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Is Anybody Here?! : Object Collection's *It's All True*

by Rebecca Marino | Published May 14, 2018



Object Collection, *It's All True* | Photo courtesy Henrik Beck

What haunts the digital cul-de-sacs of the twenty-first century is not so much the past as all the lost futures that the twentieth century taught us to anticipate. The futures that have been lost were more than a matter of musical style. More broadly, and more troublingly, the disappearance of the future meant the deterioration of a whole mode of social imagination: the capacity to conceive of a world radically

different from the one in which we currently live. It meant the acceptance of a situation in which culture would continue without really changing, and where politics was reduced to the administration of an already established (capitalist) system.

Mark Fisher, "What is Hauntology?," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (Fall 2012)

[It's All True](#) is an experimental "opera in suspension" created by the Brooklyn-based collaborative [Object Collection](#). Written and directed by Kara Feely and composed by Travis Just, *It's All True* was forged from the live recordings of the legendary D.C. post-hardcore band Fugazi. Although Fugazi hasn't played a live show since 2003, in 2011 the band released the [1987–2003 Live Archive Series](#), a 15-year archive with around 1,500 hours of content. Feely and Just went through all 1,500 hours over the course of many months, pulling and selecting detritus from the recordings: feedback, incidental noise, and, most notably, the on-stage banter and audience interactions that Fugazi became known for. While this opera does not include a single Fugazi song or a narrative of any kind, it still succeeds in translating the core values and ideology that Fugazi fervently held on to and fought relentlessly to enforce throughout the entirety of the band's career.

The opera is an ensemble of four—Catrin-Lloyd Bollard, Avi Glickstein, Daniel Allen Nelson, and Deborah Wallace—and a live band consisting of bass, guitar, and drums—Taylor Levine, James Moore, Brendon Randall-Myers, Shayna Dunkelman, and Clara Warnaar. While the band stays hidden behind the action on stage, the cast, all dressed as anyone you might run into on the street, move around a set that looks vaguely like a basement or living room. The props are comparable in their simplicity and domesticity: desks, lamps, armchairs, cardboard boxes, maybe a tennis racket or a balloon here and there, but nothing you wouldn't likely find at any given household, all of these things meant to thoughtfully give a subtle nod to the often untraditional but grassroots locations Fugazi would play. The dialogue is more along the lines of chanting and yelling rather than singing, and the staging pivots entirely from the source material into a series of choreographed vignettes of chaotic and gestural movements and interactions both among one another and with the various set props. The musical score is in perpetual limbo, expertly reanimating a definitive anxiety familiar to anyone who has gone to a show and eagerly awaited the band playing the next song. There are a few somewhat quiet moments, but overall the tension is consistently high, the tone disjointed and bewildering, to say the least.

For those unfamiliar with its legacy, Fugazi will forever be known for questioning and side-stepping the conventional standards and structures of ... just about everything. And while it does seem strange to say that it questioned the conventions of a musical genre dedicated to doing just that, Fugazi truly redefined where and what a punk show could be. The band was wholly dedicated to cultivating a safe and inclusive space. No moshing or aggression of any kind was tolerated, and the musicians would stop playing (which they did at almost every show) if audience members failed to abide. They would only play in spaces that allowed all ages (preventing them from playing many bars and venues), kept the lights on so

they could see and engage with their audience in a real way, and, of course, kept the cost of entry \$5 to \$7 for every single show. All of their hometown shows were benefits for various charities, and the band never had a manager or lawyer of any kind. They created and nurtured a true DIY outsider community.



Fugazi at [40 Watt in Athens, GA 2/19/1993](#) | Photo by Patty Torno

Fugazi was just as dedicated to questioning the conventional standards and structures of society as a whole, and while evident in its music, it is certainly as clear in the so-called detritus that *It's All True* is composed of. A great deal of the transcribed and re-adapted banter from 25+ years ago is that of genuine social and political concern, social and political concern that remains all too relevant today.

Human beings are actually physical beings that must exist somewhere, so while all this sort of, there's all this sort of scuffle going on about, development and people getting moved in and out of neighborhoods, activists trying to fight to save them, and people trying to cash in and all this other sort of stuff, ultimately, there's human beings who are in the middle of all this who are just being shuffled one way or another.

Ian MacKaye of Fugazi at a show in [Austin in 2002](#) discussing gentrification on stage, a pointed issue that resonates louder than ever in Austin 16 years later.

Gentrification, sexual assault, police brutality, gun violence, the voting system—Fugazi brought all these issues to the stage and it's all (still) true. What also remains true is that acknowledging and talking about these issues makes people uncomfortable. Fugazi didn't give a fuck if it made you feel uncomfortable because it recognized and believed in the cause, course, and potential for something much greater: a forward-thinking and engaged community committed to progress. The band challenged its audiences constantly in this way, and that's what Object Collection does with *It's All True*. While Fugazi reconfigured what it was to see a punk show, Object Collection reconfigures how we experience an opera—without narrative or traditional operatic music/dialogue but with a lot of loud, fragmented, confrontational noise and political discourse.

Many Fugazi fans (this writer included) have obviously been drawn to this project due to the sheer excitement and appeal of something Fugazi-related and are perhaps going into this production with the nostalgic hope of comfort from a time the band was still together and building within the zeitgeist. It is unlikely you'll find that here. And while it's a near-impossible task (or ask) for fans to bypass nostalgia mode completely, it certainly feels like failing to do so would only be a disservice to *It's All True*, as well as Fugazi. It's easy to romanticize the past, even when it's not necessarily a past you were apart of, but sometimes it's more appropriate to mourn a future lost. It's time for us all to embrace discomfort, confrontation, and the reality that 30 years later we're still far from the progress Fugazi hoped for.

It's All True by Object Collection is presented by [Co-Lab Projects](#), [Sean Ripple](#), and [Vault Fine Art Services](#). Catch it Stateside at The Paramount (719 Congress Ave.) on [Friday, May 18, at 8 p.m.](#), [Saturday, May 19, at 8 p.m.](#), and [Sunday, May 20, at 5 p.m.](#)

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