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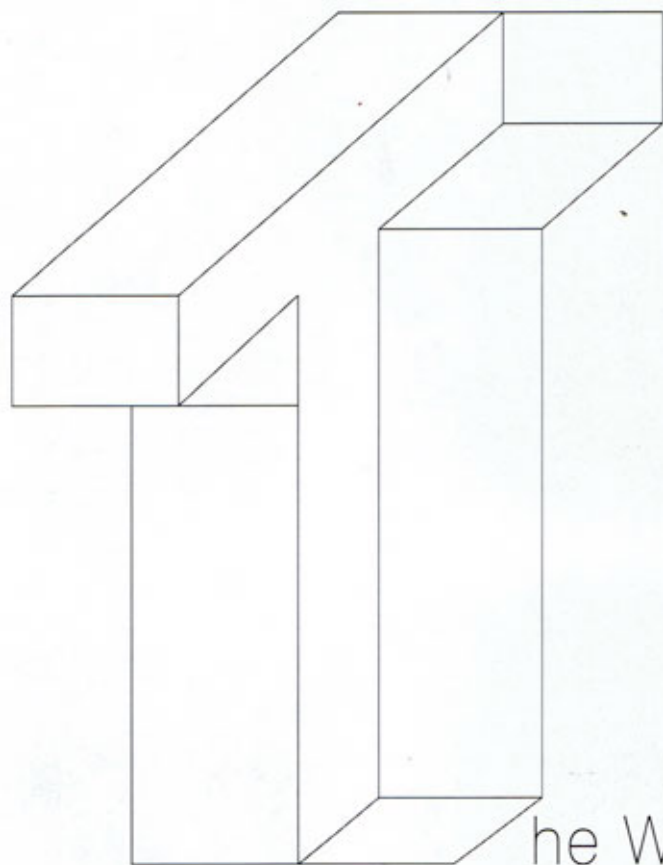
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he World's Last Bad-Ass

story John Albert photography Alex Hoerner

Depending on who you ask, Duane Peters is the last great urban cowboy, or one royal fuck-up.

□ Duane Peters looks like a pirate. His front teeth have been knocked out and he speaks with a chain smoker's rasp infused with a Southern California drawl. His body, including his head and neck, is completely covered with tattoos. Cupping his hands against the warm Santa Ana wind to light the first of many Camels, he reveals the message "Stay Away" spelled out across his worn knuckles. At the age of 41, Peters is doing exactly what he has done since his teens: He skateboards professionally and sings in a punk-rock band. It is all he knows and all he believes in. "People have been telling me to grow up forever," he says with a shrug. "But I don't believe there's a rule book, and I don't believe I have to live by society's standards."

You may have seen this on TV. Inspirational music plays over black-and-white archival footage of Albert Einstein, then Bob Dylan. A narrator begins to speak: "Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers." Martin Luther King, Jr is shown, then a bearded John Lennon. The narrator continues, "The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo." The images continue with Muhammad Ali and Gandhi. "You can praise them, disagree with them, quote them,

