other proto-grunge bands like Green River, Skin Yard, Soundgarden, the Melvins, and Malfunkshun, et al, was the fact that while it counted various British post-punk bands as influences, it was also clearly conditioned by the music of contemporary American indie noise-meisters like Big Black, Scratch Acid, Swans, and Sonic Youth, to name only a few.

The band broke up when lead singer/guitarist Jamie Lane left the group to pursue graduate studies in literature at Syracuse, New York. Tad Doyle had recently joined the group on guitar and vocals, and a few of the last songs Bundle of Hiss recorded bear his unmistakable imprimatur. Dan had already started playing drums for Mudhoney on the side. So when Bundle of Hiss broke up, Dan continued to play with Mudhoney, devoting all of his time to that fine proto-grunge outfit, while Tad and I started TAD, a band that Tad himself had already laid the groundwork for—completely on his own—by recording an initial Sub Pop single "Daisy/Ritual Device." Because that single had attracted so much positive attention, Tad had already decided to start a band that would enable him to take his music on the road. He invited me to join that band, and he also asked me to join him in the songwriting, which I did with great gusto and zeal.

Although I grew up in a small town, I was lucky enough to be able to get to Seattle quite often; it was about 100 kilometers away. I saw plenty of great bands, including the Dead Kennedys, whom I had the pleasure of seeing several times. I saw also saw X, Iggy Pop, Public Image, New Order, Black Flag, AC/DC (during their first US tour, along w/ Ted Nugent and Cheap Trick), and, most importantly, the Gang of Four, the best live band I have ever seen. All of these bands influenced me, especially the Gang of Four, but the band that influenced me the most, Joy Division, never made it to the states; I had to settle for New Order (touring to promote "Power, Corruption, and Lies"). It was a great show, sure, but I would have preferred seeing Ian Curtis, but of course, that was not possible.

Many Seattle bands also influenced me. Once I moved to Seattle to attend the University of Washington, I was able to see more and more. It was a great time to be a musician in Seattle, because there were so many happening bands in those days: Green River, Soundgarden, Malfunkshun, the Melvins, Skin Yard, 64 Spiders, Chemistry Set, Feast, Pure Joy, Coffin Break, and countless others. When a band broke up, new bands formed. For example, when Bundle of Hiss, Green River, and Malfunkshun finally broke up in 87 or 88, TAD, Mudhoney, and Mother Love Bone rose from the collective ashes. And when Mother Love Bone broke up after the untimely death of Andrew Wood, Pearl Jam was born. That's what made Seattle special: bands broke up and reformed, constantly creating new combinations; it was like a Petri dish in a chemical laboratory, and the bands were like molecules combining, breaking apart, and recombining under the microscope of public scrutiny.





TAD / GRUNGE

By the time Tad and I put together a band to perform Tad's new Sub Pop single as well as to write and perform new material, we had a very definite idea of what we wanted to do. We wanted to be the heaviest, noisiest, most obnoxious, funniest, and also the most iconoclastic band possible. We wanted to play the lowest and heaviest chords, and we wanted to hammer our riffs with the most brutality we could without succumbing to the clichés of heavy metal. In a way, our vision was metallic, but we had a punk attitude; and later, we experimented with arrangements and melodies, employing many pop elements in an effort to add dimension and dynamics to our sound. Little did we know that these would become key elements of a newly developing regional sound that journalists would later dub "Grunge," an odious term, because, like all categories, it implies limitations that the bands can't go beyond. When we first found ourselves stuck with this label, we immediately wanted to repudiate it, to violate it, by contradicting it. And we did. But we still couldn't escape it. Such is the function of labels (and I'm not talking about record labels): once labeled, you can never fully shed or escape it; it always sticks to you, no matter what you do. In the end, we accepted it and ignored it. After all, it's just a word.

As I point out above, we were influenced by a lot of American indie bands of the period, most notably, perhaps, Big Black, Dinosaur Jr., and Killdozer. We were also influenced by a few English bands: Head of David, World Domination Enterprises, and, later, Godflesh. Australian bands like the Cosmic Psychos, the Scientists, Lubricated Goat, and AC/DC were also significant influences. The Young Gods were also an influence, as were Treponem Pal.

