



PervScan

An index to the Sordid and Depraved

PervScan is for adults only. You are under 18. You must be a parent.

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## Perversity Think Tank

A Seminar on the Concept of Perversity  
by Supervert 32C Inc.

Perversion

Perversity

Depravity

Resources

**Perversity Think Tank**

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**A Seminar on the Concept of Perversity**  
**by Supervert 32C Inc.**

Perversity Think Tank  
© 2010 Supervert 32C Inc.  
ISBN 978-0-9704971-2-3

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Manufactured in the United States of America.

DIGITAL EDITION

Let me take this opportunity of answering a question that has often been asked me, how to pronounce “slithy toves.” The “i” in “slithy” is long, as in “writhe”; and “toves” is pronounced so as to rhyme with “groves.” Again, the first “o” in “borogoves” is pronounced like the “o” in “borrow.” I have heard people try to give it the sound of the “o” in “worry.” Such is Human Perversity.

— Lewis Carroll, Preface, *The Hunting of the Snark*

When I created PervScan, I had the idea to use the web site as a chronicle and compendium of perverse behavior — a living, breathing *psychopathia sexualis*. It would chart the vitality of familiar acts of deviance, foot fetishes and pedophilia, and would document the rise of new ones, like feederism. At the same time, though, I wanted the site to be more than just a static repository of depraved acts. I thought of it as a research laboratory, a facility for the study of perversion, and I thought of myself as a scientist — a one-man perversity think tank. I wanted to understand.

But it didn't take long before I felt that I understood nothing at all. Many of the acts I covered on PervScan — like the three middle-aged brothers who sexually assaulted their bedridden mother while she lay suffering amid lice, roaches, and fecal matter — struck me less as perverse than as ignorant, heedless, cruel. There were days when I thought my compendium of deviant doings was nothing more than a catalogue of errors in judgment and lapses in common sense. What can you make of a judge who masturbates at the bench? Is his behavior really perverse? Or is it just a gross lack of professionalism made possible by the tedium of his job?

Ironically, the more I scanned the news for perverse acts, the less did any act seem genuinely perverse. On one hand, I thought that this was because I was looking closely at every act, seeing past any surface perversity to glimpse the frustration, recklessness, and sometimes loneliness behind it. On the other hand, I worried that I was becoming jaded. I have now spent years sifting through thirty sex crimes a day. After you've read about a guy who wants to eat his own penis, you feel like you've pretty much heard it all. How could some mere exhibitionist seem perverted in comparison to a man who wants to



**I consciously chose not to write** PervScan in the first person. There were two reasons: one was to repudiate the diaristic tone then typical of blogs, another was to emphasize that the site was not about an individual but about perverse acts. On occasion, however, avoiding the first person felt like being bound to a chair with a gag in my mouth. There were times when some experience of my own seemed relevant and I had to find roundabout ways of communicating this. It was frustrating. I would say to myself, “Shit, what

if Descartes had set himself some arbitrary rule like this? He’d have never come up with cogito ergo sum.” Deep down that is very much what I wanted to do: derive a basic truth about the nature of perversion, something as self-evident as the cogito. (I think *too much*, therefore I am *perverse*.)

To this end I spit out my gag. The point is not to wow you with outrageous examples of depravity. The point is not to pen a memoir, *The Life and Loves of an Information Age Rakehell*. After all, to understand perversion is to

#### 01. Illustration, *Amputee Times*, Excerpt from *Fetish Magazine*, 1970s.

Punks and bums were selling disjuncta on card tables lining the sidewalk. Out of the corner of my eye I glimpsed a headline: *Amputee Times*. What the fuck? I stopped, paid five bucks, and wandered away turning the pages of this insane publication that appeared to date from the 1970s. It was filled with poorly scanned snapshots of amputees, nude models leaning on crutches and trying artfully to hide a leg, reader-contributed drawings featuring hot amputee chicks in wild sexual positions. To me, already long interested in sexual deviance, this magazine was a revelation. Apotemnophilia — who had heard of it before the internet transformed the lexicon of kinkery into common parlance? What did it mean to be aroused by amputees? I could see that it was a strange variant of the principle that *less is more* — less limbs, more appeal. I was not sexually but conceptually excited by it. This cheaply produced magazine punctured a hole in normality, and through this hole I could glimpse an entirely new realm of deviant behavior. 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.

bear in mind that most perverse acts are relatively trivial, private affairs committed for personal pleasure. Ask yourself: What is the most perverse thing you have ever done? Most people who answer that question honestly will realize that their greatest triumph in depravity amounts to little — a ménage à trois, a one-night stand, a drunken misadventure. Those who take it to the next level — the creeps, the animal fuckers, the violators of corpses — may be a little heroic in their recklessness. But still, a sodomized dog —

what’s it worth? What’s it mean? Not much. The Marquis de Sade spent his life in prison less because of his relatively petty sex crimes than because of the monumental crimes of thought that he committed in his writings.

What, then, is the point? The point is to think about perversity. Know thyself? Pervert thyself. (Perversionism.) To be is to be perverted. I pervert — therefore what? Pursue the sordid vectors.

fry his genitalia in a pan?

I began to wonder not about this or that behavior but about perversity as such. I had some received idea about what it was — deviant sexuality, voyeurism, necrophilia — and this was enough to maintain the focus of the site. However, it was not enough to satisfy my desire for a more precise definition of the subject. In the traditional formulation, sexual perversity is characterized by its lack of reproductivity — spilled seed, sodomy, “unnatural” relations. But not every form of non-reproductive sexuality is perverse, otherwise it would be deviant to have heterosexual intercourse with a woman who has had her tubes tied. I could also conceive of several forms of reproductive sexuality that clearly were perverse.

These inconsistencies made me suspect the traditional conception of perversity. What's more, the spe-

02. Julian Wasser, *Marcel Duchamp Playing Chess with a Naked Model in the Pasadena Art Museum*, Photograph, 1963.

This is what it is like to be a philosopher of perversion. My opponent is naked but I have on a suit. (How can I think if I'm busy fucking? I have to keep my clothes on, I deliberately have to uphold the very thing that troubles so many other philosophers — the separation between body and brain...) It's a game, sexuality facing off with an artificial restraint. Will I craft some endgame of understanding? Will sexuality assert its fundamental irrationality and triumph over my best attempts to comprehend? On the surface, it's a rigged match. Like reason, chess has its rules. “Gosh,” says sexuality, “you're sure to win. You're Duchamp and I'm just a set of tits.” Meanwhile sexuality works around the rules, raises a foot under the table, pushes it into my crotch, distracts me, invites me to lose, offers me a reward for losing. “Beat me,” sex seems to say, “and there won't be anything in it for you but the sterile abstract joy of a mental victory. Why don't you capitulate already, darling. I can be very nice, you know, and I would love to show you other games that two can play when one is dressed and one is not.”

cifically sexual conception seemed inapplicable to other sorts of perversity. For example, I happened to read a philosopher who criticized another for “perverting the sense” of Kant. What does it mean to pervert an idea, and in what sense does this perversion compare to that of a fetishist who takes pleasure in collecting the urine from airport toilets? Does perversity always express itself in different domains (sexual, philosophical, existential, political)? If so, could I possibly divest perversity of these trappings to catch sight of it as it really is? “It was most imperative to find and to enjoy the metaphysical fuck.” That's what I wanted — the metaphysical fuck, perversity as it is, the very Form of depravity.



Of course, there are dictionary definitions. Perversity is a “deliberate and obstinate desire to behave in a way that is contrary to norm or reason, often in spite of consequences.” Perversion is an “alteration of something from its original course, meaning, or state.” It is possible to differentiate between perversity and perversion but at root the two converge. They stem from the Latin *per-versus*, which means *turned around*. It’s easy to see how a conception of sexual deviance derives from this. You could say that a foot fetish is contrary to reason (isn’t any fetish?) and that it diverts sexual desire from its original course, which is reproduction or, at least, genital intercourse — but then you’re right back where you started: the traditional conception of sexual perversity.

When you look closely at the matter, it’s not even clear how perversity differs from the other words that

stem from the Latin *vertere*, to turn. To pervert is to turn around. To avert is to turn away. To revert is to turn back. To divert is to turn aside. All of these imply a hydraulics, a flow being steered this way and that. To pervert Kant is to guide a flow of memes in a direction that betrays Kant himself, whilst to pervert sex is to point a flow of desire in the direction of sterility. “Sex is a creative flow, the excrementary flow is towards dissolution, decreation... in the degraded human being the deep instincts have gone dead, and then the two flows become identical. This is the secret of really vulgar and of pornographical people: the sex flow and the excrement flow is the same thing to them... Then sex is dirt and dirt is sex.” (D.H. Lawrence)

But this doesn’t make for a very satisfactory definition of perversity. On one hand, it leads right back to that traditional conception again: “perversity is non-re-



03. Salvador Dalí, *Young Virgin Auto-Sodomized by the Horns of Her Own Chastity*, Painting, 1954.

The picture reminds me of girls I’ve known who, in order to maintain their “technical virginity,” have been all too willing to offer their mouths and asses. When someone offers her ass to preserve her hymen, is she not auto-sodomized by her own chastity? Of course, you’d never come up with this interpretation if it weren’t for the title, which is a work of genius unto itself. The picture draws the eye to the rectum, but the title endows the figure with an agency, a responsibility for her own anality. If a title can serve to situate an image in this way, does the name of a perversion serve the same function in regard to a behavior? Urolagnia, urolagnia. Do I have it? Do I want it? Does it describe the way I feel? Or is it rather too one-dimensional to describe the subtle ways in which urine can circulate in the perveme? And what about the more abstract terms? Perversity, perversion, deviance, depravity — I see that they’re all relational. Turned around — in reference to what? Abnormal — in reference to what? What would they mean if the reference points were dropped, the coordinate system fucked, the grid abandoned?



#### 04. *Pink Eye Sluts*, Screen Grab from PinkEyeSluts.com, 2008.

To finish in the eye of a slut is like forcing her to sit too close to a movie screen. It doesn't blind her so much as it alters her perception, magnifies and distorts the thing seen. If the facial is an ontological declaration of the orgasm, ejaculating in a slut's eye is like shouting in her ear. **HERE IS MY ORGASM, BITCH.** And yet shouting delivers what the ear expects (sound) at an intensity it doesn't expect. To do this to the eye would be to subject it to a bright white light. That is not the m.o. of the pink eye slutmeister. He is trying to make the eye into something that it is not. It ceases to be a receptacle for light and becomes one for sperm. You would think this might have a complementary effect on the vagina — if the eye is to receive sperm, perhaps the vagina should receive light. You want order and balance in the universe? Then if you're going to cum in a slut's eye, you should masturbate her with a flashlight or lit candle.

A **PervScan** reader (thanks, Zombie) sent me a link for a site whose shtick is to feature men ejaculating directly into the eyes of women, “pink eye sluts.” “Hey Jasmine, hold still you’ve got something in your eye — oh wait it’s a great big steamy load of man sauce.” Pictures and videos show men holding open women’s eyes with their fingers and ejaculating directly onto the eyeball. The implied act of blinding someone for a mere moment’s pleasure would be unsettling if it weren’t such a patently made-for-porn gimmick.

Its real value is not to impart a sadistic charge but to create a bizarre image to sell on the internet.

As a bizarre image, however, it is every bit as impactful as the famous eyeball sliced by a razor in the surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou*. You find it fails to arouse so much as startle you. Its pornography fades and suddenly you see, in the conjunction of eyeball and seminal fluid, an unintended allegory — a symbol of the ever-increasing visual import of ejaculate. Not to say that semen has never had a visual signif-



icance. Herodotus once asserted that “Ethiopians” had black semen, and then Aristotle refuted the claim in *De Generatione Animalium*. (Were experiments performed?) There are facials in Sade. “‘Pretty face,’ he gasped, ‘pretty little whore’s face, how I’ll soak it in my fuck, by sweet Jesus!’ And therewith the sluices opened, the sperm flew out, and the entirety of my sister’s face, especially her nose and mouth, were covered with evidence of our visitor’s libertinage.” In another passage a libertine speaks of “the

floods of semen which salute my performance.”

Such salutations have been dramatically elevated by modern pornography. Never in the history of fucking have the facial and the creampie held such positions of prominence. It used to be that “spilled seed” symbolized coitus interruptus, an attempt to avoid pregnancy by “pulling out.” Accordingly, since you couldn’t ejaculate in a girl’s vagina, the exciting thing was to do it in her ass or get her to swallow — to bury it deep inside her. And now? The

productive sexuality,” blah blah blah. On the other hand, it doesn’t indicate what is unique about perversity. When the sex flow is rerouted to the anus, why is that considered a perversion and not a diversion? Why didn’t that philosopher accuse his peer of “diverting the sense” of Kant? He might have claimed that Kant had been subverted — evidently there is some relationship between perversion and subversion. But what differentiates them? You don’t say that the rebels sought to pervert the reigning government. You say they subverted it. What’s the difference? What’s unique about perversity?

In his “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” Freud writes that perversions “are sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (b) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object

thing is to see it. Spew on face, tits, ass, cunt. Sex has gone from the deep end to the shallow. It’s a game of surfaces. (Pedophilia too: the child has no curves, the pedophile contents himself with her surfaces, murmuring encomia to the flat chest.) Wimps buy placebos to increase the volume of their ejaculate — not because they want to be more fertile but because they want to wow their partner, make a better presentation, sport a flashier orgasm. Why so image-conscious?

In pornography the

cum shot has a basic function. It is an ontological declaration: there, the orgasm exists, see it? The point of spilled seed is not to avoid reproduction but to enable replication — to enable the viewer to replicate the sex depicted, coordinate his orgasm with the facial or creampie that culminates the video. It is a weird mutual climax that occurs not only between people — the viewer and the porn stars — but across time, the viewer in the present and the stars in the past. What’s more, the cum shot has the effect of reducing

which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the sexual aim.” In the first case, to rub against a foot is to extend desire toward seemingly non-sexual body parts. In the second case, it may be common to be stimulated by your lover’s velour sweater — “the soft and the black and the velvety up tight against the side of me” — but it is unusual to get stuck there when you should be hurtling “towards the sexual aim.” In short, the Freudian formula reduces to something like this: if the object isn’t genital or if the subject fixates on foreplay, then the act isn’t quite normal.

But what sort of definition is that? What is all this talk of body parts “designed for sexual union” and activities geared “towards the sexual aim?” Evidently the body parts to which Freud refers are the genitalia. But in what sense are they “designed” for sex? After all, they

sex to masturbation. In the facial and the creampie, it is typically the man who finishes himself off, jerks off onto face, crotch, ass, eyeball. This enhances the viewer’s ability to identify with the porn star: they’re both wankers. “If you say, ‘Can I come on your face?’ or if you try to come on my face, I’ll assume you’ve watched a great deal of porn in your life.” (debauchette.wordpress.com)

But what is the function of the cum shot outside pornography? A man ejaculating has no need for the ontological declara-

tion. His physical pleasure heralds the existence of his climax. So why does he want to spew in some girl’s face? To humiliate her? Perhaps, but it is difficult to believe that every facial aims at degradation. More likely it is a matter of coordinating different perceptual systems so that orgasm occurs not just in the pelvis but in the eyes, taking up a greater proportion of the available perception. You can easily imagine a man trying to cum, see his cum, eat his cum, smell his cum, and hear himself cumming all at the



05. Hans Baldung Grien, *Phyllis and Aristotle*, Woodcut, 1513.

Whip in hand, the courtesan Phyllis rides on the back of the philosopher Aristotle, who crawls naked on all fours. The illustration is based on a medieval legend. Aristotle had tried to end Phyllis' relationship with Alexander the Great. In revenge, Phyllis inveigled the philosopher and, as proof of his love, demanded that she be allowed to ride him like a horse. The legend came to be seen as an allegory of woman's domination of man — but isn't there another, more subterranean interpretation? The philosopher, of all people, should not put himself above sex. To the contrary, he should put himself beneath it. Get off your ass, thinker, lest it be whipped. Take off your clothes, crawl like a dog, set aside discourse for barking. Why not? If you set up limits about what is or isn't worth contemplation, how will you ever truly understand?

are equally designed for defecation. (Is it any wonder that it's so easy to confuse the sex flow and the excrementory flow?) Or to look at it another way, what part of the body *isn't* designed for sexual union? People make use of mouth, fingers, ass, feet, armpits. Just because the mouth eats doesn't mean that it is not a sexual organ. The penis urinates and that doesn't detract from its seemingly ascendant role as a sex organ. Isn't the entire body designed for sexual union?