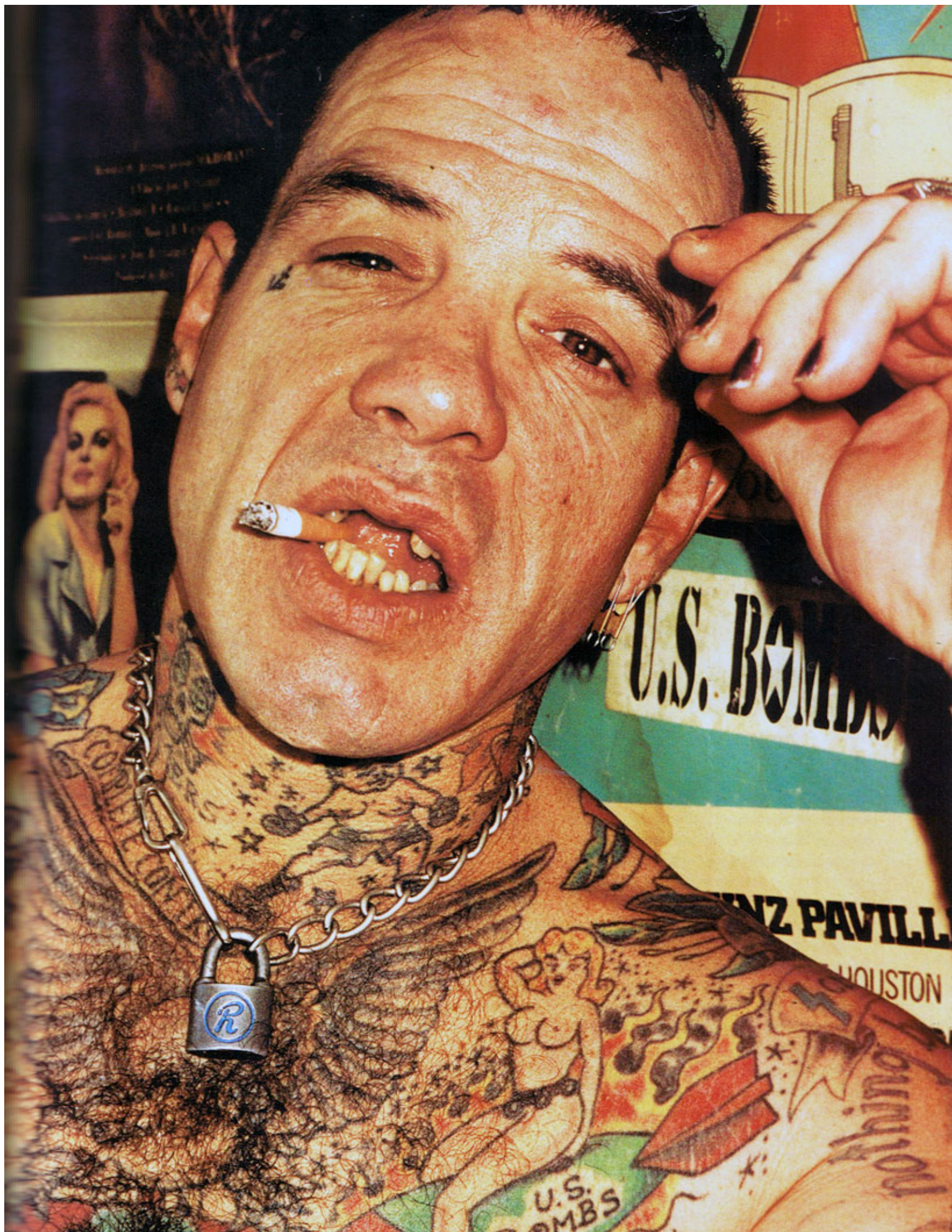
disbelieve them, glorify, or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things." The piece ends with the slogan "Think different" and Apple's corporate logo.

The premise of this little vignette, titled "Here's to the Crazy Ones," is that Apple products are made for rebellious individuals like the icons you have just been shown. The message is that if you buy one of Apple's products, by proxy, you too will be a "misfit," a "rebel," and a "troublemaker." No need to face down a mob of baton-welding racist cops or a firing squad of colonialist troops, no unpleasant jail time or alienation from friends and society. Rebellion, it seems, has been reduced to style. It's in the Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg ads for the Gap and the raucous Iggy Pop songs that propel car and cruise commercials. What was once so meaningful has effectively been co-opted and neutralized. Sure, old Iggy deserves the money as much as Bob Seager and Moby do, but let's not pretend these little deals don't have a profound effect. Because for every rebellious work co-opted, we lose something meaningful. Listen to an inspiring song that is now used to sell a product, and after a while, you only hear an advertisement. When new bands like Papa Roach

start simultaneously releasing their songs as soft-drink commercials, they cease being artists and become merely young entrepreneurs. And if there are young kids out there whose heartfelt memories will one day be accompanied by the sound of a slickly produced soft-drink ad, well, that's sad.

Back in the early '80s, Duane Peters was one of the top skateboarders in the world and the first ever to complete a 360-degree loop—a trick that would not be repeated again for another eighteen years. "At nineteen, I was the number one skater and had the best-selling board in the world," he says. "But I was only making about \$400 a month. I never saw an invoice. All these companies were just burning kids. I was still living in my garage." It was around this time that Peters first heard a tape of seminal punk band the Ramones. "I just completely fell in love with punk," he says. "Three simple chords and telling it like it is. I cut my hair off in 1978. We were totally hated and fought this biker crew every day. You couldn't have green hair back then." At the time, being a punk was a serious act of social defiance. Sporting a short haircut, a Buzzcocks badge, and some high-tops meant you'd have to fight grown men with bushy mustaches for the privilege.

Along with fellow skateboard stars Tony Alva



U.S. Bombs

U.S. BOMBS

nothing

U.S. BOMBS



Previous & above Duane Peters, who is a skateboarder and musician, is photographed here at his Silverlake studio on January 5, 2003. Over 20 years after Peters completed the first ever 360-degree loop, Vision Street Wear has released a Duane Peters line of clothing and accessories. Peters is putting out two records later this year with his bands the US Bombs and the Hunns, both on HellCat records.

and Steve Olson, it was Peters who spearheaded the merging of the skate and punk aesthetics still so pervasive today. You can see their sustained influence throughout the enormously popular extreme-sports world, where heavily tattooed neo-punk athletes blast old-school punk music while earning hundreds of thousands of dollars for moves directly evolved from Peters and his pals. "We were the pioneers of vertical skating," he says. "But like most pioneers in America, we got kind of screwed."

Walking with Peters through a bustling mall, there's something about him that still makes people uneasy. Perhaps it's the fact that he's toothless and dressed like Johnny Rotten circa 1977, or that he's not afraid to address complete strangers as they shop and chat on their cell phones. "People have always stared at me when I walk around," he says. "I totally identify with the Elephant Man."

