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Bits and pieces of this bulletin are drawn from the author's recent guidebook, *Supernatural Strategies for Making A Rock 'n' Roll Group* (New York: Akashik, 2013). Kindly note that it defies conventional fact-checking.

Cover image by the author

You often hear that the artist strives for immortality — a quality that, in the popular imagination, is related to God, vampires, the undead, ghosts, and nuclear radiation. But what lies at the heart of this quest? Is the artist a piece of radioactive matter? Are they a ghost? Do they strive for vampirism? Or God status?

Once, immortality belonged to everyone. After a person died, God could grant them eternal life — or not. If not, they'd burn in the lake of hell forever; either way, immortality was achieved. When the bourgeoisie seized power in the 17th century, though, God was defrocked, reduced to second-class status beneath the brokers, bankers, realtors, developers, and financial speculators who were celebrated as lord-deities in the new money-religion paradigm called "capitalism." This coup was manifested by Masonic bourgeois revolutions in Great Britain (1649), the USA (1776), France (1789) and elsewhere. These consolidations of bourgeois power were preceded by the Italian Renaissance. Just as the aristocracy had employed priests to explain their own divine right, the Renaissance bourgeoisie invented their own magical imp, "the artist," in order to explain and celebrate their own power and glory. It's no coincidence that "artist" is but a few letters removed from "atheist." The artist was invented as a gladiator to kill the old God for his bourgeoisie paymaster, the New God.

But in this necessary reduction of God and simultaneous celebration of science, the middle class had closed the old avenue to eternal life, even to themselves. The Kingdom of Heaven was thrown in the dustbin, while immortality became a privilege of the bourgeoisie attained through portraits, names on buildings, patronage, corporate legacy, and nowadays wheatgrass. With the commission of a painted portrait, the rich could become immortal. For the poor, there was no longer any escape from the horror of death. The mean-spirited bourgeoisie took away their hope. However, the bourgeoisie's pet, "the artist" is often seen to be on a quest for immortality, too — in their case, by making a great painting or other work of art. Leonardo da Vinci attained a kind of immortality through his *Mona Lisa*, for instance, though this status was still at the whim of his employer.

The new goal would be to become a God on Earth. This required total control of the population and Earth's "resources," the transformation

of the world through science, technology, and construction therefore accelerated at a cataclysmic, traumatic speed. But a compelling argument for the elite as living deities would only be possible if they could appropriate God's greatest threat: Armageddon. The artist's role as apologist and explainer of bourgeois power was central to all of this: their work would mirror each and every permutation. The artist would be the shock trooper for the capitalist's ideological indoctrinations.

The artist was just one of many inventions designed by the capitalist, whose greatest commission was the atom bomb—that's when he REALLY arrived. Beyond the Michelin restaurants, private jets, and high priced brothels, the believable threat of Armageddon is what makes him a true potentate. Hence the threat of apocalypse must be a constant, though it constantly transforms. Acid rain, mutually assured destruction, killer bees, the Ebola virus, Y2K, nuclear meltdowns, global warming: capitalism demands not only constructed enemies and constructed desires, but also real impending crisis that threatens the human race itself with extinction. Terror threats and the threat of hurricanes, storms, tsunamis, and earthquakes are now conflated so that weather itself is a terrorist. The narcissistic idea of Armageddon and apocalypse, both fundamentally based on the fear of missing out, is as old as mankind —and it's increasingly difficult for each generation to imagine a world in which they aren't central. But only under capitalism are the cycles of seasons, generations, and the future itself absolutely unimaginable.

While Armageddon is useful for explaining the absolutism of the elites, the ongoing confrontation with eastern Europe is a fantastic illustration of the historic use of the artist.

The vampire myth originated in 18th-century Eastern Europe, an area which has had a Third World relationship to the "West" ever since the crusades in the High and Late Middle Ages. The Crusades weren't only an invasion of the holy land, but also included the sack of Constantinople and colonization of the Baltic States. The countries of the "East," having never experienced their own bourgeois revolutions, were—and still are—seen as resources and markets to be colonized. As such, they were initially suspicious and afraid of the artists, who were heralds of a new invading class.