And what precisely is that "aim" toward which sex is supposed to proceed? Pleasure? Orgasm? Reproduction? Freud's definition is just a restatement of the traditional conception again. Evidently the question of perversion has a profound and abiding connection with procreation. Acts deemed perverse are non-reproductive, though not all non-reproductive acts are therefore

same time. Polysatiation.

In sexual perversity, semen thus attains a heightened visual significance not because spilled seed is a diversion from baby-making but because it is an attempt to saturate the senses. What the ejaculator forces on the pink eye slut — filling her field of vision with his pleasure — is a distorted mirror of what he does to himself, trying to stuff himself with his own orgasm. (Semen and synesthesia: an orgasm experienced by senses incapable of climax.)

In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer argues that the dependence of reproduction on sex implies a "metaphysics of sexuality." The purpose of sex, he thinks, is the constitution of a new generation of beings. Everything that seems instinctual is a matter of duping the individual into propagating his species. Conversely, non-reproductive acts and proclivities have the purpose of preventing the individual from perpetuating his presumably defective characteristics. Better to make some people gay, nature

**perverse. (When a man married thirty years has relations with his post-menopausal wife, it is as “normal” as can be.) But what if there are reproductive perversions? Perversions whose very perversity is enhanced if not defined by their reproductivity? Wouldn’t this call that old connection into question?**

thinks, than to allow them to have weak or malformed children.

No doubt to modern ears this sounds less like metaphysics than eugenics. It is difficult to read Schopenhauer’s analysis of homosexuality without thinking that it is naive, based less on empirical experience than on an astonishment that the authors of antiquity could have espoused it. Nevertheless, if perversity is characterized by its lack of reproductivity, then Schopenhauer’s position follows as a matter of course. If the purpose of “normal” sex is

reproduction, then is perversity nature’s way of preventing perversities from propagating?

By way of answer, it seems sufficient to mention that the Marquis de Sade — an author Schopenhauer apparently never studied — had three children. None of them were known to harbor the deviant impulses of their father, which leads to a weird hypothesis: is it precisely perversity that gives birth to normality, and vice versa?

**Does “prego porn” signal the existence of reproductive perversions? A friend once confessed that he had masturbated to images of pregnant women in order to habituate himself to the prospect of his wife conceiving. He wanted to be a father, but he needed to reconcile his libido to the inevitable alteration in his wife’s body. Evidently this was less a perversion on his part than an experiment in behavioral modification, and yet something about it rang fundamentally true to me. That is, the important thing about prego porn is not the thought of reproduction but the sight of the woman’s body. When you look at this sort of pornography, you get the sense that it could just as well take place in suspended animation. No viewer would care if the process of birth were to be forestalled forever. The focal point is not the prospect of the baby but the transformation — the deformation — of the woman’s body. It resembles pornography featuring the morbidly obese, dwarves, amputees. The keynote is the unusual, the defamiliarization of the female form.**

**In 2002 a New Zealand producer announced that he was going to make a pornographic film whose lead actress, a Kiwi named Nikki, would give birth on camera. Ultimately the film crew missed the nighttime delivery and the film, *Ripe*, ended up with a computer-generated animation instead of a live-action birth. Nevertheless, the firestorm of controversy that erupted over the mere idea of “childbirth porn” implies that this was something of a different order than prego porn. Fucking a pregnant woman is like fucking a sterile one: there is no possibility of conception, and in that sense the lust for a pregnant woman actually belongs to the traditional conception of sexual perversity. That’s why prego porn inspires little controversy. But to introduce childbirth into the picture changes it entirely. Childbirth porn not only defies nor-**

mality, it calls into question the received idea of perversity by inserting reproduction into a place where it had seemed inconceivable.

However inconceivable this may be to you or me, it was readily imaginable to the Marquis de Sade. In *120 Days of Sodom*, he describes “a man whose mania was straightly connected with observing a woman give birth; he would frig himself when seeing her labor pains begin, and used to discharge squarely upon the infant’s head directly it hove into view.” Now *that*, with some concession to the sadistic enjoyment the man experiences at the woman’s labor pains, is a reproductive perversion. It depends on no exhibition of the female form. It is not a variant of pedophilia, since the focal point is not the newborn but the activity of childbirth itself. The key thing is the coordination of two simultaneous processes: her pain

and his pleasure, her parturition and his ejaculation. You can imagine how disappointed this pervert would be if he were unable to spew on the baby’s head right as it appeared. It wouldn’t suffice to jerk off on it in the incubator. The important thing is the conjunction of birth and cum shot, a weird mutual climax whose mutuality consists not in a reciprocity of parental joy but in a synchronicity of normally unconnected events.

The synthetic quality of this “mania” — its coupling of pleasure and parturition — calls into question that traditional notion of perversity. How could sexual perversity be defined as non-procreative screwing when this particular perversion takes childbirth as its very desideratum? Reproduction is its sine qua non. To remove reproduction would detach this Sadean kink from any object whatsoever, like removing food from the act of eat-

#### 06. *Ripe*, Film Still, 2002.

*Ripe* is difficult to see — not because it is so graphic but because it is literally nowhere to be found. The concept generated a plethora of controversy but the film itself has gone missing. Ironically, this mirrors the absence of the film’s central event: the birth of a child, which ended up eluding the camera crew. If you were mystically inclined, you’d almost think the film was ill-fated. It wasn’t meant to be. To keep childbirth out of pornography, God himself intervened. It’s the last taboo... Or maybe it’s just not that erotic. In an age when people eat shit and masturbate with insects (it’s all online, believe me, I’ve seen it), childbirth may be the one thing that ceases to get a rise out of jaded libidos. I wonder if there isn’t a deep-seated reason for this. The act of birth completes the evolutionary logic of sexuality. It brings sex to an end, so to speak. To find it erotic would be like developing an appetite for the food that someone chews and spits back out on a plate. It’s *de trop*. And yet in spite of this underlying logic — or precisely to spite this underlying logic — it wouldn’t be surprising if, somewhere out in the deviant wilds, a freak believes in the aphrodisiac properties of predigested food and pleases himself to OB-GYN manuals.





07. Serge & Charlotte Gainsbourg, *Lemon Incest*, Music Video Still, 1984.

Arthur Rimbaud associated a color with every vowel. What if colors were assigned to every sexual perversion? Incest would be a lemony yellow in honor of Gainsbourg (*le père vert*). Pedophilia would be a light pink, like a little girl's panties, and pederasty periwinkle. Coprophilia would be brown, earthy, raw umber or thereabouts. Necrophilia would be black, the absence of color mirroring the absence of life. Perversion itself would be the combination of all these: a new white that is no longer a symbol of purity like the bridal gown but the most corrupt of colors, Suprematist but deviant, white on white like semen on pale skin.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari assert that incest is “impossible.” Their idea is that, in familial relationships, you possess the appellations (mommy, daddy, brother, daughter) but not the corresponding bodies. Conversely, once you possess the bodies, you no longer have the appellations — you look at the person before you and rather than think *sister* you think *girl*. The sociological affiliation disappears in favor of a more fundamental rapport between bodies. Consequently, incest is impossible because it's

excluded on both sides: there is no sex in the familial relationship, there is no family in the sexual relationship. You can oscillate between the two, flip from one pole to the other like a whacked compass, but you never really conjoin them. A truly incestuous desire would have to combine the appellation and the body. I want you not because you're a girl but because you're my sister.

This is a provocative argument and may well characterize the mindset of many of those who commit incest. A hillbilly

fucks his daughter for the same reason he fucks a cow — because she happens to be there and the other choices are few. In the hillbilly's own mind, there was no incest because he did not fuck his daughter in her capacity as daughter. He simply availed himself of the only hot young body in the neighborhood. However, the daughter may not agree that incest is so impossible. Was she molested by an older man? Or by her daddy?

I once had a girlfriend who refused to let me give her

head. (I hope this does not upset you. No one will know it's you.) Finally she consented and I found myself between her legs. Her body thrashed and twisted, but there was something ambiguous, even disturbing about her convulsions. Were they pleasure? Or anguish? I stopped and crawled up beside her, only to see she was crying so furiously that she was biting her fist in an effort to stifle her sobs. After a while she explained to me that she had never allowed anyone to do this because her father had done it to her. In her mind, her

ing. You'd end up with a mouth chewing air, a libertine trying to work up an erection over the prospect of nothing.

True, you could make the argument that this act remains well within the traditional conception of perversity. The ejaculate that lands on a newborn's head fails to impregnate anyone. In that sense, this is not a reproductive perversion, since its perversity may require reproduction but it does not itself result in reproduction. But Sade has an answer for that too. He describes a man who "has four daughters, legitimate and wedded; he wishes to fuck all four: he makes all four of them conceive and bear children so as someday to have the pleasure of depucelating the children he has had by his daughters and whom their husbands suppose to be their own." Or there is the man "who fucked three children he had by his mother, amongst whom there was a daughter whom he had marry his son,

father was tied to that particular act. You know the old song "My Heart Belongs to Daddy?" Here it was not her heart but her cunt. She had very much attached the appellation to her body. For her incest was not only possible, it was possible even in the absence of her father. ("You fuck like my dad.")

(Nobody may know it's me, but I resent it just the same. When I told you about my father, it was in a moment of intimacy. I really liked you and I wanted to explain why I was upset. I've

spent most of my life trying not let it affect me, but for you I made myself talk about it. Do you think that was easy for me? You're a jerk. But I'd forgive you if you helped me to understand. I really would like to know why my father did this to me, but I don't see how this bullshit about "appellations" helps me to understand. If what you say can't help me understand my father — I don't think of him as a pervert, but I guess incest is perverted — then how is it going to help anyone understand perversion?)

so that in fucking her he fucked his sister, his daughter and his daughter-in-law, and thus he also constrained his son to fuck his own sister and mother-in-law." Similar examples abound.

If a reproductive perversion requires that seed not be spilled in vain — that a perverse act actually lead to generation — then this would do the trick. Not all incest would qualify, since much of it is conditioned by opportunity. A man sees a young girl. He doesn't think, *Daughter*. He thinks, *Pretty*. The sex crime that ensues has nothing to do with reproduction and everything to do with the satisfaction of a momentary urge. Sade, conversely, raises incest to a higher power. It ceases to be the thoughtless inbreeding of hillbillies and becomes a deliberate perversion. A libertine doesn't molest his daughter because she just happens to be there. A libertine molests his daugh-

**If you were to pen a treatise on** the literature of perversity, there are obvious writers you would discuss: Sade, Poe, Baudelaire, Lautréamont. And while all of these writers deserve a place in the canon of depravity, I think that the most perverse book I have ever read must be Ernest Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream*. It contains no sexual deviance, unlike another posthumously published work, *The Garden of Eden*, which explores an erotic triangle. It contains no crazy catalogue of bestial lusts such as you can find

in the Marquis de Sade. Nominally it is just the story of a painter who loses his children to random accident and war.

However, if you look at the book from the vantage point of the creator, you cannot help but think there is something sick about it. The story amounts to a literary filicide in which Hemingway envisions the death of each of his sons. (Shades of Abraham and Isaac?) Why any parent would put himself through such an exercise is difficult to conceive. Did it express some latent resentment



ter because he consciously wants to create a being who is both his child and his grandchild — and still a future sex object itself. Then he molests that daughter / granddaughter hybrid to obtain another new being who is child, grandchild, great grandchild — and still sex object. It's incest in the form of nested boxes, feedback, recursion.

And no doubt Sade would also have derived a perverse pleasure from the thought that this conjunction of reproduction and perversity would defy not only normality but normality's conception of perversity — for that is all the traditional formulation amounts to: perversity seen from the outside.

toward the boys? Did it represent a resigned, melancholy attitude toward the world, like a memento mori reminding us that all things, even the most cherished, must die? Was it a bizarre exercise in courage? You can imagine the writer saying to himself: "What is the most awful thing in the world that I can imagine? The death of my children. Let me explore this, then, like a man probing a wound..."

There may be perversions that take reproduction as their object, but *Islands in the*

*Stream* describes an even weirder conjunction of deviance and breeding: it perverts the feelings that reproduction engenders in the reproducer. Parental solicitude turns against itself. A man who is both father and writer uses the one to present the other with its worst nightmare. It must have been terrifying to write. In a way it even dwarfs the encyclopedia of horrors that is *120 Days of Sodom*. After all, Sade had kids but only imagined killing other people's.

#### 08. Recursive Incest, Flowchart.

Suppose a child is 50% daddy and 50% mommy. If daddy reproduces with this child A and produces another, then child B is 75% daddy and 25% grandma. If daddy reproduces with that child, then child C is 87.5% daddy and 12.5% great-grandma. And so on. It recalls Zeno's famous paradoxes of motion. The incestuous libertine approaches ever closer to a reproductive act whose result is a child 100% himself, and yet that ultimate point is always deferred by increasingly small percentages. The libertine can never quite dispense with the shred of genetic material that belongs to the maternal line, and yet the fact remains that, by fucking the offspring of his own offspring, he is inevitably fucking more and more of himself. (Solipsism.)





Anyone reading Sade for the first time might be struck by the juxtaposition of philosophy and carnality. It seems incongruous at first: abstract discourse giving way to weird fucking, orgasmic cries preparing the way for speculative argument. But Sade had a very good reason for juxtaposing the two. His libertines are not automata driven by abnormal lusts that they scarcely comprehend, like dogs humping table legs. To the contrary, it is the intellectuality of these libertines that defines their lusts as perverse. Sadean incest differs from hillbilly inbreeding because it is calculated, thought out, planned so far in advance that it prepares today for a pleasure — depucelating a daughter / granddaughter hybrid — that might not occur until fifteen years hence.

And that, as Sade recognized, is one of the most striking characteristics of perversity: it is deliberate, self-

conscious, pellucid. Its hallmark is less its sterility than its intentionality. Libertines have to be smart, otherwise they're just "fuckers" like the well-endowed farm boys that the libertines employ at their orgies. Though these simpletons are useful for their brute physical qualities, they cannot participate in libertinage proper because they aren't cerebral enough. The libertine is able to reflect on his unwholesome activities. Self-awareness makes his pleasures all the greater. "In order to combine incest, adultery, sodomy and sacrilege, he embuggers his married daughter with a Host." It's only one act — there is not even an orgasm, just a wafer stuck into an ass — but oh how it multiplies in consciousness.

It is the evident lack of such self-awareness that undermines so many of the cases to appear on PervScan. The brothers who raped their invalid mother on a bed



09. Nan Goldin, *Nan and Brian in Bed, NYC*, Photograph, 1983.

When it is all said and done, it's over. Out of mind. A particularly delicious event might linger, leaving a sort of pleasantness, a tingle, like the taste of lipstick on the lips. But whatever image was in my mind deflates like a burst balloon. Other things fill it up, take over the space. It's really like that. One minute, I literally have nothing in mind but the image that accompanies me all the way to orgasm. The next minute, that image is gone. The channel has been changed. In its place there are new thoughts, perhaps new obsessions, rarely sexual, often philosophical. That hints at the truth of Sade's alternating moans and meditations: when sex ceases to overcrowd the brain, it has the room for speculation. (Burroughs: "Lee had discovered that he got his best ideas while lying in bed with a young boy after the fact. At first he thought this was coincidence. *God damn it, every time I get ideas for writing, I am occupied with a boy. Or maybe it's the other way around... hmm. Weel, I'm in the right place.*")

covered with bugs and caca were found incompetent to stand trial. How could they be capable of a truly perverse decision if they couldn't even be held responsible for their actions? I could not imagine these clods theorizing about the novel conjunction — an ugly amalgam of incest, homosexuality, gerontophilia, and coprophilia — to be found in their elder abuse. Frankly these guys sounded like mental defects, and therefore their actions seemed less perverse than ignorant, infantile, retarded, something along the lines of public nose-picking. When the libertines in Sade want to philosophize, they tend to dismiss the fuckers from the room, and I wondered if I shouldn't omit such dopes from PervScan too.

But then how can you know what people are thinking? It is exceptional when a sex crime reveals the self-awareness that distinguishes perversity from reck-

**You can translate Romans 7:15** a few different ways. New International Version: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." King James Version: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." New Living Translation: "I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate." Holman Christian Standard Bible: "For I do not understand what I am doing, (A)

because I do not practice what I want to do, (B) but I do what I hate." You get the idea.

When I stumbled on the verse, I thought it might present a formula for perversity. It points to that antagonism inherent in the concept — desiring something that ought not be desired. If you interpret this in the conventional way, it is a conflict between the flesh and the spirit. "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each

less impulse and animal instinct. For example, the notorious German cannibal Armin Miewes sliced off his lover's penis, fried it, and shared it with the victim. "We had agreed to eat it half and half," Miewes told police, "but he was getting faint and couldn't wait for his half to be cooked through. So he tried to eat it more or less raw and of course, it was too tough. He was furious." The really shocking thing was not this violent act per se — sex crimes involving cannibalism are not especially rare — but the copious video evidence that established the victim's desire for it. "If I survive until the morning," the victim said, "let's have my testicles for breakfast."