The Apple people tell us that rebels are not fond of rules, but what they fail to mention is that there is a price to pay for individuality, and it's not at the checkout counter of some track-lit computer store. It takes more

than owning the right products to be one of the "crazy ones." You need courage, an undying conviction, and a small amount of insanity.

The fact that somebody plays an outsider or rebel in a movie, or dresses up like one, doesn't necessarily make them one. Refusing to wash your hair and insisting on smoking during interviews won't do it either. For true outsiders, there is seldom much choice in the matter. Their behavior plays out like a self-destructive compulsion that somehow changes the world for the rest of us. At John Lennon's most fervent, he was not afraid to sacrifice an entire career for what he believed in. If thousands of fans stopped buying his records because the man talked too much about stopping the war, or because they hated Yoko's shrieking and the fact that the pale Englishman walked around naked with his droopy johnson flopping around, so be it. In the cases of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr, the price was more severe.

Duane Peters has also paid for his antisocial behavior. Besides jail time, there have been fourteen car wrecks and seven motorcycle crashes (only one

while wearing a helmet), and he has jumped off a four-story parking structure, had countless fights, been a junkie, and eventually ended up a homeless man pushing a shopping cart. "I've always lived my life like it was going to be over tomorrow," he admits. "I would go to jail two or three times a year to clean up, get some meat on my bones, and always go back to skateboarding. Go for three months just drinking, then fall apart and get locked up again." At some point during all of this, he had the phrase "Kill me, I need the rest" tattooed in bold letters across his back.

Peters was eventually able to stay off the hard drugs and stick to drinking. When his skin started to burn, a doctor informed him that his liver was leaking bile and that if he continued to consume alcohol he would soon die. He has since stopped drinking, his only remaining chemical vice being the Camels he blazes through. Peters has managed to skate professionally and continuously for 25 years, and has toured the world with his insurgent punk band, the US Bombs, playing mainly bars and small clubs, for the last ten. Several years ago he formed another band called

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the Hunns, and he is now singing for both bands. He says he tours an average of eight to ten months a year, returning home with barely enough for rent and bills. "If something goes wrong, if my car gets towed, I'm in serious trouble." Two years ago, an Orange County, California, newspaper ranked Peters number ten on its list of the 31 scariest people, among a rogue's gallery of local judges, politicians, and businessmen. Asked whether he ever thought he would still be alive at 41, Peters laughs and shakes his head. "No fucking way. The only examples I had were guys like my dad, and they were goons. I thought ties grew out of your fucking neck. I couldn't imagine why anyone would want to still be here. I mean, look what's gonna happen to you."

It's Friday night in the California suburbs. An expansive new skate park sponsored by Vans is packed with fresh-faced young kids in helmets and pads trying out their latest tricks. A grizzled Peters stands beside a concrete bowl, waiting his turn with the rest of them. He is decades older than most of the other skaters, older than many of their parents in fact, but it doesn't mean a thing to him. He is genuinely not

concerned with what others think of him and never has been. Pressures to settle down and grow up are the expectations of a society, for better or for worse, he has always lived well outside of.

As a lanky kid finishes his run, Peters pushes off and launches himself down a vertical wall. He disappears for a brief moment, then sails off the opposing wall into the air, stalls in weightlessness for a brief moment, then turns and, as he falls back to earth, reconnects with the wall and continues skating. The surrounding kids clap with approval. Later a sweat-drenched Peters moves unrecognized through the crowded skate park. More than a few of the kids are outfitted in clean, mall-purchased punk clothing. Out in the parking lot, Peters climbs into an old '70s van covered with stickers and prepares to drive home to his cheap, one-room apartment. "For me, rebellion is about standing up for yourself and not being part of the mainstream," he says. "I'm more into the moment and just believing in what I do, which is punk rock and skateboarding." It sounds good—almost like an advertisement, in fact.

People seek company through compromise, because to stand alone is a scary place. But advertising execs know that deep inside, most of us identify with outsiders like Peters. A majority of our cherished art has been created by those on the fringes, from drug-addicted and self-destructive Hank Williams to bullied and depressed Kurt Cobain. Our greatest literature and films tend to ennoble loners, as in Steinbeck's Tom Joad and all the solitary and outnumbered gunfighters like Shane. Few who have watched the film *Rebel Without a Cause* identify with the popular kids stalking James Dean and Sal Mineo. But, in reality, most of us are more like them than we would care to admit. The truth is, most misfits are not celebrated as antiheroes but simply ignored. They are friendless, unpublished, unproduced, and unsigned. And when they occasionally do find popularity, the acceptance feels so unnatural and suspect that many turn to drugs and sometimes suicide. And it is these dead rebels whom we truly prize, for in their silence they stop agitating and become perfect. Perhaps the most rebellious thing a misfit can do is simply survive. ■