Popular throughout the region, the vampire legend was a manifestation of this fear of the new artist class. The painter of portraits was creating an immortal image, immortalizing their subject while simultaneously — with their signature — becoming immortal themselves. The artist's signature had appeared during the bourgeois ascencion known as "the Renaissance." In the East, God was still the only one allowed to grant immortality, therefore the portrait painter was, to Christians, apostate — a committer of blasphemy. Like the cliché of the aboriginal people of Australia believing that the camera will steal one's soul, the portrait painter of yore was thought to do much the same thing.

The East had always been suspicious of portraiture and the immortalization of a person. The famous "iconoclast" struggles of the Middle Ages — which centered around destruction of graven images — had torn apart the Orthodox church in the 9th century, leading to widespread disruption that allowed the Vatican to break free of Byzantine authority, and which led to the East-West schism that is a defining feature of modern times. The struggle between western/Catholic and eastern/Orthodox is the backdrop to imperial conflicts such as the bombing of Yugoslavia, World War II, and the current US-designed conflict in Ukraine. In these struggles, capitalist powers like NATO and the Nazis typically fight on the side of the Catholics, while the communists, Serbs or Pro-Russian separatists are on the side of the Orthodox.

It's no coincidence that pop politicos Pussy Riot, heroine-celebrities of the West who party with Madonna, began their struggle by desecrating an Orthodox church in Moscow. In doing so, they established themselves as central players in the current push to suppress and re-colonize the East, stars of the West's propaganda campaign against Putin. They are the exemplary rationalization to liberals for the possibly armed confrontation with a nascent Russian state that the so-called "western" elite despises for its gas wealth and relative autonomy (as opposed to those European governments who are servile, supplicant bootlicks to US hegemony).

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* was appropriated from the folk legends of Slavic countries. Stoker set the book in Romania, but it could have been anywhere in the east. Such stories are poignant not only because vampires are sexy and scary, but because they are victims as well. Vampires are

bloodthirsty creatures who stalk their prey, but they were once similarly hapless dupes seduced by a thirsty, immortal undead. This perfectly illustrates the conundrum faced by the artist under capitalism.

Art is often seen as a conjuring of, or as a message from, the creator himself. The musician or painter often complains of their pen, paintbrush or guitar pick being manipulated — "as if by ghosts" — who lead them to the discovery or *exhumation* of what becomes their greatest hit. Ironically, greatest hits often don't coincide with the artist's idea of what constitutes their best work. An entertainer's runaway hit may be ill-regarded by the reluctant singer of the tune, as in the example of Tina Turner's "What's Love Got to do With it?"

A relationship with the hereafter isn't particular to artists of course; today our world is lousy with ghosts and spirits groaning at everyone from every corner, dimension, and cosmic plane. But the art worker's relationship to the spirit word is unique. An artist's stature often increases dramatically after death. Once the artist has shaken off the mortal coil, all their energy can finally be focused on their former career. They no longer have to eat, dress, make love, pay mortgages, or raise children; their work, whether it's a recording, book, or painting, is thenceforth their only material manifestation. Therefore, the artist-ghost invests itself fully to the cause of explaining their art and attempting to increase its profile and visibility, as opposed to the more usual type who haunts a mansion, castle, bridge, or staircase to underline some point about their tragic death or some unresolved conflict.

Old records are, in a sense, our communion with the dead. Records blurt out trapped moments of rapture, fear, love, anguish, despair, excitement, and insanity. When you play an album, what you're hearing is a ghost wailing, imprisoned in the moment, rattling its chains. Groups' graven images and output are likewise ghostlike, as they attempt to wreak their vision on the world from the afterlife. However, devoid of a physical body they must rely on real world minions — not unlike Dracula, who had insane slaves like R.M. Renfield, an asylum-bound, bug-eating sycophant. Every fan is a little Renfield, alternately raving and obscuring their fave group or record — that which they see as the light and hope for Earth, but also their precious illicit and contraband discovery.