Grok that. You can imagine a few other scenarios in which this crime could have been committed. The cannibal might have kidnapped the victim. Both guys might have been whacked out on drugs. They might have been

other, so that you do not do what you want." (Galatians 5:17) If you don't interpret it that way, you end up with a self-referential statement, one part of you opposing another. It verges on a paradox, a moral bastardization of the Liar Paradox ("I am lying") — "I know better" or "I know I shouldn't but I do it anyway." In the Liar Paradox it is impossible to say what is true and false, and in this moral variant it is impossible to say what is good and bad. You think you know what they are, but your actions refute

your intentions, thus what you thought was bad might really be good, and yet if it's good how can you feel bad about it?

At the same time, though Romans 7:15 does suggest the antagonism interior to perversity, something about it prevented me from utilizing the verse as a formula. For a while I couldn't quite figure out what was wrong, what was ill-suited to the concept, but then finally I realized that it's the first part of the verse — the part pointing not to antagonism but to understanding. In the bible verse

certifiably insane. In reality a computer programmer responded to cannibal personals that Miewes — a genial guy, according to his neighbors — had posted on the internet. “I hope you’ll find me tasty,” the programmer declared. He knew exactly what he was doing and that, his loquacity, is the significant thing. Cannibals are not unknown to psychopathology but people who genuinely want to be eaten have never before announced themselves with such premeditation and intent. The astonishing thing was not the violent act but the manifest display of self-awareness, the revelation of a consciousness. Here is the very essence of perversity — an incomprehensible desire, a desire wrong by a thousand different standards, clearly articulated and fully realized.

This is the paradox of perversity, that it is irrational but aware. “I dreamed my dream with open eyes,”

perversity is uncomprehending, unintentional, unaware. It fails to grok itself. It follows a blind impulse, the flesh. You get the impression the pervert is a driver trapped in a runaway car, aware that he is racing out of control but unable to do anything about it. That’s not really perverse. Perversity is conscious. The pervert is a driver who, in full control of his vehicle, decides to go the wrong way down a one-way street. His formula would remove the negations from the first part of the verse: I ~~do not~~ understand what I

do... For that which I do I allow ~~not~~... I ~~don’t~~ understand myself... I ~~do not~~ understand what I am doing...

But I do it anyway.

#### Psychopathia Sexualis 2.0.

PervScan collects and categorizes examples of deviant sexual behavior. Most stories fall under headings that would have been known to Krafft-Ebing himself, but there have been new phenomena, innovations in depravity such as feed-erism (in which a person fetishizes and therefore encourages the



Vincent Price, *Edgar Allan Poe: The Imp of the Perverse and Other Tales*, Album Cover, 1974.

One night I was on a date. It seemed to be leading inevitably toward a bar. I had the impression that there was almost an unspoken agreement, a compact to get drunk — not because we wanted to besot ourselves, exactly, but because getting drunk would ensure that we would hold hands, kiss, quite possibly fuck. But why, I wondered, did this compact have to begin with drink? Couldn’t we have agreed to bypass the bar, acknowledge our mutual attraction, proceed straight to the good part? Why did we need alcohol to absolve us of responsibility for our desires? Why did we have to get out of our minds in order to get into our bodies? Perversity, I think, is the opposite. It begins with lucidity. It doesn’t act on a desire without admitting the desire to itself — and not just the desire, but the thousand reasons the desire is undesirable. (It’s wrong, it’s bad, I shouldn’t do this...) Poe: “Examine these and similar actions as we will, we shall find them resulting solely from the spirit of the Perverse. We perpetrate them merely because we feel that we should not.”

says Severin, the protagonist of *Venus in Furs*. However, perversity is not irrational in an animal sense. It is not incapable of reason, like a brain that has not evolved far enough to undertake the abstractions of mathematics. It is not pre-rational but post-rational. Perversity is when you understand the reasons for not doing a thing, then you do it anyway. In “The Imp of the Perverse,” Edgar Allan Poe writes that through perversity’s “promptings we act without comprehensible object; or, if this shall be understood as a contradiction in terms, we may so far modify the proposition as to say, that through its promptings we act, for the reason that we should not.” It follows that perversity cannot occur in ignorance. It is, weirdly, a by-product of the intellect. It happens not when you do wrong, but when you do wrong knowing full well that it’s wrong.

morbid obesity of his partner). Technology has given rise to psychopathic variations such as video voyeurism and flash mob rape. In fact, the wild proliferation of internet pornography has resulted in a market-driven taxonomy of sexual desires. Look at the menu of any porn search engine. Everything is neatly codified: Amateur, Anal, Asian...

This is where feedback occurs, where the perv and pervologist join hands in a dance around the fire. The perv does stuff, the pervologist categorizes

it, and then the categories become temptations, lifestyle choices, possibilities for pleasure. This is where behavior ceases to be ignorant opportunism and becomes conscious decision-making, i.e. perversion good and proper. Rather than screw a dog because it happens to be there, the perv reasons that bestiality might provide a frisson he is no longer able to obtain in coprophilia or incest. Bored at home? Crack open your Krafft-Ebing — (K-E deliberately tried to lock out the curious perv: “A scientific title has been cho-

(This pertains not just to sexual perversity but to perversity as such. Remember the philosopher who “perverted the sense” of Kant? To corrupt Kant requires only that you misconstrue him, but to pervert Kant requires that you misconstrue him on purpose.)

The microanalysis of a perverse decision would thus reveal a certain pattern. A perverse decision begins as a reasoned one. Some circumstance or choice presents itself. You do not greet it with a knee-jerk reaction. You do not leap before you look. You do not decide with your heart. Perversity can never be impulsive. Instead, you consider. You reflect. You think. You strive to understand the pro and the con, the for and against. Mentally you compose a list of reasons, and hitherto your behavior has been indistinguishable from rational behavior. But then something happens. A mutation occurs in the pro-

sen, and technical terms are used throughout the book in order to exclude the lay reader. For the same reason certain portions are written in Latin.”) — or browse the fetish category at PervScan. Maybe you’ll find a way to amuse yourself that is not just depraved but *new*.

**Everyone had left their coats in** a bedroom. I went to get mine with a girl I did not yet know very well. Finding ourselves alone, we joked about what others must have thought we were

doing in the bedroom. Somehow this led me to ask her how she had lost her virginity. “I was raped in Central Park,” she said, simultaneously meaning what she said but self-conscious about not wanting to destroy the otherwise lighthearted tone of the conversation. “Oh shit,” I said, “I’m sorry.” Later, as I got to know her better, she recounted the ugly details. When she made it home, her mother found autumn leaves in her underwear.

Eight or ten times in my life girls have told me about being

cess. This is the pivotal moment where rationality metamorphoses into perversity. Your mind has ascertained the right course of action, but your will refuses to give its assent.

Why?

It is a truism of philosophy that the will follows the reason. You see what's right and you do it. This is Plato's theory that goodness is truth, and virtue wisdom. A man would not knowingly choose what's wrong, the theory goes, unless he is ignorant of the reasons that make it wrong. Immoral behavior is really ignorant behavior, and therefore morality is reducible to epistemology, to knowledge. But in perversity, it's the opposite. Knowledge is reduced to immorality. You know what's wrong and you do it. The will no longer tags along behind the understanding like a good puppy. In perversity, a stubborn will drags an

astonished intellect on a quest it realizes it should not undertake.

Baudelaire had a formula for this: *la conscience dans le mal*. You can translate it half a dozen ways: consciousness in evil, conscience in error, cognizance in sickness or even sin. It implies a reflective approach toward twisted impulses, a lucid blackness, the self-scrutiny of the damned (or rather, of those determined to damn themselves). And that, better than any lack of reproductivity, is what I consider to be a fine working definition of perversity.

#### 11. Christian Schad, *At Père Lachaise*, Drawing, 1930.

The intentionality of the pervert is nowhere more apparent than in perversions where the desideratum lacks consciousness. The somnophile is drawn to the diminished awareness of the sleeper. The necrophile is drawn not just to the death but to the brain death of the corpse. Objection: what if the necrophile talks to the body while he molests it? If he says "you're beautiful" or "sweetheart, you stink" to the cadaver, does that imply a repudiation of the very thing to which he is seemingly attracted — i.e. its deadness? Perhaps, and yet it could also reinforce this deadness by emphasizing the thing's inability to respond. Or then again the pervert might just like to hear himself talk. Why not? In consciousness, the necrophile is a rich man wasting a few dollars he can easily afford to lose. When he says "sweetheart, you stink," he really means, "Yes, my kink is not just to be with a dead body but to enjoy an exclusivity of intention. Consciousness here is mine or it is not at all..."





12. *Chateau of the Marquis de Sade at La Coste, Photograph, 1987.*

La Coste is only a short drive from Arles. (Imagine Sade stalking through Van Gogh's landscapes.) Today the chateau is a ruin, a few fieldstone walls and ramparts that testify to the destructive forces of nature Sade knew how to appreciate. "Nature needs virtuous acts, and vicious ones too; I serve Nature as well by performing the one as when I commit the other." For Sade, the pervert was not "against nature" but rather an extension of *natura naturans*: "This libertine would previously allow a candle to burn out in a woman's anus; today, he attaches her to a lightning rod during a thunderstorm and awaits a fortuitous stroke." Far from setting up the typical analogy — normal is to natural as perverse is to unnatural — Sade's interest was to annihilate the distinction between the normal and the perverse, and "nature" is what he called this state of unregulated behavior.

raped, molested, abused. It always puts me into a psychologically difficult position. I don't condone rape. When someone tells you about it, you feel protective. You'd gladly kick somebody's ass on her behalf. At the same time, though, in the back of your mind you know that you feel more than a little empathy for the rapist. You're a man. You comprehend the urge. (Using a power drill is so macho that I can almost understand how psychopaths end up killing chicks that way. It combines the machismo of tools

with the joy of rape.) Frankly it seems rather natural. Animals do it. Evolutionary biologists have pointed out that natural selection provides an obvious impetus for it, insofar as rape improves the rapist's chances for reproductive success. That my friend was raped in Central Park was symbolic: in the greatest swath of grass and trees in New York, she was subject to the Darwinism of her attackers.

A rapist is someone who reverts to animal behavior. Without consciousness, men would

rape all the time. (Without consciousness, women might not be so shattered by it.) This is where consciousness becomes conscience. When men don't commit rape, it's not because they don't want to. It's because they recognize what an awful thing it is to do to somebody. There were the two teenagers who sexually assaulted a "mentally challenged neighbor." One of the assailants gave as his excuse, "I wasn't thinking." Exactly. Their thoughtlessness mirrored the retardation of the victim.

In rape, consciousness is not what fomenters but what prevents. For this reason, it is rarely perverse. Rape may parallel perversity in certain qualities — solipsism, gratuitousness — but it is not sufficiently intentional. (You can practically make a syllogism out of it: if rape is a natural behavior, and if perversity is "against nature," then perversity is against rape.) The complication, however, is that perversion may utilize rape to achieve its nefarious aims. The pervert does not set out to rape but to commit a perverse act.

*La conscience dans le mal* — if a weird lucidity makes up the first half of the formula, then what makes up the second? *Qu'est-ce que c'est, ce mal?* Why is perversity malevolent? Bad? Sick? Wrong? Immoral? This is a very complicated question. Set it aside for a minute and recognize one thing: there is always an adversarial aspect to perversity. In this it is not alone. To rebel is to go against authority. To blaspheme is to take aim at the sacred. To pervert is to pit oneself against — well, against what? Normality? Tradition? Expectation? Against nature, like the translated title of the Huysmans book? Suffice to say for the moment that perversity always flies in the face of something — something that, in reaction, attributes a negative value to it. Perversity knows in advance that it will receive this infamy for its efforts, and that is how it conjoins awareness with evil.

If the world were as pliant as the characters in his conceptualization of the act — if the stranger wanted her foot licked, or if the little girl wanted to go for a ride in his car — rape would be superfluous and the pervert would busy himself with the satisfaction of his distorted lusts. But if he encounters unexpected resistance, force becomes a necessary means to an end. It's not that the pervert particularly wants to rape someone, it's just that he needs rape to eliminate the inconsistencies in his perveme.

In his essay “Sexual Perversion,” Thomas Nagel — drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre's discussion of sadism and masochism in *Being and Nothingness* — proposes a model of “normal” sexuality that depends on a reciprocity of perceptions and mutuality of sexual feelings. Sex, he writes, “involves a desire that one's partner be aroused by the recognition of one's desire that he or she be aroused.” Essentially it is a phenomenological formulation of the common belief that a relationship requires “good communication,”

And yet this points to another paradox. Consciousness is individual. Evil, however, implies standards, principles, codes of behavior — and therefore evil points to an outside, to other people, to the world. *La conscience dans le mal* is another way of saying the individual in society. In perversity the individual is aware that society thinks he's in the wrong. But he doesn't care or, more probably, he likes the fact that he's in the wrong. Why? Because being in the wrong does not prevent him from doing what he does. To the contrary, it enables him to assert himself at the expense of everything and everyone who would deny him. It adds a power rush to the other intensities of his perversion. The pervert insists that the satisfaction of his desire supersedes all society's rules and regulations. The war cry of perversity is *my kink über alles*.

more signal than noise.

If that is the case, then relations in which there are noise, interference, and “distorting influences” are “defective” and perverse. Nagel: “if humans will tend to develop some version of reciprocal interpersonal sexual awareness unless prevented, then cases of blockage can be called unnatural or perverted.” Following Sartre, Nagel gives sadism and masochism as examples of blockage. Consider the old joke: a masochist says “hurt me” and the sadist replies “no.” The sadist does

not want the masochist to agree with him. He recognizes that reciprocity would undermine his kick. Bondage, blindfolds, and masks are a practical analogue of a conceptual requirement. Without blockage sadism is no longer sadistic, it's just S&M, a parlor game played by consenting adults.

There are obvious objections to Nagel's model of sexual perversity. It acknowledges clogged relations — a bored couple, only able to fuck while they dream of other people, things,



Consider the narrowing of perspective that occurs in a “normal” sexual act. Desire gets sucked into a whirlpool. It focuses more and more intently on its object. Flesh looms large in consciousness, like the screen of a movie theater when you sit too close. As climax approaches, the world drops away, disappears, ceases to exist. A nuclear holocaust would fail to disrupt the growth of a tiny point of hot hot heat inside you. And then boom! your head explodes, your consciousness disappears along with the world, there is no more subject than there is object, waves of intensity wash over you and through you, pleasure reduces you to quivering jelly... And then it subsides, your brain boots back up, the world starts to reappear — you notice the curtains swaying, you hear sounds in another room, you think of some mundane task or appointment, you realize you have to pee.

stimulants — that are defective but not perverse, but fails to explain just what distinguishes the two. It also founders on homosexuality, which Nagel feels obliged to consider normal. In homosexuality, he writes, “nothing rules out the full range of interpersonal perceptions between persons of the same sex... For these reasons it seems to be doubtful that homosexuality must be a perversion, though like heterosexuality it has perverted forms.” If a good signal can normalize a homosexual relationship, it is difficult to see

how it fails to normalize other relationships traditionally dubbed perverse. Is it really impossible for an eleven-year-old girl and a forty-year-old man to develop a “full range of interpersonal perceptions?”

If anything prevents reciprocity, it is a more fundamental lack of parity. Homosexuality is not perverse because two adults have the equality to engage in a reciprocal relation. But what parity can exist between an adult pedophile and a child? Children may have sexual curiosity and

### 13. *POV Porn*, Screen Grab from POVPorn.com, 2007.

POV porn offers cinematic analogues of the narrowing of perspective that occurs in sex. The close-up simulates the way that flesh looms large in consciousness, like the screen of a movie theater when you sit too close. The focus on the cum shot causes the world to drop away, disappear, cease to exist, and thus POV porn also hints at the solipsism that is inherent in the perverse act. For the perverse act is always POV perversion — with the qualification that the important thing is always the point of view of me, not you. (For all the explicitness of detail — the lips spread, the ass opened, the semen exhibited — the one thing the cameraman never shows is his own countenance. Like God, he turns his face away.)