As TAD evolved, we began to incorporate more and more pop conventions, if only so that we could deconstruct them, turning them on their heads, if possible. Records like 8-Way Santa are good examples of this tendency, records that have both melodic and heavy dimensions. The idea was to not only keep it rockin', but to also experiment with melody, arrangements, key signatures, beats, and time signatures. The main thing, however, was to keep it brutal, and we tried to achieve this through contrast: we believed then and still believe now that you could make something sound heavier if you put it next to something light; and you could also emphasize melody by contrasting it with a drone aesthetic. These are the kind

of experiments that the new TAD record, to be released in 2008, focuses on; and both Tad and I feel that it is the most powerful, most melodic, and most bludgeoning TAD record ever.

I doubt that TAD could have developed in another place, because Seattle was sort of geographically isolated back in the '80's. This allowed the bands to be more influenced by each other than they were by outside forces, although all of us certainly felt outside influences as well. But this isolation factor was critical and it was also like a crucible in a chemistry laboratory: it provided a perfect environment for a musical evolution to take place that might not have been possible in other circumstances/conditions or in another city.

TAD, Mudhoney, and Soundgarden developed in the crucible of the Seattle scene. Nirvana came to us from Aberdeen, as did the Melvins. I always felt close to them, because I too originally came from a small town outside of Seattle. Once Nirvana started playing more in Seattle and then signed to Sub Pop, the local scene immediately adopted them, just as I had been assimilated or appropriated during the earlier Bundle of Hiss years. There's no doubt that we all influenced each other; and in some cases, we reacted against each other. But the main thing is that we all, for the most part, had Sub Pop in common. That gave us all a common bond, a common home; and it was a good feeling, because when you write about alienation, you are writing about being essentially homeless (at least in a psychological sense). So we were all alone yet together. We wrote about the hostile nature of alienation, so it was naturally comforting to have a shelter under which to seek protection. It was a strange sort of paradox, and it gave us strength, as well as a collective identity outside of ourselves, and this was good. It gave us moral support, and it gave us a certain associative power we would have otherwise lacked: it made us larger than ourselves and yet it also created for us an identity that was a function of belonging to a larger group. Our musical identity as a band was shaped therefore by not only internal factors in the band but by associative factors outside it.

KURT COBAIN / TAD

Kurt was a sweet, generous, empathic and sympathetic person; he could be funny and sad, alone yet with you, all at once. He was also a full-time artist, by which I mean that he was always creating. He was like a sponge in that he absorbed everything around him and then excreted it in his own idiosyncratic and ingenious way. He embodied that old poetic aphorism: "Good artists steal, while bad artists only borrow." He stole diligently, constantly, and with great taste, and he then regurgitated what he'd stolen in his own unique fashion. All artists are thieves, but Kurt was a particularly talented one, and once something went through the magic sieve of his brain, it was transformed; it was new, and it was better, because it contained a part of him.





TAD toured with Nirvana quite a bit in the early years. We toured both the US and Europe together, so we got to know one another extremely well. I personally used to share hotel rooms with Kurt quite often during these tours, and we used to talk long into the night about all kinds of things. Mostly, we exchanged stories about the strange people we had known in our respective small towns: the freaks, the drunks, the retards, the damaged, and the rednecks in particular. We were both fascinated by human psychological and physical abnormalities. He had a wonderfully black sense of humor, much like mine and Tad's, and he had a wonderfully infectious smile, and when he looked at you, it seemed like he could read your thoughts, as if his clear blue eyes could see down into the deepest part of you and read the secrets hidden there; but they weren't hidden for him. He could see you, and he had the gift of being able to read your feelings. When he did this, you didn't feel violated in the least; rather, you felt comforted. He always seemed to understand you, and, what's more, he sympathized with you: he felt deeply for others and at the same time he felt deeply alone. He was a bundle of contradictions, of paradoxes, and this is what made him so fascinating to be around. Besides this, of course, he was a naturally ingenious songwriter, and he was able to use his empathic talent in his songwriting; this was his greatest gift, because with it, he was able to speak and to speak eloquently to a mass audience, even if his ideas involved non-commercial themes, like alienation, for example. Even his love songs are about loss, and he was able to speak directly to the heart of his listeners, never alienating them, even if his main theme was in itself alienation. He made you feel a part of his experience and that he was somehow also a part of yours; he made you feel as if you weren't alone, even though he himself felt keenly alone all of his life.