When a group begins, they attempt to breathe life into their actions by mimicking the rattle from some tragic old ghost, repeating that momentary tantrum, which is then trapped forever on a playable disc. While the artist's painting is square and self-contained, but the record is round, and, forever revolving, seems to move quickly but actually goes nowhere. The record is sheathed in a cover that's square: this is an attempt to mimic fine art by appearing complete and contained while disguising the dark and horrific drama of the captured soul that rotates in a gyre. The recording process is thus a conjuring of magic, and as such is regarded suspiciously by some who are less rooted in capitalism's gizmo-conjuring production paradigm.

The pop song itself, with all its bizarre repetition, is another flirtation with death—not to mention its bedfellow, insanity. The recorded group might live a long life, but once recorded, it, too, becomes a walking undead, tethered to a material manifestation of a particular moment in time that it must repeat over and over again. Some groups go unnoticed and fail; ultimately, they are the ones who are free. Successful groups are like legendary ghosts who have to perform their stunted emotional moments for their entire lives and then on into the next world. It's hardly surprising, then, that record collectors' houses often feel a bit haunted. The record collector is someone who consorts with ghosts and the supernatural quite often. The compulsion to find the value of an old, out-of-print record is an unconscious attempt to please the ghost trapped in the groove. These ghosts are often insecure about the worth of their contributions, and want confirmation.

Records and artworks are therefore used as mediums to communicate with the "other side." Drugs are another kind of bridge: either an escape from a less desirable reality, or an attempt to reach a more enlightened "state." Drugs are essentially correctives designed to stabilize a mood, personality or disorder that is deemed "wrong." They are exhumed from the natural habitat or pharmaceutically designed because the world is deeply imperfect. Whether by design or accident, nature has failed us and we require drugs: moods fluctuate, people become unhappy, bored, and insecure. Drugs are the cure for all these maladies, but—because nature is imperfect once again—they aren't permanent. They need to be taken again and again. (Permanent correctives are called "operations.")

Drugs are used as a medium between the horrible world of reality and a more perfect one. Everyone has some kind of medium to bridge the gap between what is and what should be. Techies use computers, musicians use music, painters use paint, others use drugs. Some use more than one of these means; in particularly severe cases, all of the above.

Andy Warhol is as essential to the psychedelic era (1964–1971) as counterculture figureheads such as Timothy Leary, Owsley Stanley, and Syd Barrett. Warhol's early films, often seen as interminable, boring, strange, and detached, were actually just simple, unadorned transmissions of a stoned experience—the psychedelic equivalent to entries in a ship's log, or the dry observances of Che Guevara's diary. The film *Chelsea Girls* and the "Exploding Plastic Inevitable" happenings were surrealist drug trips for the casual onlooker that attempted to transmit the "high" consciousness to a straight participant. "Pop" art is a sophomoric, stoned equivocation: mass-produced objects are living beings, and vice versa.

More than Warhol's films, TV shows, magazine, and events, this latter proposal continues to resonate. Indeed, it seems increasingly poignant. Pop, a.k.a. the assembly line, was, to the alienated post-war consumer, like a dazzling act of God—and so it was designed to appear. Items from the factory floor, divorced as they were from the craftsman's hand, were imbued with something universal, timeless, and perfect. Alienation of the workers from themselves, their labor, and the product of their labor, was, for the Pop-ist, a state of grace, not the tragedy that Karl Marx had warned against in *The Communist Manifesto*. Warhol's "pop" was a declaration of love for these "goods," promulgating a new kind of romantic desire for a post-war generation whose ability to care for other people was so stunted they had to enforce the dictate to "love" with signs, in songs, and on protest placards. They even declared a "Summer of Love" (May–August 1967), like a recycling campaign. Warhol's insistence on the personification of the commodity and the commodification of the person—as with his *Marilyn* portrait—neatly sums up the state of *l'amour* in the consumer capitalist society.