#### 14. René Magritte, *Les Amants*, Painting, 1928.

A man in a suit kisses a nicely dressed woman. It would be the very image of normality if their heads weren't wrapped in sheets. Superficially the painting neatly illustrates Thomas Nagel's notion of the blockage that occurs in both defective and perverse relationships. But which is this hooded kiss — merely defective or fully perverse? It is difficult to say. I once was involved with a girl who would sleep with me but not kiss me. In the midst of that relationship, I slept with someone else. Prolonging the first girl's quirk, I slept with the latter but, on a whim, refused to let her kiss me. (Yes, now you know why.) What the first did to me was, in Nagel's terms, merely defective. It was not perverse but rather expressed a certain issue that she had. (Don't worry, I won't tell what.) What I did to the second was perverse. I had no particular reason for doing it. It was intentional, gratuitous, cruel, pleasurable for me but not for her, a deliberate insertion of blockage into the act, like wrapping her head in a sheet.

they may play games that mimic the erotic behavior of adults. But these games are just that — games. Like toys, they serve to initiate the child in the practices of the world that awaits him. Plastic tools teach a boy how to wield a hammer, dolls teach a girl how to hold a baby, and playing doctor teaches them both how to touch each other. (And that's inter pares, among equals.) But when an adult takes advantage of the sexual curiosity of children, it violates the principle of parity. It's as though a child offers you a

pretend dessert, an empty plastic plate that he says is full of cake, and you go after it with a real fork. Such is pedophilia: to a toy curiosity you bring a real hunger.

Consequently, there is an inverse ratio between the dirty old man and innocent young girl: the younger the girl, the dirtier the man. As the girl regresses in her ability to communicate, the sexual interest of the man increases in perversity. It is dirty to lust after an adolescent, unconscionable to have the hots for a five-year-old, unspeakable to fantasize

about babies. And if this is true, if a desire increases in perversity as it decreases in commensurability, then perversity is mathematically correlated to solipsism. To say that it is a defective relationship with another person is to say that, even in the presence of others, perversity is above all a relationship with oneself.

**Sex often implies a strong sense of place:** the bedroom, the home, the back seat of a car. People like to repudiate this to spice things up, take their desires somewhere new,

do it in a park or a movie theater. A girlfriend once had a contest with her gal pals. They wanted to see who could have sex in the weirdest place. My girlfriend won when she managed to do it in a hearse. Personally I thought it was silly — same act, different place. More interesting is to perform a different act in the same place. This requires creativity, innovation, a mental exertion on behalf of a libidinal excitement. It's what Sade's libertines do. They confine themselves to physical strongholds — remote chateaux,

Now translate this into perversity. The process of intensification is the same but this time with an edge. Every increase in focus is a new *fuck you* to the rest of the world. The pervert would mortgage humankind for his kink. He would cause untold grief to parents, to family, to friends, in order to spend ten minutes molesting an adolescent. Why? Not because he wants to subvert the nuclear family or undermine the status quo. Rather, he has a thought in his head, an *idée fixe*: I will be happy in this forbidden embrace. He does not rape or seduce so much as he pursues this mental image. His interactions with the world are the by-products of a self-involvement. “Lolita had been safely solipsized.”

There was the man who liked to hide in public restrooms. He would shut off the water to the child-level urinal and place a cup in its drain. After a young boy

secured villas, dungeons, crypts — in order to pressure-cook their imaginations.

Roland Barthes wrote that the obvious function of these strongholds is “to isolate, to shelter vice from the world’s punitive attempts.” If you were to write an architectural survey of sexual perversity, you would find a preponderance of such spaces: the alleys, backstreets and empty parking lots haunted by rapists; the cellars and basements in which children are molested (sometimes the abuser even digs a dungeon);

the barns and pastures of bestialists; the graveyards and mortuaries of necrophiles; cheap hotel rooms, where anonymity creates isolation; the bathroom, whose isolation is a function not of remoteness or anonymity but of a perceived impurity — odor and filth.

These spaces puncture little holes in normality, they create vacuums in which the pervert is free to act out his impulses. They are physical spaces that open up conceptual possibilities. Sade: “Ah, it is not read-



15. Man Ray, *Imaginary Portrait of the Marquis de Sade*, Painting, 1938.

Man Ray depicts a Sade who is made of masonry. His flesh has been replaced by blocks of stone, and he fixes a stony gaze on the castle in the distance. Man Ray knows what Sade is thinking: a concrete zone of perversity is the realization of a conceptual one. The castle will be subject to a becoming-Sade that populates it with illicit pleasures, but only because Sade himself is already caught up in a becoming-castle that insulates his desires (and thereby allows them to mutate in the dark isolation of his imagination).

would urinate, the man would emerge from hiding and drink the boy's urine from the cup. "I like it," he explained, "because it makes me closer to them, like I'm drinking their youth." The disconnect between mental image (getting closer to boys) and reality (distance from those same boys) could not be more pronounced. There are obvious ways to commune with children: be a cub scout leader, coach a little league team, have some kids of your own. To drink their excreta could only repulse the very boys the man would like to get close to. It's a vicious circle, a recursive kink: the man ingests waste products; this physical proximity creates a personal distance; the distance feeds the desire for proximity; the man ingests more waste products... The more he drinks, the further away he gets. He implodes in his perversion, falls through a trap door in his own mind, finds himself trying to get

ily to be imagined how much voluptuousness, lust, fierce joy are flattered by those sureties, or what is meant when one is able to say to oneself: 'I am alone here, I am at the world's end, withheld from every gaze, here no one can reach me, there is no creature that can come nigh where I am; no limits, hence, no barriers; I am free.'" Physical barriers remove psychological inhibitions. A concrete zone of perversity is the realization of a conceptual one. The castles and dungeons of Sade are idealized places, the dream hous-

es of solipsism, and the defining thing for the pervert is the space he carries around inside him, the concentration camp of his own pleasures.

(The girlfriend replies: No, no, you just don't understand. That's what it is like for you — you with your love of interior spaces, your distaste for *plein air* fucking. For me, the hearse was something else. It was a matter of expanding and conquering space, like a colonist. When I think of a few drops of cum, the wetness from my vagina, the imprint of

closer to people by hiding in a toilet stall.

(I'm not sure you understand. I do not want the fraternity with these boys that one can obtain from swimming lessons or church groups. I do not want to mentor youths. I don't want to help them become little adults. I don't want to change them, I want to cherish them as they are. When I drink boys' urine, when I take this into myself and make it a part of me, it's like an embrace. I so revere these boys that their very waste is dear to me and, in drinking it, I experience a profound, encompassing feeling, a real love.)

The irony is that the pervert leaves the world untouched, unharmed. Usually nobody is even aware of his act of kinkery. The pervert tends to play out his drama in private or in secret — in a toilet stall. The rebel tries to change society, the heretic wants to dethrone God,

sweat that my ass left on the floor, I think of a dog marking his territory with piss. I occupied the hearse the way an army occupies a village. I transformed a death place into a sex place. Now are you going to tell me that that is just another form of solipsism?)

**You know how the Bible has** those weird chapters listing generations, so-and-so begat so-and-so and so on? One day some deviant genealogist will chronicle the generations of porn too. Ancient Greek vase painters begat Victo-

rian postcard photographers, and these begat Hugh Hefner, and Hugh Hefner begat net porn, amen. Somewhere in there it was a golden age of pornography that begat me too. One of my earliest memories is the Watergate scandal. Another is *Penthouse* magazine. Thanks to the former, I possess a complete cynicism as regards politics. Thanks to the latter, I have never not known what a vagina looks like.

For this reason, I was always fascinated by the way that the previous generation's pornog-

16. Christopher Wool, *Hole in Your Fuckin Head (W31)*, Painting, 1992.

I was reading about a neurological disorder called *simultanagnosia*. Those afflicted can recognize objects in their visual field but only one at a time — literally they can make out this or that tree but not the forest. It struck me that a perverse desire causes a similar impairment. When I experience a strange lust, it's like brain damage. My head isn't working right. Some idea has swollen up inside it like a tumor. Any other input — a distraction, an interruption, a phone call — only irritates the tumor. I could lash out, hurt someone, because my sole desire is to be alone with this cancer. Even if other people are necessary to satisfy whatever my urge is, I'm still alone with the thing in my head. Others are just fragments of a perveme, actors in my drama. They may be working inside my thing but the thing itself is inside me. I've got to get it out, lance it like a boil. And once I do, there is a hole in my head, an emptiness. The world drains back in — a bottle of water, a car alarm, a faint smell of dead flowers. These are signs of recuperation, a newly achieved homeostasis, and I regard them with a modest interest, like a man trying out cornea implants.



but the pervert merely wants to except himself from the norm. To subvert an authority is to do it for everybody, but to pervert a norm is to do it just for yourself. An act of bizarro sex affects little, leaves the norm unchanged. In fact, normality — whatever it is — has a tremendous tolerance for individual acts of perversity. It is the pervert who is intolerant of normality.

raphy — men's mags, lurid detective stories with buxom damsels in distress, swimsuit pictorials, Marilyn Monroe's calendar — would obscure the good parts. An arm would be in the way of a nipple, a sheet would artfully conceal any suggestion of pubic hair, little black bars would block out obvious erogenous zones. Behold a full-frontal nude — but she's been vandalized by some Suprematist painter wannabe who superimposed a black square over her mons veneris. It must have been very frustrating for 1950s

boys, who no doubt figured that the vagina was an abstraction, like a bar chart.

In my case, the black bars did not hide something I wanted to know about but something I already knew about. Because sex had never been a mystery for me, I was almost bored of it by the time I was old enough to have it. Consequently, I saw something different in black bars. Far from hiding genitalia, they opened up new possibilities. They were "nillustrations," small blocks of nothingness, nihil + illustration,



17. Joel-Peter Witkin, *Journies of the Mask: The History of Commercial Photography in Juarez*, Photograph, 1984.

When I look at this image, which is one I love very much, I cannot accept that the traditional conception accounts for the perversity of the act that it depicts. A foot in the ass — yes, it is non-reproductive, but it is also a thousand other nons: nonalcoholic, nonconformist, nonde-nominational, nonflammable, nonproductive, nonverbal, perhaps even nonsensical. So what? Is deviance just an agglomeration of sins of omission? I hardly think so. When I look at this image, I wonder what its positivity is. Forget the nons. What are the pros? For example, it is very stagey. Perversity is often like that: staged, meaning partly that it is deliberate and partly that it is theatrical. Psychodrama — the mind scripting an immorality play for the body.

and I liked the way that they introduced negative space into precisely the most important parts of the picture. They freed the mind from the tyranny exerted over it by the compelling sight of something desirable. In place of the vagina, my imagination filled in wild new anatomies — cunts with holes like Swiss cheese, clitorises that hung like grapes from a vine.

This free play of the imagination is too often undervalued in the analysis of perversion. Past definitions work by

negation: perversion is not reproductive, not genital, not consensual, etc. But what is the plenitude of perversion, the fecundity? Perversion is sex mixed up with vision and invention. Perversion is creative, which is perhaps why artists are often as avant-garde in their behavior as in their work. Perversion can also be destructive, soul-killing, homicidal, evil — but even in the most hideous examples of perversion, is there not a spark of creativity, a sort of art, a vision of how sex could be?

It is as though pervers-

sion inserts those little black bars into the sex act itself: let me block out your cunt, free myself from its despotic grip on my libido, explore, innovate, let's try something new...

**A girlfriend once worked in a** massage parlor in a small city located near Amish country. Sometimes Amish men would visit her. I used to tease her a lot about it, joking that the guys must have paid her with fresh baked goods and handmade quilts. “Did you ever go parking in a buggy?” I’d

ask. Or I’d say, “Do you know that Amish guys make their own condoms? They just go out to the barn and disembowel a sheep.” To her these Amish men were no different than any other client, a slab of flesh. But to me they represented a conceptual difficulty. Is it perverse, I wondered, for an Amish man to tell his wife he is going into town to sell some vegetables but then take the money to a massage parlor? You must have to unload a lot of cabbage to pay for a happy ending.

Is it perverse? It is dif-

Evil implies standards — but are standards necessarily collective? Must codes of behavior point to other people, to society? Is it not possible to sin against oneself? Here's a thought experiment: could Robinson Crusoe commit a perverse act? Certainly he could engage in activities that are usually categorized as sexually perverse. He could groom a monkey to serve as his butt buddy. But then the question arises whether Robinson Crusoe would ever engage in such an activity if he weren't stranded on a remote island. His bestiality, like the homosexuality of prisoners and sailors, would appear to be conditioned by circumstance. Is it perverse if it's not a thoroughly free choice?

Consider a hermaphrodite or, to use the more modern term, an intersexual person. This individual may have both male and female genitalia or he may have neither in any distinct way. A number of biological causes, mostly chromosomal quirks, gives rise to the condition. Such a person is abnormal but no one would consider him perverse, or at least not perverse vis-à-vis his hermaphroditism. It's as senseless as saying that someone is perverse for having hazel eyes. Whatever the exact cause, a hermaphrodite is subject to a physiological determination. He does not choose to be intersexual. At best he can elect to suppress his intersexuality through surgery or drugs. But that's only a negative choice, and often the decision is made for him. (Intersex babies are typically nudged in the direction of one gender.)

Conversely, consider people who deliberately attempt to change their gender. They cross-dress, take hormones, get implants, undergo transformative surgical procedures. These people are frequently considered perverse, deviant, even monstrous. Why? Because they repudiate their given "normality" to opt for a state of being



18. Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Ill-Matched Lovers*, Painting, circa 1530.

Andy Warhol: "It's the long life-spans that are throwing all the old values and their applications out of whack. When people used to learn about sex at fifteen and die at thirty-five, they obviously were going to have fewer problems than people today who learn about sex at eight or so, I guess, and live to be eighty. That's a long time to play around with the same concept. The same boring concept." Following that logic, modern science and medicine will ensure a lively future for perversity. Our physical longevity will serve as the breeding ground for our psychopathologies, the health of our bodies will be responsible for the disease of our minds. The Dirty Old Man will be no rarity. Rather, dirtiness will belong to the very concept of aging, such that it will be impossible to grow old without developing weird and distorted notions of sexual satisfaction. Conversely, children and young people really will be innocent, not because they lack sexual desire but because they haven't yet put in the time to corrupt it.

that the born hermaphrodite is ashamed to suffer. Their perversity is defined not by what they choose but by the fact that they choose it. Perversity is never compulsory but is, to the contrary, independent and free. It is the liberty in the libertine. “I was carried by the conviction that I rejoiced in extraordinary freedom. To fuck above and beyond any sense of disgust was not just a way of lowering yourself, it was, in a diametrically opposite move, to raise yourself above all prejudice.” (*The Sexual Life of Catherine M.*)

There was the husband who had been trying to convince his wife to act as his interloper with a thirteen-year-old girl. He wanted the wife to ask the girl to sleep with him. Finally the wife must have snapped. “She armed herself with a knife and 2m fishing spear and yelled that she wanted to kill them both. She poked her husband

difficult to think your way into the mind of a Pennsylvania Dutch farmer (or any radical other), to guess what strange twists of logic he might use to reconcile his desires with his religious precepts. For example, he might tell himself that it is better to alleviate his lust outside the house than to molest one of his daughters. (PervScan has covered a few stories claiming that incest and abuse run rampant in Amish communities. One Amish boy thought it was “normal” to have sex with his sister. Perhaps it was

normal insofar as there were no other outlets for his desires.) Or the Amish John may have no rationale at all. He may simply be suffering from unbearable urges. If these drive him to the massage parlor, mental anguish accompanying him all the way, then they condition and determine his actions. His decision to seek relief may not be entirely compulsory, but neither is it entirely free or, more to the point, gratuitous. He’s like a starving man who eats a bug — it may repel him but he’s driven to it. That’s not perverse.

with the spear and forced her husband to lie on top of the crying teenager and have sex with her.” The act retains the outward form of an illicit coupling — man rapes teen — but really it is not the husband who violates the girl. Rather, the wife rapes her using the husband in the same sense that somebody else might rape a girl using a screwdriver. It is no longer the man’s kink to crave the teen but the wife’s jealousy to arrange this tableau, which is designed to give the husband what he wants in a way that ensures he cannot enjoy it. In freedom the man’s lust may have been perverse, but coercion drains it of its deviance. The man is left with the travesty of his desire rather than the fulfillment of it.

The moral of the story is that you can’t be forced to do something perverse without thereby negating the perversity of the thing you’re doing. Perversity is always

Perverse is when you push aside a bowl of fresh fruit to fondle a monogrammed napkin.