Well, it was quite obvious, especially when we played together, that Tad and Kurt had a lot in common: both were social outsiders, and both were (and still are) musical geniuses. Because the music business is a very visual medium—I'm talking about Pop music, of course—Kurt was earmarked for

success from the beginning because he was quite angelic in appearance. Tad, on the other hand, looked like how Kurt felt, and this was not attractive to an audience of teenybopper girls: they preferred the angelic-looking devil to the satanic-looking angel, and so Tad obviously lost out, at least when it came to the popular marketplace. But this was both a curse and a blessing for Kurt: not only did it make him rich and famous, but it also made him miserable, because the constant public scrutiny of success meant he was always on display, and this he couldn't bear; he wasn't built for it. Tad, on the other hand, although he could never achieve the same kind of popular success, was lucky in that he could go on creating music without the curse of fame hanging over his head twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

DRUGS

I may as well explain here that TAD—besides the initial Sub Pop single—always wrote as a band. Tad and I wrote the lyrics together, and we as a band wrote the music together. Tad and I wrote most of the songs; I think it's fair to say that he consistently contributed more than I did, but most people don't realize that TAD was a corporate entity, despite the fact that the band was named TAD. We were happiest and most successful when we wrote as a unit, when we felt that special psychic bond that only the members of a band can feel when they are writing as a unit.

The song you refer to as "Alcohol" is actually a song off of Salt Lick (produced by Steve Albini) called "High on the Hog." One night during our first Euro tour w/ Nirvana, Tad was too sick to play, so Kurt Cobain sang with us instead. He didn't know the words to the songs, so he just made them up as he went along. On YouTube there's a video of us performing with Kurt that night, and Kurt is singing, during the chorus, "Alcohol" instead of "High on the Hog." It actually sounds great, because he could make even the telephone book sound like the most beautiful poetry. In this case, the words he happened to choose were also highly appropriate, because we all drank constantly during that tour, all of us except for Kurt, that is: his stomach condition prevented him from drinking. He didn't even smoke at that time, although he would later.

But to answer your question, of course alcohol and drugs were a very heavy influence on TAD, just as they were on Nirvana and other grunge bands (but not ALL grunge bands).

Towards the end of our career (which lasted 11 years), both Tad and I heavily abused drugs, including hard drugs. Tad's preferences ran to cocaine and methamphetamine, but mine were more Catholic in that they included both of those as well as heroin. In any case, drug abuse certainly contributed to the demise of the band. I myself not only lost the band, but my first wife. It nearly destroyed my life and in fact nearly killed me. I am lucky to be alive, and so is Tad. We both realize this. But we were both, at the same time, driven to abuse drugs by the demons that haunted us. Now we must live our lives without drugs, but we are still haunted by our demons. At first, we smoked pot and drank and then we did more and more of both. Finally, every other drug you can name entered the picture at one time or another. Both Tad and I became serious long-term addicts, but we are both free now, even if a part of ourselves will always remain caught in the labyrinth of addiction. Our former addictions definitely conditioned and influenced our material, and they continue to infect everything we do to this day, and they always will. A part of me will always be lost in the labyrinth of addiction; this is the legacy of every addict. But this isn't necessarily bad, because, luckily, we have survived. This means we can write about our experiences, tell others stories about what we've been through. It gives our stories the air of authenticity that not everyone can generate, because not everyone has been

through the hells we've lived through. And even fewer have survived to tell the tale.

SERIALS KILLERS

Both Tad and myself—as well as Kurt Cobain, for that matter—drew a certain amount of inspiration from serial killers and other social freaks, because we all felt like social outsiders, and no one is more of a social outsider than a hard-core criminal, and the most evil species of hard-core criminal is the serial killer: they are symbolic of what is most alienating about being human. Since our songs are largely about alienation, the serial killer becomes a natural symbolic figure for our music. What could be more miserable than the fate of the victims of serial killers? Once touched by the hand of a serial killer, a victim becomes a part of the mythology of alienation—I should say extreme alienation.

