

## Psychedelic Horseshit - *Magic Flowers Droned*

(Published in *Punk Zine* in 2008.)

Psychedelic Horseshit's LP *Magic Flowers Droned* (Siltbreeze, 2007) recasts the meaning of the phrase "pop-punk," which has been dragged into the codified lineage of the Ramones-Screaming Weasel-Green Day. "Pop-punk" also applies to Psychedelic Horseshit's entirely separate vision that speaks directly to the etymological meaning of the term. It is a *punk* look at *pop*, which does not necessarily entail fast beats, three chords, and whoa-ohs, though that strategy was once as abrasive, confrontational, and critical as the one now employed by Psychedelic Horseshit. No, this is a pop that is glued together with spit, a measure from falling apart. It's shitgaze—Ohio, not Orange County.

Nearly lost in the mix, in the recording and in the critical commentary on this sound, are the pop songs Psychedelic Horseshit and their brother band Times New Viking entomb in the noise. Jason Crock's *Pitchfork* review of TNV's 2008 Matador record, *Rip It Off*, treats it as if it were a field recording or a broken television set's white noise. Sure, the production style is the aural equivalent of the chatter on old film reels. But this chatter has bizarrely engendered the sort of outsized blowback the Impressionists received from indignant art critics accustomed to hundreds of years of easy-to-read academic painting. One wonders just how many *Pitchfork* writers even heard DIY music before they got their byline.

Psychedelic Horseshit plays up the implicit critically of the tape hiss in a self-aware, direct manner. "Bad Vibrations" is a retelling of the Beach Boys' canonical pop song "Good Vibrations" that strips the original of its utopian euphoria and discovers an actual lived possibility, one of anxiety and misanthropy. "I'm picking up bad vibrations everywhere that I go, from just about everyone I know," sings Matt Horseshit, a common feeling in Columbus. On "New Wave Hippies" Horseshit takes vacuous buzz bands like Yeasayer and Deerhunter to task for offering a vision of coolness that is apolitical: "New wave hippies don't protest, they do it on little screens, recovering nineties ravers and people who bought the wrong zines, occasionally psychos but mostly just nice folks, it's like a new disease."

Psychedelic Horseshit's lyrical inversions and spirited attacks on pop music complements their patchwork conglomeration of injured methods of music

production that deconstruct conventional song structures, coherent instrumentation, and audio fidelity. They have a difficult time pulling it all off live as a three piece playing through a clean PA, but on record it's a wall of pretty problems. Psychedelic Horseshit isn't engaging in empty aestheticism by suffusing the themes and melodies of pop songs with ugliness, dissonance, and tape hiss, as many have implied. Rather they are critically reworking pop codes to show the options abandoned by the industry tastemakers whose structural power in broadcast radio and music television is hegemonic.

These tastemakers impose rules on how music will sound, and how audiences will conceive of the very notion of music, by only allowing a narrow band of expression to receive effective distribution. That these same tastemakers (*Entertainment Weekly*, MTV, *Pitchfork*) are now courting bands like Psychedelic Horseshit and Times New Viking is no shock. Late capitalism's greatest achievement has been its proficiency at turning criticism into product. That these bands are to turn on the dead assembly line of pop music is not a surprise. What is a surprise is that Psychedelic Horseshit and Times New Viking are actively participating in their commercial co-optation. Corporate exposure invalidates independent culture in that it asserts one must rely on mainstream capitalist institutions to be successful. It would seem joining ranks with the world of booking agents, PR, and corporate venues would be intellectually incompatible with the conceptual message of the music. Even if one thinks the opportunity to play music for a living would be hard to turn down, and that agreeing to do so isn't worth complaint, why engage someone who refuses to spell your band's name correctly? MTV's John Norris wrote "Psychedelic Horsesh--" on his blog, leaving open the possibility of "Psychedelic Horseshoe." (How is MTV going to capitalize on the current roster of "indie" bands using curse words for cheap, memorable appeal with this rule in effect? Bye, bye Holy Fuck, Holy Shit, Fuck Buttons, Fucked Up, Fuck the Facts, Holy Fucking Shit, Shitstorm, et al.)

The commercial exploitation underway is nothing more than another turn in the grinding cogs of capitalist music. The brashly beautiful *Magic Flowers Drowned*, full of abrupt endings, dueling vocal lines, inconstant instrumentation, unanticipated shifts of momentum, teeny-toy drums, and blown out recordings, will lose its ability to startle once it is not a comment on mainstream codes of music, but is, instead, mainstream music itself.

## A Useful Equation For Cultural Capitalism

Mainstream Cultural Product Code

+

Independent Culture's Criticism  
of Mainstream Cultural Product Code

=

New Mainstream Product Code

And nothing structural in the music industry institutions that cause the artificial cultural suffocation that produces bands like Psychedelic Horseshit will change.