What if the tables are turned? Instead of a desperate farmer patronizing a sex worker, what if an “English” person conceives a strange lust for Amish girls? He imagines the ivory thighs concealed beneath white aprons, or he fantasizes about undoing all the hooks (some sects don’t permit buttons) that hide a Menno-nite bosom. If it just falls in your lap somehow, it’s not perverse. It’s opportunism. (Man, you won’t

believe it, I screwed this Amish chick.) But if you nurture a lust that has few chances for success, or whose success can only come at the price of a concentrated effort to break into a closed community that wants nothing to do with you, it’s probably not quite normal. To go from a repressed community to a freer one is natural. To reverse that, to seek the delights of a free world in an oppressive one, is not. It’s like wanting to go to prison just to get your rocks off. True, there are unique pleasures that belong precisely

19. Nobuyoshi Araki, *From the Series "A World of Girls,"* Photograph, 1983.

Perversion often has a ludic character. It can be like dressing up or inventing a game, in which case the perveme resembles nothing so much as a playgroup. People come together, suspend disbelief, engage in some imaginative set of rules or circumstances. Children play doctor to learn about sex, but adults engage in perversion to unlearn about it — to free sex up so that it's not just baby-making or blowjobs or a hundred positions you can find in a book. To put it more philosophically, perversion resembles play under the idea of freedom. A small part of the lust for schoolgirls consists of this — a desire to emancipate sex from the clutter that experience and adulthood impose on it, a desire to reassociate sex not just with nubile bodies but unconditioned minds, a desire to regain "innocence" defined not as celibacy or ignorance but as a field of possibilities.



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free — too free, *de trop*, a superfluity that occurs where the opposite of compulsion is not just liberty but gratuitousness. The perverse act need not have happened. That is what the victims always say: Why me? What did I do to deserve this? Well, you did nothing to deserve it, and that's precisely the point. It shouldn't have happened but it did. Perversity spills out of the frame, like a baroque painting. A girlfriend once told me that she fucked a complete stranger, an old man, in a McDonald's bathroom as a form of performance art. I figured it was a lie but I thought it was a wonderful one, a marvelous invention, a fabulous story. Why? Because it confused the gratuitousness of a perverse gesture with the gratuitousness of an artwork — one, moreover, that nobody would ever see.

to this reversal — the sense of triumph that ensues from transgressing a rigid social boundary; the fun of sullyng someone, pulling an "innocent" person into the dirt of perversion; the masochism of voluntarily submitting to rules and frustration; the secret-agent thrill of subverting these; etc. But still, to make things difficult for yourself only makes sense to a logic of perversity.

Hypothesis: the perversity of a desire is proportional to the resistance and impedance it offers to the pervert. A rational

sexual choice is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. But what does a pervert do? The opposite. The masochist chooses pain. The foot fetishist chooses a lowly part of the body that often stinks. The coprophile chooses excrement and therefore makes himself pay for ecstasy with disgust. In all these cases, the pervert is like a weightlifter who works against mass and gravity to make himself stronger. The pervert works against pleasure in order to make himself all the more capable of it. (Nietzsche: "what is a pleasure

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20. Yayoi Kusama, *Grand Orgy to Awaken the Dead at MoMA*, Performance Photograph (from front cover of the *New York Daily News*), 1969.

The orgy sets up a new regime. Individual intention counts for little. Something else takes over, an emergent property, group psychology. This is the place where anything goes. You can have anal, oral, genital — it's normal. You can have sex with strangers — it's normal. You can alternate between homo and hetero — it's normal. You can touch yourself, stuff every orifice, stand on your head — it's normal. You can probably introduce a pony into the mix without causing much of an uproar. Like a nude beach, the orgy sets up a new normal. Ironically, that waters down its perversity. As the orgy expands, its perversity contracts. Its intentionality dissolves in open-mindedness. Its singularity recedes before the multiplicity of partners. Its gratuitousness dissipates in the implicit mandate to fuck. It no longer faces any resistance or impedance. The perverse decompresses in the quantitative extension of the orgy. There is so much fucking that the perversity factor (pervensity) disappears like a cum drop in a bukkake facial.

other than a stimulation of the feeling of power by an obstacle?")

Conversely, there is something easy about normality. It may seem restrictive, but at the same time it is the path of least resistance. Maybe it's boring, but it's safe. No one objects to the missionary position. This is the low-hanging-fruit version of the pursuit of pleasure. The value of a weak pleasure is proportional to the ease with which it can be obtained. And vice versa: if it's difficult to obtain, the pleasure is greater... Why would I bother

to climb a mountain for a weak pleasure?

In the "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," Freud notes that the "extraordinarily wide dissemination of the perversions forces us to suppose that the disposition to perversions is itself of no great rarity but must form a part of what passes as the normal constitution." Paradoxical as it may sound, perversion requires rarity but perverse tendencies are themselves normal. Perversity already exists in normality, latent,

lurking, a potential energy circulating in ordinary behavior. It erupts, appears, does its thing, then dissipates, sinks back down into the normal — deflates like an erection.

Consequently, perversity and normality are not opposites in the same way as black and white, hot and cold, a and not-a. They are more like figure and ground — a silhouette against a landscape, a deliberately discordant note in a melodic progression. A perverse act is a singularity; normality is repetition, form;

and underneath them both is a great formlessness, a chaos of unregulated behavior, drives and desires that cannot be perverse because they are pre-normal, wild, inchoate. (One of Sade's favorite strategies is to hint at this underlying formlessness by opposing incompatible normalities. What's customary here, he likes to say, is an abomination somewhere else. *Philosophy in the Bedroom*: "All is relative to our manners and the climate we inhabit; what is a crime here is often a virtue several hundred leagues hence, and

She had had sex with a llama, she swore. It was obviously a lie. I couldn't imagine how she, a city girl, would have had the opportunity to experiment sexually with a pack animal normally found in the Andes. It was a wonderful lie, though, and like the McDonald's story it expressed a keen intuition about the nature of a perverse act. A llama — what could be more novel? Somehow it seemed more perverse to imagine her in the heat of passion with this exotic camel-like creature than with, say, a lap dog. But why? Did the peculiarity of this animal enhance the perversity of this fantasy act? Would the act have seemed less perverse in an Andean village where llamas are common? In Manhattan you don't even see llamas, let alone screw them.

Plainly there is a quantitative aspect to perversity. The difference between the llamas per capita in New

the virtues of another hemisphere might well reverse themselves into crimes in our own.”)

This three-tiered structure — formlessness; form; deviation / randomness; repetition; singularity — always retains the possibility that configurations can shift, new structures arise, perversions can become normal, norms can become perverse. If something has to be rare to be perverse, what happens when it becomes common? Look at homosexuality or the increasing rates of oral sex among teenagers — these have

lost the perversity that they had a generation ago. On PervScan I joked that although “it might not be exactly surprising to say that norms evolve, it does open up some interesting possibilities. Imagine, for instance, what sex would look like if the norms and perversions you know today completely switched places. You might come to PervScan, for example, and rather than find stories of bestiality or pedophilia, you might be reading about married couples utilizing the missionary position to get pregnant.”

York and Peru affects the perceived depravity of fucking one of these “little camels.” Rarity conditions perversity. On PervScan I posted a poll asking people to rank the perversity of various kinks. By a large margin, necrophilia was voted most perverse. Bestiality came in second. One commenter made the case that pedophilia is more perverse than these because it's more damaging. That's a commendably rational way of looking at it, but popular opinion clearly considered sex with cadavers more far out. Why? Harmfulness would be a qualitative measure of perversity, but voters veered toward the quantitative. The perception of a behavior's perversity correlated to its frequency in the wild. Pedophilia seemed less perverse than necrophilia simply because more people molest little girls than dead bodies.

Thus there is a gradient of perversions that be-

It was a joke but there was a lot of truth to it. Population researchers have remarked that the birth rate in developed countries has declined to the point where parents do not have enough children to replace them. (If parents on average have 1.5 children, the children do not replace the 2 parents when they die.) If the birth rate really is declining, it implies that reproductivity should no longer qualify as the standard for “normal” sex. The imperative to reproduce would no longer be the norm. Consequently, extrapolat-

ing from birth-rate trends, there should be an increase in forms of sexuality that do not have reproduction as their goal — an increase in precisely the forms of sexuality hitherto deemed perverse. And isn't this what can be seen in the pornography now exploding across the internet? Every porn video ends with cum on the face, ass, or breasts.

**Nowadays everybody wants to** be a little bit different, a touch radical, slightly perverted. “Too many of us would rather be in-

gins with the normal (everybody does it), slips into the perverse (not everybody does this), intensifies (few do this), and finally arrives at some extreme outpost of perversion (nobody but me ever did this). The normal, the quasi-perverse, the perverse, and the superverse. At that final station you're like the explorer in the medieval illustration who discovers, literally, the edge of the world and tries to poke a finger through it. You can't go any further. You've done something novel in the strictest sense of the term — something unique, without precedent or category, something possibly even incomprehensible since there is no template for it.

If perversity requires novelty, normality requires something else: repetition. Normality is a frequency of acts, codes, behaviors. It is not identical to morality or legality. It might be normal but immoral to cheat on your

spouse or normal but illegal to cheat on your taxes. Rather, normality is very much like a “normal” or Gaussian distribution in statistics, where some things (norms) occur with a high probability density and other things (perversions) occur with a low probability density. In other words, a norm is something that repeats and a perversion is something that does not, or tends not to, or does but rarely. Remember the traditional formulation? What perversity really opposes is not reproduction but repetition. It is more perverse to have relations with a llama than a lap dog simply because it's more singular.

But how can this be? Perverse acts repeat over time. Burgo Partridge wrote a *History of Orgies*, and certainly you could write a history of any perversion, *Dog Sex through the Ages*. Perverse acts are also repeated over the course of a lifetime — which is precisely the problem

21. Zak Smith, *100 Girls and 100 Octopuses (Detail)*, Painting, 2005.

Each of the 98 canvasses in this mosaic depicts a girl having some unnatural congress with an octopus. (Burroughs: “My dear, I love the octopus...”) Here in New York the octopus is rare and octopus sex even rarer. But in art there is already a tradition of eroticized cephalopods: it begins with Hokusai's famous woodcut of 1820, traverses the *Jurisprudence* panel of Gustav Klimt's University of Vienna ceiling paintings, and culminates with Japanese manga artists working today. When you see Smith's mosaic, this is what you think of — a multitude of other paintings — not the actual rarity of tentacle sex, and for this reason the perceived depravity of the work is very low.



of recidivism among sex offenders. Once a dog fucker, always a dog fucker. How, then, can a perversion be disinclined to repeat?

Repetition poses two dangers to perversion. On one hand, there is the risk of apathy. The first time you do something outré, it's stimulating. The second time it lessens in impact and the third time it edges toward boredom. This is when the Law of Diminishing Kicks exerts itself. You conquer one perversity, you need more — faster, better, harder, further, more extreme. You want to discover new virginities in yourself in order to have the pleasure of violating them. And if you reach your own personal limit, the ne plus ultra of your sexuality, then you turn around and survey behind you the wasteland of kink. What's left to you? Leftovers? Sloppy seconds? At that point you might even return to "normality" out of sheer perversity.

volved in a sex crime than in sex." (J.G. Ballard) There are still plenty of norms but normality is not chic. It raises the question of whether there comes a point at which perversity might form its own weird sort of institution. Look what happened to youth culture, rock and roll, bohemianism, tattoos. Could the same thing ever happen to depravity?

I used to know a girl who lived right in the center of Greenwich Village, a place long known for its appeal to the self-consciously eccentric. In this

Land of the Misfit Toys she was the exception. She emitted no signs of deliberate weirdness. She never hinted at secret sorrows. She offered no claims to heresy or pretensions to kink. A Midwestern girl, she came from a comfortable but not opulent background and spoke fondly of horseback riding. She was a decent student and after college obtained a good job. She was even-tempered, upbeat, fun but not wild. She seemed — dare I say it? — the most "normal" person I ever met.

But I could never trust

On the other hand, repetition poses another danger to perversion. Suppose you do something once. It's perverse. You like it. You do it lots of times. You still like it. You get the same kick every time. At this point the perversion congeals, solidifies, crystallizes. It becomes an obsession. It loses the experimental character of the perverse and becomes programmatic, an algorithm for pleasure. Perversity dies a slow death in the grip of obsession. The perverse is intentional and self-conscious, but becomes automatic and therefore unthinking in obsession. The perverse is free to the point of gratuitousness, but it acquires a compulsiveness — I can't stop myself — in obsession. The perverse is powered by variation, difference, singularity, but is constrained to repeat in obsession.

(Could an amnesiac commit a perverse act? On

my own perception of her normality. I operated on the assumption that everyone has his or her psychopathologies, kinks, tragedies. If you're patient, or if you know what to look for, or if you make yourself easy to talk to, these invariably come out. But not with this girl. Over the course of three or four years of relatively close friendship, there was nary a glimpse of anything untoward in her soul. She hadn't been abused, she didn't have bulimia, she didn't hate anybody, she didn't appear to have any sexual desires that

you could find outside a romance novel. One time she persisted in a crush on a guy who, friends told her, was secretly gay, but I think this was no perversity on her part. She really just happened to like him.

How could she be so normal?

(If you thought I was so normal, you can only imagine what I thought of you. I operated on the assumption that people couldn't be all psychopathology, kink, and tragedy. In spite of your lurid interests, you're very sane



22. Joseph Kosuth, *Art as Idea as Idea (Meaning)*, Painting, 1967.

In spite of my philosophical interests, I have never given much thought to the “meaning of life.” It has always struck me as a pseudo-problem, the application of a semantic concept to an un-semantic thing. It’s like asking about the meaning of a vase or a cirrus cloud. These may have great beauty, or great utility, or personal value (“That vase belonged to my grandmother”), but meaning? Nada. I would rather philosophize about a fuck doll, say, or a brassiere. A bra can engage in you in thoughts about the nature of qualities (hard/soft) and therefore of perception and therefore of being itself (to be is to be perceived). There is a great anecdote about the philosopher Theodor Adorno. He was giving a speech sometime in the late 1960s. A women’s libber ran up to the front of the audience and pulled off her shirt. He stood there speechless. Now I understand why. It was a revelation of the nature of being.

somehow. I think this might even chagrin you, since you make up for it with that Flaubert dictum about how a writer has to be calm and orderly in his life in order to be disorderly and violent in his work. Then again, you’re also crazier than you think — or I should say, crazy in ways you don’t think you are. What you’re most self-conscious about — the perv thing — is nothing. It’s the things you take for granted, the things you don’t even realize, that freak people out. The very fact that you’re so clueless about them is exactly

why they’re so disturbing. They’re the real you.)

Sometimes I suspected that she must be masterful at concealing her kinks. Sometimes I thought I was simply failing to read the signs of her secret vices. Then I came to realize that, in the context of Greenwich Village, her patent normality was her best bid for originality. She was like the first uninteresting number paradox in mathematics. (Go through numbers listing their interesting qualities: 1 is the first positive integer, 2 is the only even prime,

etc. If you arrive at a number that has no interesting qualities — 39, according to one mathematician — then that is the first uninteresting one, and paradoxically that makes it interesting.) This girl was a conundrum on the order of 39. Her lack of distinction was precisely what distinguished her.

Was this deliberate? Was it a strategy? Did she realize how interesting it made her? Was her apparent normality the result of a profound perversity that had turned on all the exhibitions of perversity around her?

Frankly I’m not sure. Her normality was so astonishing that it was ambiguous, like the dialogue in Sade that would be prudery in a different context. (“‘Conceal your cunts, ladies,’ an indignant Gernande says to Juliette and Dorothee” — about which Roland Barthes observes: “the same sentence serves both libertine and puritan.”) Whatever she was in the past, though, I think she may well point to a ratio that will be increasingly pertinent to the future: the pervier the masses, the normaler the perv.

one hand, his affliction would not prevent him from being fully aware of all the reasons for not doing a thing and then doing it anyway. On the other hand, something doesn't seem right about it. An amnesiac could commit a perverse act, forget it, and then commit the same exact act the next day — without his perversity thereby degrading into obsession. Amnesia would remove the Law of Diminishing Kicks from perversion. The amnesiac would feel no need to outdo himself. He would be running in place, like the obsessive, whereas the pervert is usually climbing a ladder, ascending from kick to kick. The obsessive repeats. The pervert intensifies. The amnesiac would repeat without obsession a perversion that he does not know enough to intensify.)

**A perversion can harden into a fetish, but a fetish cannot erupt into perversion. Something you do a thou-**

**“Sickness is a powerful stimulant,”** wrote Nietzsche, “but one has to be healthy enough for it.” So too with perversion: you have to be normal enough for it. Ironically, repression is a great ally of the pervert. It makes things forbidden, wrong, taboo, and therefore desirable. The pervert needs normality the same way that the rebel needs authority. It is the source from which he draws his *raison d'être*. Without authority, the rebel is an absurd, superfluous being — a rebel without a cause, pointless disruption, pent-up hos-

tility taking aim at the wind. And without normality, the pervert is also superfluous and absurd — a pervert without a kink, a lust for weirdness in a world where nothing is weird.

