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Letter from the Editor

The Alpha, Enema and Omega of Amalgamation

— Eric Swenson

ON PUBLISHING

Violet Smith Talks with Supervert

— Violet Smith

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The person or entity now known as Supervert first crossed the cultural radar in the early 1990s as the co-founder (with Eric Swenson) of Necro ENEMA Amalgamated, creator of the notorious series of *BLAM!* CD-ROMs. A blistering barrage of extreme graphics, ear-splitting audio and incendiary texts, *BLAM!* was a multimedia experience like no other—and given that the internet has killed the CD-ROM as an art form, there may never be anything quite like it again. *Wired* called it a “torture garden of earthly delights,” while other reviewers alternately praised its innovative interface design and complained about getting headaches from watching it.

After the release of *BLAM! 3* in 1998, Necro Enema Amalgamated decided to disband, and out of the ashes was born a new entity: Supervert 32C Inc. Wielding the motto “Vanguard Aesthetics, Novel Pathologies,” Supervert continues to create multimedia—on its popular web site, there are Shockwave modules such as Sex Lingo, an illustrated dictionary of sex slang, and Shockometer, a psychometric device that enables the user to determine his “shock-resistance capacity” by enduring an increasingly repellent series of graphics. There are etexts by authors such as Thomas De Quincey and the Marquis de Sade—and now there is also Supervert’s own new book, *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish* (sometimes known as *ETSF*).

Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish, available in both print and electronic editions, purports to be the case history of a computer programmer suffering from a psychopathology that the book calls *exophilia*, an abnormal sexual attraction for extraterrestrials. However, *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish* is no simple porn-sci-fi hybrid. The book combines narrative, satire, parable, history of philosophy, computer code and half a dozen other genres into an aesthetic mutation that reviewers have compared to William Burroughs and David Cronenberg.

VIOLET SMITH: Everybody must ask you this question: Is *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish* autobiographical? Do you have a fetish for aliens?

SUPERVERT: Inevitably an author leaks into his work like blood into a carpet. Some authors slit their wrists and splash the blood around and make a show of themselves. Others are more worried about the carpet itself and only bleed on it by accident. I like to think that I’m the latter sort, and therefore *ETSF* is no memoir of personal depravity. I do not have a fetish for Martians or Grays or Little Green Men.

That being said, I do think that there is already something of the extraterrestrial in every fetish. “Extraterrestrial” may literally mean “outside earth,” but—to the extent that aliens remain elusive—it also signifies beyond reach, unattainable, perhaps even non-existent. Without tangible proof of existence, an “alien” is no more than an anthropomorphization of an absence. Consequently, a man who longs to have sex with an alien really longs for the unattainable—and isn’t that the nature of desire anyway? You most want what you don’t have or can’t get.

SMITH: *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish* has a unique structure. Why did you choose this approach rather than, say, write a straightforward narrative or novel?

SUPERVERT: The approach I took in *ETSF*, inspired by set theory, ended up being a kind of ordered collage—ordered because it has a serial structure, collage because it juxtaposes not just elements in a series but one series with another. Of course, whenever you try to write a book with an

unconventional structure, you have to be careful not to let the form overshadow the content—otherwise you end up with something obnoxiously pretentious or even downright unreadable, as in *Finnegan's Wake* or some of William Burroughs' cut-ups. Then again, I'm not sure that you can even call collage unconventional anymore. Somehow collage has come to signify vanguard and experimental, and yet there is already a long tradition of collage literature: The Marquis de Sade used a serial structure in *120 Days of Sodom*, Kierkegaard juxtaposed different genres of texts in *Either/Or*, Flaubert spliced together narrative and dictionary entries in *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, and so on.

In addition, I think the collage approach actually makes a book easier for people to read today. We are habituated to the short, the essential and the non-linear—to sound bites and instant messaging and hyperlinks. We're a different society than the one that indulged in long novels, and it may well be that that literary form—the novel as Tolstoy or Henry James knew it—will become as distant from us as epic poetry or Shakespearean English.

SMITH: The reviews of *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish* have been almost universally positive. Does this surprise you?

SUPERVERT: As an author, you try not to have any expectations about what people will say—though of course you have them anyway. For example, I was worried that people would fail to perceive the significance of the philosophy sections in *ETSF*, which to my mind are extremely important, and therefore I was pleasantly surprised that reviewers so far have appreciated and understood their significance.

I was also surprised that, to the best of my knowledge, *ETSF* has been entirely ignored by what I thought were its two most obvious audiences: the sci-fi scene and that alien subculture made of up ufologists, flying saucer buffs, fanzines, conventions. On reflection, I've come to the conclusion that this says something very telling about the book. Normally, if you write a book about aliens, people automatically assume it's science fiction or paranormal pandering. *ETSF*, on the other hand, is unique insofar as it's a book about aliens that belongs to neither of those genres. It's literature, really—a literary book about aliens.

SMITH: What are your literary influences?

SUPERVERT: There are many writers I admire for many different reasons. Setting aside all but those who have had a tangible effect of some kind, I would name: the Marquis de Sade, for his combination of pornography and philosophy; Edgar Allan Poe, for his sense of rhythm; Gustave Flaubert, for his astonishing discipline; Charles Baudelaire, for something I can't quite put my finger on; and William Burroughs, for his humor, his freedom, and his "routines."

SMITH: Before the publication of *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish*, you were known more for the *BLAM!* CD-ROMs. Is there any crossover for you between writing and making multimedia?

SUPERVERT: Collage was important for both, and there is an obvious link between writing and programming. Being a programmer, in fact, might even make you a better writer, since it trains you to think with precision, logic, and clarity. A single typo in a block of code can crash an entire program—imagine if the same were true for novels or books! Every writer should strive to write as though a single word could render his book unreadable.

Conversely, there are obvious differences between the two processes. To make multimedia you have to be a bit of a Renaissance man: You have to be able to program, design, compose. It's a combination of writing, art, film, music. You can really feel it exercising different parts of your brain. Writing, on the other hand, is very narrow. It's like having a staring contest with the infinite. You pick a direction, focus your gaze, and refuse to turn away until you've managed to

make out the tiny figures moving about on the horizon of your imagination.

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If I had to sum it up in a metaphor, I would say that multimedia is a gangbang or orgy, whereas writing is monogamy, even obsession.

SMITH: Is *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish* the product of an author or a business? What is Supervert exactly—a person or a corporation?

SUPERVERT: Legally, Supervert is a corporation—but of course it was a person who wrote the book—and yet the company holds the copyright—and yet a person owns the company. Rather than fixate on the organizational minutiae, it's better to think of Supervert as a brand name. Authors' names tend to become brand names anyway: Hemingway means machismo, bullfights, hunting, war. Kafka means alienation, paradox, futility, "modern condition." With Supervert, I wanted to create a brand name that would say perversion, intellect, pornography, aesthetics. As an individual, I may write or create a variety of products, everywhere in the range from malevolent to sweet, but wherever you see the Supervert brand name, you can be sure of what you're getting: Vanguard Aesthetics, Novel Pathologies.

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Violet Smith works as an artist's model, sending her naked body careening like a spaceship through the minds of tomorrow's painters. Whenever you see a bare thigh or naked breast adorn a vanguard canvas, it might be her.

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