

Chuck Klosterman on *Fargo Rock City* (the Movie), and How the Unabomber Had Some Good Ideas

Tim Grierson

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Eating the Dinosaur, the latest collection from cultural essayist Chuck Klosterman, travels familiar thematic terrain for the 37-year-old New York writer, touching on pop music (Garth Brooks), TV shows (*Mad Men*), and sports (undervalued eighties Houston Rockets center Ralph Sampson). But the book's most provocative essay is its final entry: "FAIL," a defense of infamous Unabomber Ted Kaczynski's manifesto that criticized technology for its restrictions on individual freedom. Vulture spoke with Klosterman about Roman Polanski's legacy, the forthcoming *Fargo Rock City* film adaptation, and why a lot of readers are idiots.

Few writers can discuss both pop culture and sports intelligently — it's almost as if they exist in two diametrically opposed spheres.

I get the impression that kids who went to really big high schools, there tends to be a split around 13 or 14 when they have to either decide, "I'm going to play sports and be part of sports culture" or "I'm going to listen to the Replacements and dress differently and be part of whatever counterculture." There was no counterculture at my school — there were twenty-three kids in my graduating class, so everybody who liked rock also played football. There's a really strange moment that happens for guys when you're about 14 years old, and all of a sudden you find yourself thinking, "I would rather be David Lee Roth than Larry Bird." I remember having that realization, but I never stopped being interested in sports.

"FAIL" offers a defense of some of Ted Kaczynski's ideas from his manifesto, "Industrial Society and Its Future," although you start the piece by making it clear that you're not defending his crimes. Have you gotten much grief about it?

No, I haven't — probably because I'm pretty clear that I had some trepidation about writing about him in any way that wasn't negative. It's just become clear to me over my life that a lot of people are idiots. [*Laughs*] They will take one aspect of something you've written without reading anything else, and then they will decide that they will guess what they think the piece is about, and that will impact everything else. So I was very aware of the fact that I didn't want to seem like I was being consciously controversial.

Why did you seek out his manifesto?

I've always been very interested in the culture of serial killers, so I was interested in the Unabomber way before he was arrested or the manifesto was published. At the time, I was only thinking about him in the way he was being portrayed, which was as this insane, diabolical person. Which is not to say that he wasn't insane or diabolical, but I didn't take him seriously as an intellectual. Everybody talked about what a brilliant mathematician he was, but somehow that just marginalized him as proof that all smart people are dangerous. [*Laughs*] Later, occasionally I would look for the manifesto online, and every time I would read it, I would find something else that was intriguing to me. I think it's important that someone's ideas are not discarded even though the person themselves is terrible.

Reading “FAIL,” I couldn’t help but think about how that debate’s still relevant, especially concerning all the recent discussion of Polanski’s artistic merits versus his crimes.

Polanski’s a little different, though, because there was really never a period where people did not keep valuing his work as a filmmaker. If Polanski had murdered that girl, he would be in prison, but people would still watch his work. Kaczynski not only did these terrible things, but he also had the physical appearance of a lunatic, and was living this hermetic lifestyle, and had this insane request to have his work be published in newspapers to stop him from blowing people’s hands up — so people completely discarded his ideas. I don’t know, I think those ideas might be kinda valuable.

I read that the Hold Steady’s Craig Finn and *Letterman* writer Tom Ruprecht are turning your memoir, *Fargo Rock City*, into a film.

It’s weird that this is news now — the deal actually happened six months ago. I knew Craig Finn a little bit — I’ve been around him, and of course was a big fan of his music, and we used to go to some of the same bars. He and this guy from the *Letterman* show, who I’d never met, said they wanted to have a meeting about buying the rights to *Fargo Rock City*. Which of course was extremely weird to me, because there’s no narrative in that book. So we met, and we asked what their idea was, and they seemed to have no idea. They just said they really wanted to do it, and they were really enthusiastic. Then they sent me a treatment, and it was awesome. They had picked out three specific details from *Fargo Rock City* and made it into a totally different story. It was great, and I signed the deal. And as is usually the case with these things, I assumed never to hear about it again. But now it seems like there’s a lot of interest.

How involved are you in the project?

It’s really their thing, to be totally honest. If they want me to be involved, I totally would be. But I think that they have a pretty clear idea of what they want to do, so I wouldn’t want to interfere with that. The worst thing you can do to anybody trying to be creative is to demand participation in their vision.

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