Thus the enemy of the pervert is not repression but liberality, sexual liberation, social tolerance. Whereas the rebel wants to see the world adopt his ideology, the pervert wants nothing less than to see the world indulge in his kink. In an environment where anything goes, nothing is perverse. Even worse is when

sand times cannot suddenly acquire the novelty of a perversion. In fact, the only perverse thing you can do with an obsession is to deny it — not because you want to reform but because you want to deform, to liberate energies, see what new things might emerge. You practically slip over into meta-perversity, which is the point at which you take a perverse attitude toward your own perversions.

kinks are not only tolerated but canonized, popularized. Things formerly delicious become common, platitudinous. If everybody's doing it, the pervert wants no part of it. Normality invigorates him, gives him options for depravity, but normalization — the process by which the taboo becomes the norm — deprives him of opportunities for outrage.

For this reason the pervert typically abhors those propagandists who try to convince people that sexuality is healthy and natural. The pervert does

not want his sexuality to be an aerobic exercise, a breath of fresh air, a balanced diet. He does not want it to be healthy or natural. He wants it to be sick and unnatural. He does not want it to be salutary or hygienic, like a bar of soap. He wants it to be dirty and filthy. (Hence the privileged position of the anus in perverse sexuality.) The pervert does not want his sexuality to be open, like a town hall meeting. He wants it to be closed, secret, self-contained. D.H. Lawrence: “The whole question of pornography



seems to me a question of secrecy. Without secrecy there would be no pornography.”

To the pervert, normality is therefore a cover story. He is a secret agent representing the powers of deviance in the realm of the straight. He seems normal because he tends to hide his sex quirks, and he hides his sex quirks because his agenda is not social action but personal pleasure. If somebody marches with a sign blaring “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it,” his goal is to be normal. The person whose goal

is perversion doesn’t make such a spectacle of himself. He plays it cool, lies low, looks for opportunities to get in, get off, get out. Foucault: “The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it.” Get it? Perversion is infiltration, the pervert is covert, the perveme a black op.



23. Alfred Hitchcock (Director), *Rope* (1948) and *Vertigo* (1958), Film Stills.

Filmic illustration of the difference between perversion and obsession. In *Rope* pleasure lies in the attainment of a novelty — a murder, how interesting. In *Vertigo* pleasure lies in repetition, in the effort to resurrect the dead. *Rope* portrays a crime that is singular, experimental, self-conscious, gratuitous, perverse. *Vertigo* equates obsession with illness, acrophobia, as though to underscore that it lies beyond individual control. (The obsessive acts as though time does not exist. When the perveme decays, he recreates it. *Vertigo*: Jimmy Stewart resurrects a dead woman by compelling a live one to simulate her. Conversely, for the pervert the decay of the perveme is a matter of indifference. Why should he care about the perveme? He’s tired of it anyway. He wants to organize a new one — and therefore his problem is that it has all been done before. The long continuous take of *Rope* is the filmic analogue of the pervert’s experience of time: he can’t escape from it. To his every attempt at novelty time holds up a billion previous examples. The Law of Diminishing Kicks crushes the pervert with history.)

The danger that repetition poses to perversity is an individual one (boredom, obsession) because, from a morphological perspective, perversions obviously repeat. In fact, it is astonishing just how much structure and regularity there can be to perverse acts. (A desire for a particular person is love, but a desire for a particular arrangement is perverse.) You can pick almost any unlikely conjunction of bodies and trace its trajectory as it is passed from perv to perv, like the slut at a biker party.

The pervert does not like to repeat himself but perversions themselves become memes, autonomous structures taken up and repeated from individual to individual. Like phonemes or morphemes, there are units of perversity, pervemes. These are suprapersonal forms with both an extensive and an intensive dimension. The extensive dimension is a heterogeneous set: a man, a

**The first piece of performance** art I ever saw was at a nightclub on the Lower East Side. At about two or three in the morning, half a dozen naked men and women entered the small crowded room and danced joyously in a circle. It resembled the famous canvas by Matisse, *Dance (I)*, that hangs in the Museum of Modern Art — except for the carrot. While they were dancing, one person pulled a carrot from the ass of the person in front of him. He took a bite and stuck it in his own ass. The person behind him withdrew it,

took a bite, and stuck it in her ass. The person behind her withdrew it, took a bite, and stuck it in his ass. This continued — the carrot going from ass to mouth to ass — until it was eaten up, and then the dance was over.

I had no idea what it was supposed to mean. Probably the performers intended simply to shock. At the time AIDS was still relatively recent, and in the hysteria about safe sex and disease it was indeed surprising to see people eating from each other's rectums. In retrospect it also oc-

curs to me that, in addition to its art historical precedents, the dance formed an odd perveme. It conjoined several other pervemes — group sex, circle jerk, masturbating with a vegetable, felching (which is when a man ejaculates into somebody's anus and then sucks out the sperm, sometimes with a straw) — in a memorable image, and it also lent to the perveme some of the gratuitousness of art, like the girl who claimed that it could be an aesthetic statement to have sex with a stranger in the bathroom of a fast-food

woman, her daughter, a dog. (You'd be surprised how often this perveme recurs in the news, not to mention in reality.) The intensive dimension is the flow of affects — anticipation, awkwardness, focus, pleasure — inside the perveme. There is also a special intensity that derives precisely from the self-conscious contemplation of the members of the set. It just wouldn't be the same without the dog...

Just as there are enduring works of art or literature, so too are there enduring forms of perversity — classics of kink. (Sleeping Beauty, the necrophiliac kiss.) However, any given incarnation of a perveme is temporary, evanescent, even delicate. The heterogeneity of its elements can pose a threat to its very existence. In any perveme there are participants who don't really want to be there, whose thing is something else entirely, whose

restaurant.

Now when I think of the perveme as a concept, I often associate this image with it — bodies spinning in a circle, forming a unit. (Echoes: the circular formation of the orgy in *Eyes Wide Shut* and the ring of sexual exchange in Arthur Schnitzler's play *La Ronde*.) Any body could replace any other body, any group of bodies could reconstitute the circle on their own, the perveme would remain intact, a novel structure whirling like a dervish. It could expand in size,



pleasure lies in something outside the perveme, whose participation is only the result of coercion or tolerance or humoring. (Does the woman really want the dog involved?) And if these heterogeneous elements aren't people, conscious entities of some sort, then there are other elements that don't belong, objects that aren't used right, a cucumber in somebody's ass. These things point outside the perveme to an external reality, and the pervert must ignore them — deny his partner's boredom, repudiate the real use value of objects, create blocks of willful ignorance in his mental image of excitement — or his pleasure will threaten to fall apart, like an unstable scaffold.

There is also an interior temporality to the perveme, different from the longevity of its structure and the ephemerality of its incarnation. Inside the perveme there

is narrative, psychodrama, a procession of events. The pervert has a plan which he sets in motion with the hope of building toward climax and pleasure — the happy ending. However, there always remains the possibility that the plan can abort, sink into frustration and disappointment, coitus interruptus. At that point a perversion can change, compensatory mechanisms arise, deviance turns to plan b, I take pleasure in hurting you because you failed to give me pleasure in the first place. Blow me or die.

On a phenomenological level, perversity is intentional, solipsistic, excessive, singular, but on a morphological level the issues for the pervert are more practical. How do you organize the perveme? How do you maintain its inner consistency? How do you guide it to its end? And once you do, how do you steer between boredom and obsession — how do you intensify the perveme, up the ante,

24. Serge Gainsbourg (Director), *Stan the Flasher* (1990), VHS Cover.

Stan the Flasher is not frank about his sexuality. Paradoxically, he displays but does not reveal himself. Like a lightning bolt he strikes but then disappears beneath his trench coat. (That's his cover story, the man in the street, "à poil sous un raincoat.") Thus the exhibitionist is not he who publicizes his sexuality but rather he who privatizes a fragment of the public by drawing an unwitting citizen into his perveme.



25. Andres Serrano, *A History of Sex (Autoerotic)*, Cibachrome, 1996.

You might think that this would form a perveme of one: its relative rarity and its disregard for other people (turning in on itself like a snake eating its own tail) suggest the solipsism of a perverse act. Since it's non-reproductive it would certainly be perverse according to the traditional conception. However, it does not truly form a monadological perveme. Any guy who could do this probably would do it — thus its rarity is conditioned by the limits of physical possibility. It is not rare because people refrain from doing it but because they cannot anatomically manage it. Sucking your own penis thus lacks the gratuitousness of a free choice. It is rare but not perverse, a sex act but not a perveme.



include a thousand bodies gyrating in a field, or it could contract until only one dancer remained, a person spinning like a top and moving a carrot from his ass to his mouth and back again.

**The perveme does not require** other people. It is possible to cobble together a perveme of one, like the Vaseline Vandal who liked to check into a motel and smear every surface — television, furniture, carpet, alarm clock — with petroleum jelly. Evidently he was trying to experience in an

erotic way what Sartre called “the great ontological region of sliminess.” His fetish was to organize a perveme on the model not of the group (woman, daughter, dog) but of the monad. For him the perveme was a structure closed in on itself like a jelly donut.

Perhaps Vaseline even served to eliminate the final vestige of multiplicity in the perveme, the separation between the individual and his environment. Sartre: “That sucking of the slimy which I feel on my hands outlines a kind of continuity of the slimy

substance in myself. These long soft strings of substance which fall from me to the slimy body (when, for example, I plunge my hand into it and then pull it out again) symbolize a rolling off of myself in the slime... To touch the slimy is to risk being dissolved in sliminess.” This feeling may even be more acute when you elicit slimy substances from your own body, so that the goo coating the room and your skin is paralleled by the goo you bring up from your own depths, the jelly on the walls and the sperm in your body perform-

ing a viscous fusion of outside and inside.

This changes the problem of the perveme's internal consistency. No longer is it a matter of aligning the psychologies of the participants, fomenting a deviant esprit de corps, but rather of creating an environment in which everything partially deliquesces. Here consistency is glutinous, gloppy, gelatinous — a physical embodiment of the mental state that the pervert seeks when he wants the participants in his perveme to “stick together.” And

take it to the next level, stave off the Law of Diminishing Kicks? Sometimes this is easy, there's a great opportunity, the perveme just falls into your lap. Other times it takes a concerted effort, the perveme has to be assembled, worked up, cobbled together, participants have to be convinced or coerced, exotic objects have to be procured, peculiar conditions have to be met (there was the guy who found it "sexually exciting" to cause women to drink caustic fluids — cleaning supplies, windshield wiper, Nyquil — and to listen to them describe the pain they experienced subjecting their digestive tracts to chemical burns).

This is what defines the pervert: not a psychological condition or a twisted state of being but the fact that he organizes pervemes. Usually he reconstitutes them, does the two-girl thing or the wife/daughter/dog thing.



But sometimes there are also great artists in the realm of the perverse, people who make the leap from repetition to production, who cease recreating and begin creating pervemes, novel pathologies that either fade away or give rise to entirely new categories of perversion: feederism, squish videos, exophilia....

He may have been depraved, but the caustic fluid perv was an artist of this sort, an innovator in the realm of the deviant. His fetish had few peers outside Sade — but then again, Sade really did seem to envision practically every possibility. The perversions actually known to be committed by Sade were laughable, even trivial. But has anyone in history created such an astonishing arsenal of pervemes? A million years of fucking have barely carried the species past the missionary position, and it's hard to imagine that another million would exhaust the possibili-

#### 26. *Bukkake Face*, Web Image, 2008.

The perveme's consistency is determined not just by the variegated psychologies of its participants but by the number of perversions packed into a given act. Much as a zipped file contains more information in less space, so too does a compressed perveme give more bang for the buck. For example, in a regular facial, there is a 1:1 correspondence between ejaculator and face; in bukkake the ratio is  $n:1$ , multiple ejaculators and one face; therefore bukkake constitutes a compressed facial. Another example occurs in *120 Days of Sodom*: "A notorious sodomist, in order to combine that crime with those of incest, murder, rape, sacrilege, and adultery, first inserts a Host in his ass, then has himself embuggered by his own son, rapes his married daughter, and kills his niece." The consistency of this perveme is threatened by obvious gaps in reciprocity: the niece doesn't want to die, the daughter doesn't want to be raped, etc. But on the other hand the sodomist is able to compress the perversions inside it, make one act serve half a dozen illicit urges. (It's only one act but oh how it multiplies in consciousness.)

ties laid out in *120 Days of Sodom*. You could practically define perversion as the recreation of scenes from Sade — the eternal return of the Sadean perveme.

when this occurs, when all the elements of the perveme fuse, it achieves a new kind of internal consistency. In the monad, the perveme becomes self-consistent.

**One night I was lying in bed** and reading a new edition of Nietzsche's late notebooks. "Everything," Nietzsche scribbled, "defamed as immoral is, viewed in economic terms, the higher and more essential and how development towards a greater fulfillment of life necessarily also implies the *progress of immorality*." Somehow

the thought struck me. Wanting to let it reverberate in my head, I closed the book, put out the light, and lay there turning it over in my mind. I stared into the blackness and asked myself whether Nietzsche's insight could hold up against particular examples of immorality. I thought of half a dozen recent stories I had read for PervScan. Pedophilia is "defamed as immoral." Is there any way in which pedophilia could be conceived as "the higher and more essential?"

First I had to remind

27. Jean-Jacques Lebel, *120 Minutes Dedicated to the Divine Marquis*, Photograph of Performance, Paris, 4 April 1966.

In his performance, Lebel required visitors to enter between two slabs of meat "like the lips of a vagina." Once inside the performance space, they were treated to various pornographic spectacles that included a transsexual nun sodomizing herself with vegetables, a woman urinating on the audience, and another inviting spectators to lick off the cream that covered her naked body. If you can define perversion as the recreation of scenes from Sade, then every bit of depravity is pretty much a performance on the order of this — a few minutes dedicated to the Divine Marquis.





28. Pierre Klossowski, *Roberte and the Parallel Bars*, Drawing, 1967.

Just as it is possible for there to be “bad” monogamies based on obsession, fetishism, contracts, slavery, kink, so too can there be “good” infidelities. In the novels of Klossowski, for example, there is the “law of hospitality” that obliges Octave to offer his wife Roberte to their guests. Octave furnishes a philosophical justification for this hospitality: he believes that these observed infidelities reveal new aspects of Roberte’s personality for him to understand and love. Certainly applying this law to marriage perverts it — not by breaking up a relationship but by transforming the supposed antithesis of marriage, cheating, into the very thing that drives and perpetuates it. Not only that, it also sets up a tantalizing analogy: infidelity is to monogamy as perversity is to normality.

The pervert appears to be on the side of immorality. The news reinforces this impression, since it exhibits the pervert when he has been exposed, arrested, convicted. And yet perversity is not inherently bad or evil. The other day I overheard a guy telling his friend how he had angered a girl by sleeping with her and then refusing to engage in any further “meaningful” relationship. “I may have commitment issues,” he said, “but that doesn’t mean I’m a bad person.” So too with the pervert. He isn’t necessarily a bad person. He just has deviance issues.

Perversity cannot be a mere synonym for wrongdoing. Sometimes a perverse act is perfectly moral — not out of virtue but out of perversity, even meta-perversity, perversity turning against itself in order not to collapse into the axiomatic. Perversity doesn’t strive to be good but might happen to simulate goodness while satisfying its own weird imperatives. For example, just as “good” monogamy is based on fidelity and love, so too are there other monogamies, “bad” ones based on obsession, fetishism, contracts, slavery, kink. From external appearances, you might not be able to tell whether the most monogamous couple is in love or in contract — or both. (Sexual monogamy is rare in the animal kingdom. Hypothesis: monogamy is unnatural; what is “against nature” is perverse; ergo monogamy is perverse. Question: how does this perversity become a purported virtue?)

What is morality? When you think about being subject to it, you have a sense of being pushed and pulled by invisible forces, like a man in a windstorm. Sometimes you’re in the right, the wind is at your back. Sometimes you’re in the wrong, you have a sense of exertion in the face of resistance, the wind is in your face. Other times you’re not sure which way the wind is blowing, you simply feel the effects of moral wind shear. Philosophers have

long debated the nature of ethical impulses — do they derive from sentiment? reason? duty? — but perhaps morality is simply a field. Like a magnetic field, morality has poles (good and bad) and forces (principles, injunctions) that are intersected at angles by real human behavior (dilemmas). You can map the fields in different ways. For example, there is a religious morality whose coordinates are defined by the Ten Commandments, or there is a social morality: “An enormous bulk of social phenomena — schools, the stifling of sex in childhood, the misery of the puberty years, the oppression which was sex within marriage — brought repression to individuals... We must speak of an economy of sexuality: the form in which society regulates, encourages, or inhibits the gratifications of the sexual drive.” (Wilhelm Reich, “The Imposition of Sexual Morality”)

myself that I was reading a notebook, not a developed argument. It would be unfair to pin Nietzsche against the wall for an insight he had yet to return to, review, elaborate. Second I had to remind myself of Nietzsche’s tendency for overstatement, for bombast, and I had to situate his insight in the context of his antipathy for Christianity. Surely what he really meant was that everything Christians defame as immoral is “higher and more essential.” Still, setting aside certain cult leaders, Christians do not

look approvingly on pedophilia. I thought of a particularly heinous example I had read. Is there any way in which the rape of a very young girl could be considered essential for the “development towards a greater fulfillment of life?”