"Alienation of labor" was something Marx had witnessed, with the pell mell rise of capitalism and industrialization, in his own lifetime. It summed up the situation of the workers, who no longer had direct relationships

to the things they made. But Marx lived in a time of revolutions and street actions; he saw the establishment of the Paris Commune as well as the revolutions of 1848, when people still felt they had agency to change their world. He couldn't have predicted the dizzy heights of alienation achieved by modern capitalism. This alienation has only been rehabilitated and made bearable by institutionalized drug use — legal and illegal — at every level of society. Though the drug culture purports to be a rebellion, it's actually State-mandated and determined by the needs of Imperial policy, as well as by industry. The State's narcotic prohibition was just a clever move designed to make drug users feel empowered, special, and sexy — sort of like Facebook's early "college only" pretense.

The drug scene that shaped US culture in the 1960s was a direct result of the compulsory pill popping required by the army and was mandated by the state. When the soldiers came home, they wanted to keep feeling the "ups" and "downs" that had transformed their service into something more interesting than just "hurry up and wait." Life in the army, after all, is interminably boring, but it is also marked by a certain largesse: soldiers are encouraged to go whoring, engage in violence, and generally misbehave so as to blow off steam accumulated while waiting for action that typically never comes. The soldier is an object with no value except for the ability to use money requisitioned for military budgets. They aren't required to do anything except consume (besides killing people during wartime, which is relatively unusual).

As drug culture in the USA had martial origins, it retained particular values when it was absorbed by the counterculture; it was colored by army life, army mentality, and army preoccupations. The California counterculture's main drug dealers were Hells Angels, for example, who had started life as bored, itinerant ex air-force, and refused to give up the rapacious "free" lifestyle they'd experienced murdering people overseas. The beatniks who were their customers also organized into militant "cell"-style cliques with vague insurrectionary ideologies. Warhol's fabulous coterie, by comparison, were ex-debutantes and social strivers who provided a kind of USO (the army's entertainment corps) to the drug-addled, polymorphously perverse counterculture, serving up Dada and bitchy in-jokes to a smashed audience of sophisticates.

"The Factory" was an ironic name, given that drugs at the time were considered anti-work. Whether you dealt them or took them, they were an antidote to production — and as such the true expression of a post-industrial consumer society. The pill-popping hedonism of the "it" girl and the other superstars in Andy's orbit made for a scene that garnered considerable publicity and became an inspiration to millions.

Indeed, because the drug is often at once a rite, an initiation, a cross to bear, and a symbol of machismo, art workers and rock 'n' rollers often find themselves pressured to ingest copious amounts of substances that are arbitrarily illegal so as to weave a legend. This tedious behavior is only superseded by the material that it produces. Meanwhile, these drugs are credited with much of human creativity over the past millennium, particularly during the beatnik and rock 'n' roll period. This creates all kinds of problems with credit: don't let drugs get the credit due to you!

Still, drugs are central to the identity of many artists and particularly rock groups, since they are illegal and therefore mysterious, secret, strange, macho, and highly personal. They are a natural fit for those modern artists who want to become a kind of gatekeeper to a private club or cult of the anointed. If you choose to be a drug group, some things to consider are the drugs which will be in vogue during your ascent and what kind of music will be appropriate to serve as the soundtrack to their usage. The ability to predict drug trends could be an enormous asset to a group, akin to a stockbroker knowing how to play the market effectively. If one can be associated with the resurgence of a particular drug — as Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg were with the marijuana vogue of the early 1990s, or as The Grateful Dead were with LSD — hits needn't be produced, and the music can become a tertiary concern.

