

somethingdark



Literature, art, philosophy and... (of course) perversity

Perversity Think Tank by Supervert

Why not start from the beginning: the small package of three books had been opened on one side of the Atlantic or the

other. Clearly, perverts infest the UK and US postal-security bureaucracies, but whether they are of the type that would appreciate Supervert's books is doubtful, even if they did allow the books to reach their destination.

Perversity Think Tank in many ways is a distillation of Supervert's thought, and, as far as his three books are concerned, the culmination of his work, although there is every indication the author has not had his final word on the subjects that so clearly occupy so much of his time. As far as his latest book is concerned, the topic is approached more directly, the author's focus unhindered by literary forays and explorations of other major themes such as the question of the existence of extraterrestrial life, or grappling with the reality of mortality.

Thus, the principal questions asked in *Perversity Think Tank* are those such as *What is perversity?*

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how can it be defined?; What is the nature of perversity?; What acts, what thoughts, are, in fact, "perverse"? These questions are at

the crux of this work, and they lead to other, more concentrated questions, many of which are more intriguing than they may appear at first glance; for example: "is it precisely perversity that gives birth to normality, and vice versa?".

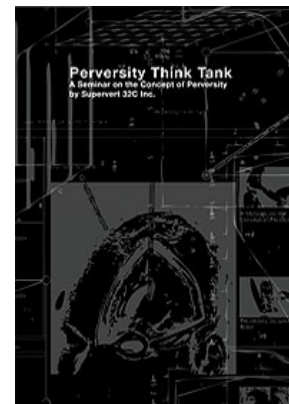
The reader encounters early statements setting out the author's starting point, as when he explains how he was "not sexually but conceptually excited" when he discovered a magazine devoted to apotemnophilia, or Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID), formerly known as Amputee Identity Disorder: "My thoughts poured into all the spaces where limbs used to be, and I realized that these deformities of the flesh demanded a corresponding deformity of thought – a new way of thinking about desire, beauty, pleasure".

Whether Supervert has succeeded in thinking in a new way about

the issues he treats is perhaps entirely in the realm of philosophy, but the book's text is certainly unusually structured: it is

reminiscent of his first book, *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish*, but not as formally compartmentalised. *Perversity Think Tank* is all-the-more interesting for its structure: three, thematically linked philosophical and reflective narratives weave their way through the book. One of the narratives is focussed on imagery that Supervert, for reasons best known to himself (copyright issues? censorship issues?), has chosen to represent as solid black rectangles. The reader must do some work for himself to follow up on the imagery, but the result is a greater and more rewarding engagement with the subject: the reader must invest his own stake in what is essentially a contemplative process, and hopefully also an educational one.

This does not mean that Supervert could not perhaps have done a little more in offering concrete criticisms of established thought. For example, early discussion of



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Perversity Think Tank

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Freud's writing on sexuality and perversion as presented in the famous psychoanalyst's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* moves very quickly from a brief, if correct, conclusion on Supervert's part – "if the object isn't genital or if the subject fixates on foreplay, then the act isn't quite normal" – to raising questions that suggest a wholesale revolt against Freud's edifice is warranted. Indeed, Freud's "definition" of "the sexual aim" was more than a simple "restatement of the traditional conception": it was the reinforcing of the traditional conception with (pseudo-) scientific theory that has virtually become a secular canon of the psychiatric sciences.

Supervert used his earlier, but now-discontinued PervScan web project as the basis for much of his research, and it was through that project that he has – almost – "seen it all". But, vitally, he has *considered* what he encountered, and has done so very deeply.

Importantly, he doesn't necessarily rule out anything, and resists judgment. As he wrote when discussing the case of a man who allegedly habitually sought the embrace of a horse to satisfy his obsession with anal pleasure, to the point of eventual death (of the man, not the horse): "Is it ok to pursue pleasure to the very point where it finally separates from the duty (tendency? instinct? moral obligation?) to preserve your own life? I don't know... You'd have to answer that question for yourself". Here he seems to admit that philosophy has its limits; his passing appeal to Kant provided no ready response, and "morality" is an impotent concept.


Appropriately, Supervert doesn't come to any definitive conclusions: "Negatively put, perversity leads desire to the unlovely. Positively put, it carries desire beyond all limits". Negative potential and foreboding are "an important part of sublimity", he writes, and in weighing "the rapist" against "the pervert", concludes the former is a conventional being pursuing conventional desires through appropriation, while the latter "arrives at sublimity [in achieving] limitlessness in his desires... in the liberation of abnormal urges". In the end, "all we have are definitions", and any attempt to define *pervert* or *perversion* is ultimately futile; they are, as the author writes, anything one wants them to be, usually juxtaposed to one's own self-perception as "normal". Excluding nonconsensual practices or those that cause emotional, psychological or physical harm, any

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attempt to understand the nature of perversity is not a waste of time, if, like the author, one realises that definitive conclusions don't matter and what confronts us is not an abyss, or a philosophical problem, but humanity in its richness and diversity.

So is this book the child of "a philosopher of perversion", as Supervert writes in reference to Julian Wasser's 1963 photograph of Marcel Duchamp playing chess with a naked Eve Babitz? Although it is not clear whether the reference is to Duchamp or to himself, our author is making a statement about the power, allure and elemental nature of sex and – despite the haughty intellectualisations of philosophers – about the inseparability of body and mind in human existence. Likewise do Supervert's thoughts on the sixteenth-century woodcut by Hans Baldung, *Phyllis and Aristotle*, appear to represent development in his philosophical thinking over the nine years since *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish*, particularly regarding an apparent lionising of Kant in the earlier book.

To focus a little more on the author himself at this point, how would one portray Supervert? He describes himself as "an alias – a nom de plume – a moniker for an individual – a corporation – a brand name. Supervert offers you a unique combination of intellect and deviance. Perversity for your brain. Vanguard aesthetics, novel pathologies". Indeed. And not many people, we presume, know his real identity. It seems to be working for Banksy, and it appears to work for Supervert. In our opinion, accolades are due.

And now for a general note on the physical format of Supervert's books: they're small – a five-inch by seven-inch format, which is smaller than the international A5 size. The diminutive stature of the books somehow make them more attractive, and, dare I say it, desirable. Their desirability is enhanced by quality printing with relatively solid, tactile covers and good paper. So yes, the books are paperbacks, but are among the best examples of the type and are conversation points in their own right. So, for anyone who finds such subject matter appealing, or is curious to explore some unusual and, at times, difficult human terrain, then this book, as with all of Supervert's work, is worth the investment of time, energy and money. 

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Additional Info

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This work appears to represent development in the author's philosophical thinking.