Once I had framed the question in this way, I could not help but think of Nietzsche as a naïf. He was not the most worldly or experienced of men. He had not, as I had, fed his gray matter a regular diet of depravity. When he thought of immorality, he had

If morality is a field, the perveme lies within it like a bubble. The volume and density of evaluations in the moral field are perforated by a hollow, a gap in the moral coverage. Anything can happen in the perveme. Principles suffer the fate of weak cellphone signals. Suspension of judgement ceases to be an epistemological guideline and becomes a justification of pleasure — epoché perverted. Moral injunctions are replaced by hedonic directives. *Thou Shalt* and *Thou Shalt Not* give way to *put it here, touch me there, blow me, fuck me*. The pervert does not oppose morality so much as he abandons it in pursuit of a twisted personal fulfillment. His goal is not to effectuate change — to want to change morality is to be a rebel, not a pervert — but to achieve a private satisfaction. Shouts, commands, threats, and gestures are how parents force morals down their children’s throats. In the

his religious education in mind. When I thought of it, I had a gallery of sex crimes before me. I could see how his insight functioned within the terms of his thinking, but I could not transplant it so easily into mine. Once you’ve read about a guy forcing himself on a six-year-old — with their disparity in sizes causing such an injury that her intestines were left hanging between her legs — it is not so easy to proclaim the higher value of immorality.

I probably would have left the matter at that but for a

chance encounter with another book. *Survival of the Sickest* argues that what is lethal for the individual often turns out to be beneficial for the species: from an evolutionary standpoint, “many diseases are really complicated blessings, not simple curses.” Given the obvious parallel between sickness and perversion, I wondered whether the same might hold true for sexual deviance. Could it be that individual examples of deviance serve more universal purposes of existence? Perhaps that is what Nietzsche

29. Ana Mendieta, *Siluetas Series*, Mexico, C Print, 1973-1978.

Perhaps there are finally enough people. The earth is swollen with humanity, stuffed with flesh, bursting at the seams with human animals. Evolution is finished. DNA ceases to terrorize us with its desperate need to exist. Throwing off the burden of reproduction is like emerging from the Dark Ages. We are no longer serfs toiling to make human flesh grow. It's a new dawn, nature gives way to unnatural selection, Hedonic Darwinism, the weeding out of pleasures that have become old, weak, or stale. (A thousand years from now an anthropologist discovers the bones of the *missionary position* disintegrating in dirt...) Evolution spawned new species of being. Are we not now seeing new species of behavior? Pervolution.

was getting at — “how development towards a greater fulfillment of life,” i.e. evolution, could require the “progress of immorality.” Survival of the perversest.

If you were to take the traditional conception of perversity at its face value, there could indeed be a latent value to deviance. Scientists today worry about whether the planet can continue to sustain life. As population increases, it destroys the very resources for which it makes greater demands. As a result there is a vicious circle between over-

population and global warming, pollution, food and water shortages, loss of natural habitat, and so on. Malthus thought that these could be checked by death, disease, famine, and, on a more personal level, sexual abstinence. But is there not another way in which reproduction can be reigned in?

The sterile forms of sexual depravity also help to protect the planet from the ravages of overpopulation. Their non-reproductivity is eco-friendly. Save a Tree, Eat a Beaver: cunnilingus fights deforestation, the cum shot



is good for the ice caps, you can imagine someone who molests little girls for the sake of the polar bears. If everyone were a pedophile, there would be no population crisis and thus no environmental one either. A kink may often have hideous consequences for an individual — don't minimize the suffering of the disemboweled six-year-old — but it can have unintentionally good consequences for the species. In this very weird sense, Nietzsche was right: the progress of immorality serves the development of life.

(But if sexual immorality is good for the planet, is it immoral? It may be wrong to commit gratuitous violence against a six-year-old, but what if this is just an epiphenomenal form of an otherwise green perversion? Which is more important — the individual or the species? It could well be that, in the future, many perversions will become norms thanks to their ecological correctness. At that point the real perversions will be consciously un-green ones — repropaths having dozens of babies, or freaks who exacer-

perveme, shouts, commands, threats, and gestures are how those children spit them back out.

Or sometimes the perveme is less a hollow than a malignant growth, a tumor in the moral field, a *mor-aloma* like a carcinoma in a tissue sample. Morality seeps through the walls of the perveme but finds itself cut off, isolated. It loses its orientation to the poles of good and bad, it sets up new goods and bads, distorted ones, corrupt, pathogenic. Consider the Gentle Pedo: he will tell you how kind he'll be to your little girl while he molests her. (Oh thanks, you mean you'll rape her in such a way that the surgeon won't have to repair her rectum? That's really kind of you.) Or there is the masochist who undermines the most basic premise of morality, which is that it's wrong to hurt somebody. In masochism, the Golden Rule becomes a black invitation: *do unto me as I would never*

bate the hole in the ozone layer because it excites them to think of a great orifice in the sky.)

**One commenter (HorseHelper)** knew the man who had been fucked to death by a horse. Another posted a link to a video purporting to show the unfortunate act. This remained in the moderation queue while I decided what to do about it. The video made me queasy. It did not show anyone dying and was filmed, according to HorseHelper, on a different occasion. However, it did show a

man being sodomized by a horse. It didn't look or sound pleasurable. In fact, the sight of it was less disturbing than the sound of it, though HorseHelper insisted that the man "was groaning with pleasure — it felt rather good to him, or else, he won't have kept going back, over and over again. Those are also the same noises, he makes, when he's getting fisted or playing with any one of his dildos — one, which is actually longer and thicker, than the horse, you saw in that video clip."

I debated with myself

*do unto others.* How can morality endure where there are individuals who covet such reversals? In a sense, it is not the masochist but morality that suffers in the perveme. It undergoes an existential crisis, a bout of uncertainty, doubt about its own premises and principles.

The perveme's ecology is like the pervert's solipsism, an interior world with its own strange laws. A principle may sound righteous inside the perveme (I love animals). But then it leaks into the moral field and sounds absurd (so you sneak into my barn to fuck my goats?). Meanwhile the judgements that the moral field offers on the perveme are like those that the patriot offers on the defector or the xenophobe on the outsider. They're harsh, unsympathetic, cruel. The perveme, they declare, is immoral. What happens if the pervert hears this scorn and outrage? Maybe it strikes a chord with him. Maybe he

whether to publish the comment containing the video link. It is the only thing in the years I've run PervScan that made me step away from the computer, take a walk, try to clear my head. I sat in a courtyard beside a black glass skyscraper. It was a bright summer day. Doctors were having their lunch beside me. People in business suits hurried by, and I wondered what kinks their suits concealed. Should I approve that link? As a site owner I had concerns about liability, but rationally I could see that these were mini-

mal. I wasn't hosting or distributing bestiality. As an individual I had concerns about the morality of the whole thing. Is it wrong to offer your ass to a horse? What, I wondered, would Kant think? Is it possible to apply the categorical imperative to equestrian sodomy?

The video made me uneasy, but the prospect of censoring it made me uneasy too. I don't endorse what the guy did — after all, it killed him — but, at the same time, in the state where it occurred bestiality wasn't technically illegal. Was it immoral?



reorients himself to the field's poles of good and bad, he agrees with its condemnation of him. Or maybe he disagrees, his perveme is so freaky and complete that he can't see anything wrong with it, a principle that sounded righteous to the field sounds absurd in the perveme. Some perverts will react with the indignation of wrongly punished children. (It's not my fault! A sheep-fucker: "If I did do it, which I'm saying I'm not, that is a sick person, and if I did do it, I'm sick.") Others will relish the outrage of the moral field. For them, as for those who like to be cursed and insulted during sex, vilification only intensifies their pleasure.

Maybe yes, maybe no. Was it immoral to contemplate it, watch the video, analyze it? No. Finally I released the link from the moderation queue. A lively debate ensued. Some commenters were appalled and talked about animal cruelty. Zoerasts responded that the animal was being dealt pleasure, not cruelty. Privately I thought the morality of the thing had less to do with the animal than the man. He was engaging in a risky behavior. It stopped short of being suicide by horse cock, but death by peritonitis was

not an inconceivable outcome.

Is it ok to fuck your way right up to the edge? 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. That's murky. You'd have to answer that question for yourself. I do know, however, that everything changes when your pursuit of pleasure threatens somebody else. There are ways you can justify assault or even murder as hedonic side effects, collateral damage in the

### 30. *Man and Horse*, Video Still, 2005.

The sight is nothing next to the sound. You should have heard it. We all know that cries of pleasure can duplicate the sounds of other extreme human emotions. There are climaxes that sound like somebody being stabbed to death, or struggling with constipation, or receiving really bad news. There are cries, whimpers, grunts, shouts, groans, bestial sounds for which there are no words — to describe these you would have to resort to onomatopoeia. Such was the man being fucked by a horse. In my memory I recall it as something animal — I mean, the man reduced to an animal — and yet suctiony. You ever hear someone plunger a toilet? It was like that but more fundamental, as though the guy had been fucked back into some preverbal evolutionary state, Neanderthal passion. Afterward, I recalled reading the claim in a book on the philosophy of disgust that there is no such thing as a disgusting sound, a sound that could make you nauseous, a sound that could literally induce vomiting. Evidently, I thought, the author had never heard a man fucked by a horse.



### 31. Joseph Duncan, Video Still, Criminal Evidence, 2005.

“Joseph Duncan made movies of himself sexually molesting and raping these children, starting very soon after he slaughtered their older brother, their mother and their mother’s boyfriend. Joseph Duncan made movies of Dylan hanging by his neck from a rope or cord, from a crossbeam in that cabin in Lolo National forest. Joseph Duncan filmed the ongoing hanging of little Dylan, the video shows Duncan bringing him to the brink of death — only to lift him up to regain consciousness and let him hang once more... Duncan getting off on this scene the whole time. Joseph Duncan then choreographed a scene in which he forced the traumatized Shasta to further degrade and harm her half-dead brother by making her drag him by the rope around his neck — through the campfire. Joseph Duncan then murdered Dylan with a shotgun, and used his hatchet on his little body. Joseph Duncan filmed himself forcing Shasta to place her beloved brother’s body parts in a campfire. Later, Joseph Duncan filmed Shasta being forced to pick her brother’s charred body parts out of the cooled ashes of the campfire. They were then placed in a culvert, to be washed out — or so Duncan thought — with the rain.” (Excerpted from a crime blog.)

campaign for jollies: the individual is everything, it’s a Raskolnikov trip, dog eat dog, *my kink über alles*. But that justification belongs to tunnel vision. If you can extract yourself from your own solipsism, you’ll see that the moral boundary of your perveme coincides with the faces, arms, crotches of other people.

**The relations between perversity and morality** are very complicated. I do not want you to think that, in trying to analyze perversity, I condone the actions of Jo-

seph Duncan. I don’t. I feel very clear in my own mind that what he did was wrong — and yet this puts me into a difficult psychological position, because the way he hung a young boy reminds me of the erotic hangings in *Naked Lunch* and other works of William S. Burroughs. How can I repudiate this act in reality when I derive a certain stimulation or pleasure from experiencing it in a work of literature? Is this not the worst form of diletantism?

On one hand, it most certainly is. Look, you’d go watch



a horror movie with delight but then shudder if you saw those cinematic acts transposed to reality. Who wouldn’t? On the other hand, I wonder if this isn’t diletantism exactly but something else. To read the erotic hangings in *Naked Lunch* might be shocking. It might subject you to a new perspective of some sort. But then you know and accept beforehand that one of the functions of literature is to do this to you: open up new perspectives. An author who genuinely shocks is merely fulfilling the mandate of literature.

Conversely, a criminal act might shock, but that is not part of its mandate. To follow a murderer in his awful lust might open up a new perspective, but only at the cost of trapping you in the narrowest of personal pursuits, a twisted image of fulfillment through sociopathic behavior — *my kink über alles*. To contemplate this is not to feel an opening up of perspectives, as in literature, but a closing in, a narrowing, a suffocation. (Which suggests a corollary: to enter into the perversion of others is claustrophobic.)



32. Laurel Nakadate, *Love Hotel*, Video Still, 2004.

“What else is there to say?” the artist told an interviewer. “I went to Japan, I pretended to get fucked in rooms I didn’t belong in, and I came home.” In a sense this is what we all do. Rather than really have sex we only simulate it within our cocoons. Sometimes we rub up against another cocoon, and because that other is simulating sex too, we at least share in a mutual striving. But afterward we lie side by side in our cocoons again, resigned to the impossibility of any real communication. We utter commonplaces (was it good for you?) because at least those are common, i.e. shared. Love is an effort to break through the simulacra, and I wonder if perversity isn’t the opposite: a complete acceptance of existential isolation, a recognition of the futility of Total Communion, a sordid cynicism that says, “All right, we’ll never be two hearts as one, so fuck it, I might as well explore my own weird individuality, elaborate the thread of my desires, undo the knots, see where it leads, why not? You’ll never understand me so I may as well have a go at understanding myself.” Thus perversity is an expression of lust that approaches philosophy, *know thyself* with the presumption that your obsessions will bring you closer to truth and reality than immersion in another will ever.

**To a philosopher the masochist** is a paradox who upholds two contradictory theses about sex. One concedes that sexuality is a pursuit of pleasure. The other asserts that sexuality is a pursuit of pain. Imagine a syllogism ending *ergo pain is pleasure...* It’s enough to make a logician despair, and yet this very riddle appears under another guise in the canon of philosophy. For example, an entire chapter of Edmund Burke’s famous treatise is titled “How Pain Can Be a Cause of Delight.” Was he writing a monograph on

masochism? No, his concern was something else — sublimity.

In philosophy there is a substantial literature on the sublime extending from Longinus to Lyotard. But what does sublimity have to do with masochism? My thought is this. Part of the pleasure in perversity consists in stepping outside the norm — in eluding or exceeding limits. Coincidentally, this is how philosophy speaks of sublimity. Kant says that sublime feelings are aroused by an object “so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a

representation of limitlessness.” Such is not to say that any given desideratum (armpit, amputee, animal) is sublime. Rather, it is the act of organizing the pervene that opens up a perspective, a vista on formlessness. It’s like standing on a precipice. You’re at the edge of normality looking out over a vast terrain of unregulated behavior, Kink Land. In her diary Anaïs Nin reports that Henry Miller tells her: “The first day I saw you, I felt and believed you perverse, decadent. And apart from our personal experience, which is nei-

ther perverse nor decadent, I still feel in you an immense yielding, so that one feels there is no limit with you, to what you might be or do — that is decadence — an absence of boundary — a perverse yielding, limitless in experience.”

In this regard sublimity stands in stark contrast to beauty. “The beautiful in nature,” writes Kant in the *Critique of Judgement*, “is a question of the form of object, and this consists in limitation.” In other words, there is a profound connection between beauty and boundary. The beau-

The image that comes to mind when you contemplate perversity requires pleasure — a creep utilizing some deviant means to get off, a man throwing himself to the ground to lick the toes of a sandal-wearing stranger. If you remove pleasure from the image, if you imagine the man performing the same act without getting off, then it no longer seems perverse but rather odd, perhaps mad.

Obviously pleasure is essential to perversity — and yet this is not a simple physiological phenomenon. People get off licking feet, being gagged, causing others to drink caustic fluids. None of these need culminate in orgasm. Pleasure always accompanies perversion but climax comes and goes. It's epiphenomenal, a side effect more than a goal. After all, an orgasm is an orgasm. The physiology remains the same whether you're fucking the missus or a dog. What changes is cog-

nitive. You *think* your pleasure depends not on orgasm but on the conjunction of orgasm and dog — or, to remove orgasm altogether, on the conjunction of foot and tongue, or on the immobilization of the arms, or on the inducement of nausea. The pervert strives for an arrangement, a perveme, a conceptual model of a physical act, and therefore pleasure in perversity is the way in which a mental image conditions a fleshly affect.