The ascendance of a particular narcotic as the "it" drug of one or more subcultures shouldn't be difficult to guess if one maintains an awareness of geopolitical trends. Since availability of narcotics are controlled by the CIA and its allies in organized crime, covert US military actions and assassinations provide a clue as to which part of the world the substances are coming from. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a huge volume of heroin flooding US streets, imported through the CIA/Corsican mafia's "French Connection" via war in Southeast Asia. This was transported

care of the CIA's own "Air America," though it was sometimes shipped perversely in the hollowed out bodies of dead GIs. The CIA had induced the Hmong tribe in Laos to fight the communists for them in exchange for purchasing their opium crop, and needed a captive purchasing public. Most of it was sold directly to GIs on their tours in Vietnam, but the surplus made it stateside, with devastating effects.

Heroin had become a hip trend a generation earlier in the USA as the CIA united with the Corsican "Carbone" gang in Marseille to stop the communist unions from controlling that strategic port. Together with French ex-Nazis, the Carbone gang used CIA and police assets to flood the US market. Initially, heroin was popular with jazz and Beatniks, but with its return in the Vietnam era it spread into the rock 'n' roll and pop music genres.

Cocaine enjoyed enormous success in the 1970s with war against the Sandinistas and the CIA sponsorship of the South American juntas in Argentina, Chile, and Central America. The coca plant supplied "the company" with an enviable pile of cash for teaching torture techniques to South American police state bogeymen against labor leaders, artists, communists, innocent foreign exchange students and whomever else these deranged freaks fingered. The white powder's proliferation helped shape the disco music lifestyle, music, and morality. Cocaine is highly sociable, sexual, and anti-intellectual but leads to paranoia, megalomania, insanity, worship of material luxury, and garish costumery. Cocaine enjoyed a resplendent comeback in the 2000s with the USA's "Plan Columbia," leading to the sell-out vacuity of 21st-century "indie rock," as well as the aesthetic of braggadocio and amorality typified by that generation's rap stars.

Occasionally a new drug is introduced to great aplomb, like the CIA's own LSD revolution, which transformed the anti-war movement into a schizo, mystified fuzzball, and the "crack" innovation, which rehabilitated the wealthy's use of cocaine by creating a poorer, tawdrier cousin, providing the pretext for a money-making "war on drugs" that enabled prison building and new levels of police repression against the impoverished. Now, however, the fad for legal pharmaceuticals has bumped the predictable drug cycle out of whack. The old drugs are largely unnecessary since

doctors aggressively dope any stubborn, interesting, or unusual person into passive conformity. Sometimes innovation can create drugs on a grassroots level. Project Pat's famous "Sizzurp" is one example of a "homemade drug." The Ramones' championing of airplane glue is another example, and Donovan's "Mellow Yellow," the smoking of banana peels, is a third. These brave souls were unwilling to submit to the CIA/mafia's prescription for dependency and created their own mind-altering agents instead.

The drug your group takes will represent an aesthetic decision rather than a penchant for the drug itself. Groups' identities are often closely linked to various drugs, and the group with no ideas or personality can often enlist a drug to give it one.

Record production is another kind of drug-making, of course. Record collectors are addicts, and the narcotic effect of pop music is widely recognized. The different types of music and indeed formats are akin to different types of drugs with very different effects. Rock 'n' roll in the 1950s and 1960s was proliferated via 45s, cheap and disposable, which gave the listener a euphoric sense for a few moments, followed by a manic desire for something the same but different. It was essentially like crack cocaine. The 45 era was therefore a golden age of music in terms of volume of good songs and dynamic groups, but the groups had to be extraordinarily concise. The songs were expected to deliver either a novel noise or sensual thrill within a few seconds of the needle hitting the vinyl, otherwise the listener would quickly move on to a new platter.

The 45 was largely abandoned when it was replaced by actual cocaine, which proliferated massively in the 1970s. Or perhaps the explanation is vice versa: cocaine was used by addicts as a stand-in drug when the industry abandoned the 45 format.

