



## Dexter Bang Sinister: GOOD SHIT

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Cover image: Dexter Sinister, vanity acid blotter, 2012

How do we begin in order to lose the plot?

The narrative fabric of psychedelia can't be woven and spun in the usual ways, because it doubles up and folds, it comes apart at the seams and re-connects where it split, it implodes in all the middles where it began. Yet we cannot open up the gap too much, we cannot deepen the crack irremediably, because then language will disappear the way it has so many times before ...

Things are never just black or white. Therefore black and white make for the easiest way of tripping up reality. So I should already have begun elsewhere, because elsewhere is where it's at. If I started with me, I have ruled out you, and if you started with white, you have ruled out black. Even in the split-second it took to introduce "you" and "black" into the sentence, there is already delay and difference. We are already writing in strobe.

Tripping on this ill-logic, let's conclude—that is, begin again—by asking: what color might footnote black and white, already apparently the lowest of the lo-fi? What color might constitute the unwelcome third leg, brought in to go even lower and undermine the dualism?

Brown, perhaps.

Brown, like the suede vests and leather sandals that off-set the rainbow colors worn by the beautiful people. Brown as the earth off the grid, brown as rice, lentils, linen seeds, and the resin of the cannabis flower. Brown as the freak caked in the mud of Woodstock and of the hippie refusal to bow down to the regime of personal hygiene. Brown as the nut in the nuthouse connotations of psychedelia. Brown as the downwards pull of the stoner's self-debasement that mocks her desire to be dissolved into blue plasma or elevated to an incandescent nebula.

Brown was the color of the countercultural threat to the city and the law; the hue of a fundamental critique of civilization in which eschatology is catalyzed by the scatological. A character in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*—published in 1973, when the hippie era was heading rapidly downhill—describes the deforestation of his childhood woods as

“diminishing green reaches ... converted acres at a clip into paper—toilet paper, banknote stock, newsprint—a medium or ground for shit, money and the Word.” Black, white, and brown herald the revenge of paper. The Gutenberg Galaxy strikes back from the future, and the plasma screen’s additive RGB is degraded to ink’s reductive b/w. Shit was the ultimate threat to any form, a utopia of indifference: composted psykedeliab, psykedeli-kaka, and all those fecal metaphors adopted by the counterculture to reflect a corrupt and warmongering mainstream. It was a last recourse to authenticity from which no return was possible. At the rear-end of value, shit was real.

So when you smoked dope you were smoking some good shit, and your shit was likely cut with camel dung from Morocco, and when you smoked some good shit collectively you were having a shit-in. Freaking was a way of taking the piss out of power, like when Otto Muehl’s communards sing Beethoven’s *Ode an die Freude* to a plate of human shit in Dušan Makavejev’s 1974 film *Sweet Movie*. While authorized visitors to the Cannabis Gallery in Malmö were given membershit cards, British hippies quoted Antonin Artaud as claiming “all politics is pigshit,” and Abbie Hoffman concurred that “words are the ultimate in horseshit.” Mick Jagger kissed the devil where the sun don’t shine, and William Burroughs pointed out that the day that shit becomes worth something, the poor will be born without an asshole. But asses followed those who freed their minds long before toilet doors were taken off their hinges in the communes. Charles Fourier, the 19th century thinker of libidinal communism—a proto-hippie if there was one—included in his blueprint for communal living a faux-parliamentary forum called the *Merde-ensemble*. Here, communards with political ambitions could have bull sessions to their hearts’ content, talking out of their arses without harming society; pure peristaltics as an aesthetic joust.

That last bit about Fourier is, in fact, complete bullshit. But this is all as Fourier himself would have wanted it, seeing that one of his key insights is that \*sincerity itself is bullshit.\*

While the excremental became emblematic of the U.S. counterculture’s program of cultural erasure, elsewhere it was put to less nihilistic use. In India, Gandhi instructed people to clean their own toilets. No one on the

left had thought of that before—it used to be a low-caste job, reserved for the Dalit community. In Brazil, the time after the Tropicalist counter-cultural revolt in the late 1960s was called *desbunde*: literally, “letting go of your ass”—a moment of relief mixed with frustration, when liberated social energies spurred people to drop out and join the guerilla.

If brown really is the contraband of black and white, we have to admit that they were fundamentally related from the start, given that all three are essentially UN-colors. However, unlike black and white, which are neatly separated from everything else—a class apart—brown is something else again. In fact, brown is all other colors MERGED together: exhausted, burnt-out, wasted, and impotent.

In *My Cocaine Museum* (2004) the anthropologist Michael Taussig wonders why thinking about color causes reality to tilt. “Color makes a mockery of language,” he writes. “It is color that turns language into word dust, patterns lose their ability to hold us in thrall, and silence falls—silence that is heavy, silence that is blue, the blue of waking dreams.” Shimmering and gleaming dreamily, color’s potential is vast; it may even open up new pathways that could lead us back into language. But how to account for brown’s vagueness and shame? Is it also silent ... or is it UN-sound? Does it too have the power to mock language and shift reality? According to Wittgenstein, you can never be sure that your “blue” is the same as the next person’s “blue.” I can only persuade you to share a consensual language game whose referents are sufficiently stable to function. The question is, is my black & white your black & white?

But brown is not only a profane color. As we have seen, it is metonymically embedded in shit, and hence also in the \*absence of form.\* In the psychedelia of the 1960s, life liquidized form into floppy letters, amorphous blobs and pulsating plasma. Yet once we find ourselves in the realm of the formless, a return to a differentiated material reality may prove difficult. Teilhard de Chardin once wrote “all that rises must converge,” but psychedelia’s paranoid holism may merely muddle up in seventh psychedelic heaven as a useless blob of vitalistic plasma.

Psychedelia is, as we know, an infernal rodeo, a piggy-back ride on the anti-body of a berserk octopus. As such, the key question is, perhaps,

which exhaustion to choose: (a) the physical and mental exhaustion of the actual psychedelic trip; (b) the ascetic self-proletarianization through the loss of self-control and social prestige; or (c) the analytical and conceptual depression that follows the imperative to avoid form and repetition.<sup>1</sup>

While the common psychedelic valorizer of \*expansion\* is all too easily appropriated by the culture industry, we can't afford to lose verticality if we want to both remain above it all AND stay grounded. We must get high precisely because there is no up or down. So let's not end on a downer, but get high with Marx who, in *The German Ideology* (1846) asserted that consciousness is a social product. Ideas, he says, do not descend from heaven as the idealists claim. Instead, thinking must "ascend ... from earth to heaven." Then, six years later in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," he goes on to claim that the revolution will evade the fall from tragedy to farce, will avoid merely replicating the situation it has displaced, via a newly-realized self-reflexivity, a process in which individuals "criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh ... until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: HIC RHODUS, HIC SALTA!"

In other words, cut the crap ... prove it RIGHT HERE and RIGHT NOW. In this perpetual self-critique, history is owned by no-one, or by all. Surely there is no better reason to jump for joy.

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1. In a crystalline statement titled "In the Aftermath of Psychedelia" (2013), artist Søren Andreasen writes: "Any type of Order is a sign of entropy. Reproduction of Order is effectively an increase of entropy, as a given system thus is moving from a state of less probability to a state of higher probability. (This is a paradoxical precondition to self-transformation because Order is non-life.) If a cause of action is IMAGINARY, SPECULATIVE, or HYPOTHETICAL, it is effectively in a state of very little probability. To make the state of a given system less probable, the formal and symbolic agents of Order have to SELF-transform (or \*PSEUDO-form\*)." That is, unless we want to fall back down into the shit.