AMERICA / FRANCE

Both Europe and the US have their good and bad points. Right now, as Gore Vidal says, the US is no longer a republic but a national security state: it's a police state, just as every state is these days in the western world. This is the legacy of WWII, I'm sorry to say, but no one in the government in the US would ever admit it. In the US today we have a phantom police state: a subtle, ghost-like police state that is transparent yet very real. It's similar in France, according to my experience. I believe Sarkozy is cut from the same cloth as the neocons in America. He may be more leftist—gauchiste—than any American conservative, but in the context of France he serves the same function as George Bush in America today. I personally believe George Bush is a puppet of forces beyond his own control, but this may not be true of Sarkozy; however, it's irrelevant, because Sarkozy is still a prisoner of conditions beyond his control. Bush is a figurehead, a moron, and a mannequin. He can't think for himself: that's clear.

Personally, I couldn't believe it when George W. got re-elected. I voted against him, as I did the first time. I never believed that the war in Iraq was a good idea (in fact, I thought it was quite obviously retarded: the work of a brain-damaged political machine), and I applauded the French for not supporting Bush and his fucked up war. To me, it was obvious from the start that Bush's reasons for the Iraqi war were economic, and that he was a liar. It all comes down to oil; it's that simple. I mean, what did Iraq have to do with 9/11? Nothing! To blame it on Saddam Hussein—with absolutely no evidence—was preposterous, and I couldn't believe that Americans believed Bush's reasoning, which was the reasoning of an idiot, if I may be so bold. Everyone knows now—and quite a few knew then, but we were outnumbered—that Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein were and are separate entities, yet Bush insisted, for no demonstrable reason, that Iraq was somehow responsible for 9/11, despite the lack of evidence. So America invaded Iraq and killed Saddam—not to mention the fact that Bush personally risked the lives of many young Americans in the process and continues to do so to this day—and for what? Now America has invested itself in a losing proposition from which it cannot extricate itself without more and more bloodshed, not to mention the tremendous financial cost of a long-term war that no one will ever win. The current state of the dollar is testimony to how wrong the Iraqi war is, for the war is responsible for its devaluation.

I moved to France for several reasons, the most salient of which, I'm afraid, has nothing to do with politics, although I was delighted to have left the empire of George W. The main reason I moved to France was that my present wife is French, and she wanted to visit her family. Also, at the time we moved, the economy in the Puget Sound area was in bad shape. Neither my wife nor myself could find jobs. Ironically, I

found it easier to find a job in France than in America. It wasn't easy, but it was easier, because English is my mother tongue, and schools that teach English in France prize that characteristic above all others when it comes to hiring English teachers.

Sure, I wore a suit and tie. I did not hide the fact that I was a musician or that I was a member of TAD. In fact, many of my students—all were cadre level: lawyers, CEO's, accountants, marketing executives, et al—were fascinated to learn about my musical past. No one knew TAD's music, but many were music fans. Often, my lessons revolved around spea-



king, in English, about music. I discussed it openly with my students, and this provoked them to be open with me. They spoke to me about their intimate affairs, as if I were a priest: it was like they were confessing their sins.

In this way, I learned a lot about France from my students. For example, I learned that very few people feel happy or free, despite the 35-hour workweek and the health benefits and the long vacations. In America, we have none of these, and Americans are unhappy because of it. But the French are still unhappy, despite the fact that they have these benefits. Why? Because, for one thing, the 35-hour workweek is a sham. It only allows your boss to make you work overtime without paying you for it. So, instead of working for 35 hours, you end up working 50, but you only get paid for 35. This means that people in France have almost no spare time during the week, and people are totally stressed out because of it. In America, people are totally stressed too, but the causes are different. Here in the U.S., many people lack health insurance, for example, and very few people can afford to take vacations, much less long ones. Both countries, in my opinion, are extremely fucked up, but in very different ways. In the end, however, it comes to the same thing: dissatisfaction and disaffection on a grand scale. I believe this is one reason why the music of today seems so dark and foreboding, as it did during the original post-punk era: it reflects the repressed tensions caused by these stress factors, among other things.

To be continued !

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Or die.