"Long Playing" records were more like a marijuana high. Double albums were heroin. Meditative, at 15 minutes a side, LPs were for "deep" listening. The sides could careen up and down in mood and create a drama or narrative. The most successful LPs were those like *James Brown Live At The Apollo* or Isaac Hayes' *Hot Buttered Soul* — records that transported the listener to an unusual scenario. Double albums like

Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma* or Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* promised total immersion and were in vogue in the late 1960s, coinciding with the height of heroin chic. CDs and ipods are from the pharmaceutical era of mandatory drug use; they chatter in the background, creating an atmosphere but never demanding actual attention.

While drugs used to be about "taking a trip," "expanding horizons," "destroying the ego," or "exploring consciousness," modern drugs (Adderall, Xanax, Klonopin) are about making "wrong" things — such as supposed personality disorders — "right." They are correctives, designed to help the user conform to normative social behavior and work modes by ironing out hard-to-take behavior. Accordingly, modern groups are loath to have personality, being formalistically obsessed with copying the Jesus & Mary Chain, the Ramones, the Stooges, or some other group. Inspired by the pharmaceutical drugs, they want to be "right" in their decisions, correct in the way they sound, like something an influential Internet magazine has said was important. This is why they slavishly ape institutionalized forms.

Capitalism's business models and economy are based on addiction. New models of automobiles, new styles in clothes, new sounds, new films, up-to-date telephones, "refurbished" kitchens, and so on. Drugs are just one more aspect of enforced compulsion and dependency on consumer goods. Groups are attempting to create a taste for their sound, which becomes a habit — an addiction of a sort. Designing a popular sound is akin to designing a drug. A "hit" record is feeding a compulsion for a particular, magical sound. For the listener — once hooked — no other sound will do.

The Internet remains the most profound contemporary drug, and one that has become an enormous influence on music. Internet addiction isn't just socially tolerated — it's aggressively encouraged. It leads one to a state of constant distraction, the desire for incessant stimulation, and an unquestioning trust in and worship of the authority of a monolithic "web." For these addicts, all answers to all questions are found from a single source — the "Wikipedia." This monolith is a dreadful public work, which — like an ethereal version of the Egyptian pyramids — is labored on incessantly by uncompensated, fanatical zombies. The Internet drug drives its fiends to create more and more of their addicting substance — the Internet itself. They construct new web pages, "links," and what they call

"content," all of which make their "webmasters" and other debauched Internet overlords wealthy beyond comprehension.

People who stop taking drugs tend to replace them with coffee addiction or obsessive behavior that they flaunt as a macho "work ethic." This is a case of making up for lost time: drugs are time consuming, and once one is not taking them it becomes apparent to the former user how much time was used up by what is essentially a consumerist version of sleeping late.

However, group members encumbered with a guilt complex for their "bad behavior" needn't fret. Without a drug habit, a fast moving rock memoir is nearly impossible to write. Both for the square and for the substance abuser, drug addiction is the socially prescribed outlaw lifestyle. Hollywood makes glamorous films about it and its victims regale each other with their heroics in meetings. As opposed to bestiality, shoplifting, wife-swapping, political activism, or Grand Theft Auto, drugs are the malignant social behavior which is institutionalized, validated, and sort of beloved by our society. Ever since the institutionalization of Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous, drug addiction has become the neat packaging of mankind's struggle with temptation and sin—something everyone can relate to as it touches so many social obsessions, including class, race, sex, and so on.

Ultimately, Americans in particular love a redemption story. In fact, as evangelical Christians, either latent or actual, they demand it and won't trust you if you haven't got one. A history of drug abuse is a tool to achieve this: addiction to drugs is our National social vice and the narrative of so many "broken" lives. The drug user becomes the "sin-eater" who absorbs the wrongdoings of their societal peers, with their officially designated "bad" and "outlaw" life choices. In a sense, mourning drug use and the wasted talent or broken families is just hand-wringing over mortality itself. The drug user's explicit pissing away of time is a salve to the non-addict's conscience and also a reminder or meter of our general ineffectualness.

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