Naturally, pleasure is not equally distributed across the perveme. Take the man/woman/daughter/dog thing. You can't speak (like a utilitarian) of the greatest pleasure for the greatest number of perverts. The man (organizer of the perveme) is pursuing his pleasure. The woman is tolerating it. The daughter is hating it. The dog — is it even capable of an affect that isn't merely physiological? You could create a heat map of the pleasures that cross

capable of, where things could lead, how desires could turn sour. (Sometimes they ricochet back on you. Autoerotic electrocution: guys get their jollies with surge protectors and homemade climax circuits but end up offing themselves.) Such negative potential, such foreboding, is an important part of sublimity. Burke: "the feeling of the sublime is grounded on the impulse towards self-preservation and on fear, i.e., on a pain [...] capable of producing delight; not pleasure but a sort of delightful horror." A delightful horror

— this is the paradoxical affect that stimulates a person who says to himself, I know it's wrong but I'll do it anyway. Horror comes from the cognizance of wrongdoing, delight from transgression of the same. Voluptuous Panic.

(The rapist also attains a sort of sublimity, a limitlessness in his choice of sex objects — Why, they're there for the plucking, like low-hanging fruit. However, the rapist arrives at sublimity in a different way than the pervert. The pervert achieves limitlessness in his desires, but the rapist achieves

thing beautiful but something ugly or low — a foot, a mutt, a corpse. While it may be that we derive pleasure from these, we also derive it from the very fact that choosing them is transgressive. Negatively put, perversity leads desire to the unlovely. Positively put, it carries desire beyond all limits.

There is something very exciting about this. Any pervy little thing you want to do is possible in Kink Land. There is also something scary about it. You don't quite know what you're

the perveme in extensity. It would show solids and voids, points of great intensity and points of zero intensity, little pleasure voids, hedonic hollows. The hollows would correspond to heterogeneities in the perveme. The intensities would belong to the perverts. That's the way the perveme works. It is a stage production choreographed by a degenerate whose only concern is to maximize his gratification. What does he care if a little girl cries? What does he care if his desire to ejaculate in her armpit breaks her parents' hearts? The important thing here is his pleasure. *My kink über alles.*

Does the intensity of pleasure in the perveme correlate to the perveme's perversity? Certainly there is a perviness factor that can increase or decrease. Take a woman — that's not too perverse. Add her daughter — the perversity increases. Add her dog — the perversity

it in his desiderata. The pervert is unconventional in his urges — he yearns to wear angora sweaters or to watch strangers fuck his wife. Conversely, the rapist is conventional in his wants — just gimme a woman — but unconventional in his methods. For the one, pleasure lies in the liberation of abnormal urges. For the other, in the appropriation of normal objects.)

**Boring fucks come in a variety** of forms. You sleep with someone not out of lust but out of pity

or duty. Or you start with excitement but then, in mid-fuck, tire of your partner and feel too embarrassed to leave off. Or you have fucked your partner for so long that it has become rote, like brushing your teeth before bed. Or you have done so much fucking in your life that it's hard to imagine a fuck exciting you much. Call that Sex Machine Syndrome: maybe you can really crank it out, but you also bring the emotions of a machine to the act.

Ironically, nothing reveals the nature of pleasure quite

34. *Beautiful Agony*, Screen Grab from BeautifulAgony.com, 2008.

The fascinating and very elegant site beautifulagony.com features video close-ups of faces in orgasm. Many people find it exciting to watch the facial expressions that their lovers make during orgasm. Superficially, this pleasure in faces is similar to the pleasure in facials. In each case, when you scrunch your eyes and bite your lips or when I ejaculate on your face, I am able to see visible expressions of my sexual efforts. It's like being confronted with my heartbeat on an electrocardiogram: something I had only known through the murkiness of internal sensation is suddenly externalized, objectified, brought back to me through the eyeballs. However, there is a key difference between "beautiful agony" and cum shot. In a facial expression, it is your pleasure on your face. In the facial, it is my pleasure on your face.



increases. In this case, an increase in extensity (more elements in the perveme) correlates with an increase in perverse intensity (*pervensity*). That's not always the case, though. Sometimes it takes a decrease in extensity to push pervensity to a higher magnitude. Take a heterosexual couple. Both want to fuck. Then the woman withdraws into herself, pleasures herself in front of the man, not because he asks for it but because she has every intention of denying him his gratification. She does it to torture him. Ergo the pervensity increases but the extensity decreases, the two elements remain in the perveme but the bonds are broken, the perveme condenses on the woman and leaves the man drifting at the periphery.

On the surface a perveme might appear to be an entirely unpleasurable arrangement — nipple torture — and yet somehow transports of joy compete with zones

like a boring fuck. On the surface, it seems like a contradiction: there you are, disinterested in the act, and yet your body undergoes the same old climax. You could not care less but your genitalia are pushing euphoric shock waves into your body. This is pleasure reduced to its physiological basis: stimulation, blood flow, rhythmic contractions, relaxation. What's missing? The mental quotient, the enthusiasm for a person (love), a thing (fetishism), an arrangement (perversion). In all of these, the mental quotient is greater in

importance than the physical. You can love without orgasm, fetishize without climax, indulge in perversion without tripping the switch on your built-in titillation kit. Fondle the monogrammed napkin: the pleasure is not in your fingers but in your mind.

The boring fuck is therefore the polar opposite of the extreme perversion. The one is all body, the other all brain. What would be interesting would be to see some deviant innovator try to conjoin the two. Nobody fantasizes about boring fucks — so

of boredom and anxiety, micro-ecstasies emerge from repulsion and irritation. Pleasure is essential to perversity, so why does the pervert so often seek pain? Is he a paradoxical being? A synthesizer of contradictions? Pleasure and pain seem to exist on a continuum. Pleasure is at one end, pain at the other — thus a great pleasure involves no pain and a horrible pain involves no pleasure. It's the popular (i.e. unperverted) conception, and you can find it in philosophy too. Epicurus asserted that a state of painlessness is equivalent to the highest possible pleasure. Plainly the philosopher knew no masochists.

Perversion can require the most skillful coordination of pains and pleasures. This has the effect of either bending the pain/pleasure continuum into an impossible shape, like a Möbius strip, or of sundering the two altogether. And wouldn't that really make the most sense?

wouldn't it be perverse to pursue? Or perhaps it would just be paradoxical, since if you desire a boring fuck it can't really be boring or else you wouldn't desire it.

**Does language have a specific** role inside the perveme? If reproduction is the "natural" goal of sexuality, the analogous goal for language is reproduction of meaning — to reproduce my thoughts in your brain. To pervert language would be to undermine this act of reproduction. In Sade, perversion transforms words into commands,

so that it is less a matter of reproducing my meaning in your head than in your body, your posture. You don't need to understand. You need to submit. Words are nothing we share. They belong to me, they're my words. The sadist perverts language by taking ownership of it and thereby rendering communication meaningless. For example, there is the Sadean libertine who obliges a woman to pronounce blasphemies: if she refuses, he blows her brains out and says, "There's one for God"; if she blasphemes, he blows out

Instead of a continuum anchored by pleasure at one pole and pain at the other, there are two continuums: one ranges from pleasure to displeasure; the other, separate, ranges from pain to “dispain.” In the hedonic continuum displeasure is not a pain but a negative value proper to pleasure as such. Have you ever had someone keep blowing you after you’ve ejaculated? There is a moment there where the joy of orgasm gives way to a weird sensation that’s not really painful and might become pleasurable again. But meanwhile it’s something else — displeasure, a negative value on the pleasure continuum. Similarly dispain is an agreeable sensation interior to the algesic continuum. There are “good pains,” like the pinch of a nipple. These are not pleasures because, after all, they hurt, and yet they occupy positive positions on the continuum of pain. (I no longer think of pleasure and pain as being at

opposite ends of a seesaw. They are more like levels on an equalizer.)

Thus sexual perversity — with its seemingly paradoxical fusions of pleasure and pain — indicates the non-continuity of pleasure and pain. As a result, it also shows the non-complementarity of sadism and masochism. These are not the two halves of a clinical entity, no more than pleasure and pain are the two halves of a sensory continuum. “The sadist and the masochist might well be enacting separate dramas, each complete in itself, with different sets of characters and no possibility of communication between them, either from inside or outside.” (Deleuze) For example, there is a sadistic relish in pain that is quite different than the masochistic enjoyment of it. The sadist welcomes pain because he is able to rise above it. Pain enables him to express his apathy toward



35. Meghan Boody, *Psyche Adorned* (From the Series *Psyche and Smut*), Lightjet Print, 2000.

For years a postcard of *Psyche Adorned* served as the bookmark in my beaten paperback of *Lolita*. A gallery had mailed it to me and I had tucked it into Nabokov’s book. “I am not concerned with so-called ‘sex’ at all,” Nabokov made Humbert Humbert say. “Anybody can imagine those elements of animality. A greater endeavor lures me on: to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets.” The pervert, paradoxically, is not obsessed with sex. Obsession implies an acceptance of the thing as it is. “I’m obsessed with x” is to say that x is, to me, perfect. The pervert, to the contrary, inhabits a world of imperfection. Sex can always be different or better. His concern is not x but x+n (what if we add a dog to the mix?), x\*n (twins!), x-n (what if I gag you and therefore subtract from the fullness of the sensorium? Or what if we remove orgasm altogether? Not to say that we won’t orgasm but that, as perverts, we refuse to think of orgasm as the “natural” terminus of sexuality). Perversion is permutation, and the pervert is less a sexual being than a sexual becoming — he who subjects sex to a variety of becomings.





36. Raymond Pettibon, *The Observable World*, Drawing, 1985.

“Sex is everywhere all the time and you can’t escape,” the caption says. “Shower with a friend.” The woman attempts to cover herself. Her face seems to shout, “Get away!” The caption replies by saying that sex is ubiquitous, inevitable, you might as well give in to it, have casual sex in the bathroom. But if this is a relevant thesis — sex is everywhere all the time, and “we don’t stop talking about sex” either — there remains an alternative other than resignation. There are little punctures in sexuality, black holes, and it is possible to venture into these. You can escape from sexuality by plunging into perversion. (Sexuality has two edges: on one side, there is the virginal, where the asexual becomes sexual; on the other side, the perverse, where the sexual touches once again on the asexual but in a new way — hence fetishes, deorgasmification, etc.)

pain. The sadist says, “I am a continuum of pleasure. For me, the continuum of pain does not exist as an affect but as something more like a special effect — I do not feel it but I see it in your writhing and I hear it in your screams.” Conversely, the “woman torturer of masochism cannot be sadistic precisely because she is *in* the masochistic situation, she is an integral part of it, a realization of the masochistic fantasy. She belongs in the masochistic world, not in the sense that she has the same tastes as her victim, but because her ‘sadism’ is of a kind never found in the sadist; it is as it were the double or the reflection of masochism.” (Deleuze)

her brains and says, “There’s one for the devil.”

Or in Nabokov, perversion transforms words into a kind of stuttering. Maneuvering Lolita’s legs across his lap, Humbert Humbert stammers out a mangled ditty: “O my Carmen, my little Carmen, something, something, those something nights, and the stars, and the cars, and the bars, and the barmen... The stars that sparkled, and the cars that parkled, and the bars, and the barmen...” If perversion interrupts the flow from foreplay

to orgasm by inserting an armpit, a leather mask, or a spanking, it also interrupts the discursive flow, chops it into discrete units like a cut-up — the something, something nights, or the Sadean cut-up consisting of commands, syllogisms, and moans placed side by side. And of course there are gaps between these units, silences in which perversion swallows up language altogether, “A fustigator quietly and slowly saws off all four limbs, one after the other.” (*120 Days of Sodom*)



One day I was walking through Central Park and passed by a girl speaking on her cell phone. I overheard her say that she was thinking about getting a job in Latin America, perhaps teaching English. Meanwhile, she said, she had been enjoying her time in New York because it was enabling her to learn a lot about herself.

I walked away with this snippet of random information reverberating in my ear. The girl's identity quest had struck me as quaint, like a child's enthusiasm for a magic trick whose secret is obvious to an adult. That old philosophical imperative to know thyself — suddenly I felt as though I'd achieved it. I was sober and cold, like an assassin enacting a well-rehearsed plan for murder. I can't say that I have achieved perfect self-knowledge. I'm not a philosopher or a Buddhist monk. But at the same time, I do think I've arrived at a utilitarian approximation

**When I was about nine years** old I read a story in the newspaper. A man, a professional wrestler, smashed his wife in the head with a frying pan. Loud screams caused neighbors to call 911. When police arrived, they found the man sitting on the ground behind his house trailer. He was eating a portion of his wife's intestine. The article did not say how he extracted it from her body, but since he was a wrestler I imagined that he had simply punched a fist into her stomach, reached right into her guts, gripped the intes-

tine in his powerful hand, and yanked it out.

The story made an incredible impression on me. It opened a wormhole between the world of my childhood and another world of inscrutable impulses — madness, violence, and cannibalism. I couldn't comprehend the story and yet, at the same time, I liked to think about it. I cut it out of the newspaper, folded it up, and kept it in a little wallet that I carried around, much the same as other boys carried around baseball cards. Sometimes

of self-understanding. I'm not seeking myself or trying to figure out who I am. I know, more or less, who I am. (This is not self-congratulatory, since self-knowledge implies that you know your warts as well as your beauty marks.) At this juncture it seems less important to learn about myself than to take what I have and do what I can with it.

At the same time, a certain philosophicality of temperament makes it impossible for me to accept the complacency implied by this functional self-understanding. My skepticism trumps my utilitarianism. Isn't there always something to learn about oneself? Aside from the fact that life presents challenges which elicit strengths and weaknesses you never knew you had, I find myself reintroducing opacity into my self-understanding by means of perverse acts. It is as though I say to myself,

I would take it out and re-read it. I could understand the argument and the fight. Boys fight too. But the grisly image of the man sitting in some grass chewing his wife's intestine? I had no template for this. Even the violence of animals failed to compare. There was something weirdly intimate about it, the man literally ingesting his wife, but at the same time it was brutal, extreme, beyond the pale. I doubted that any of the adults around me could say, as they did of sex, "I'll explain when you're old enough to understand." How

old would you have to be, I wondered, to understand something like this? A thousand or a million years old?

One day at school the teacher gathered us together for show and tell. Other kids hauled out their bric-a-brac. Probably I forgot to bring something, so I reached for the article in my wallet. I handed it to the teacher. She began to read the first sentence or two to the class — I think it was standard newspaper fare, "Police were called today to investigate a domestic dispute..." Then her

37. Andy Warhol, *Blow Job*, Film Still, 1963.

The film begins abruptly, without titles. For slightly more than half an hour the immobile camera shows a young man's face. You become aware of its slightest fluctuations in expression: a twitch, a glance, the scratch of a nose, a look of pleasure (or is that boredom?). Lit from above, sometimes the face moves into deep shadow, the eyes become black holes. Suddenly the young man lights a cigarette and you realize he must have climaxed. But what is it exactly that you have just witnessed? A microanalysis of pleasure? Weirdly, it is almost difficult to process what you have actually seen because your mind is busy filling in everything that the film excludes. It has no sound, color, or credits. You have not seen another person, a mouth, a penis, semen. "There is both a missed space in the film (the space of the supposed fellatio) and a missed time (by the time the cigarette is lit, 'it' is already over)." (Linda Williams, *Porn Studies*) And yet these voids are precisely what distinguish the film. Whereas pornography gives you pleasure by overloading your eyeballs with genital close-ups and cum shots, *Blow Job* does the opposite: it withholds and thereby causes you not to enjoy but to think.



voice trailed off. She got very quiet. She read ahead. Children shifted in their seats. A clock ticked. She folded the article back into its well-worn creases, carefully, as though she hoped to put back the horror that unfolding it had released. "I don't think we should share that today," she said, returning it to me.

This censorship made me popular in the hallways afterward. Little boys and girls clamored to read and then giggle about this loathsome event. Probably I enjoyed the attention, but deep

down inside I had been struck by a disparity. The gruesome image had inspired much thought and reflection in me. But in this teacher whom I took to be worldly and wise, it inspired silence, unease, uncertainty, an abdication of authority. It exposed a pocket of incomprehension, a lacuna in understanding, a puncture where the fathomable drained off into the unfathomable. I was fascinated. This awful thing in reality somehow corresponded to a black hole in the brain. I felt like a child — I was a child — who discovers

the mouth to a cave. I wanted to climb right in and explore.

Which is to say that depravity was, to me, the entrance to philosophy. On the gates to his academy Plato had inscribed "Let no one who is ignorant of geometry enter here." In my mind those same gates were inscribed with sex crimes and psychopathologies. I felt as though I had discovered, in this quotidian bit of journalism, the portal to a new kind of thought. Perversionism. It would use the abhorrent and the abnormal as points of departure for ab-

straction. It would also perform the reverse operation — carry abstraction into the abhorrent and abnormal, into a nighttime of concepts, the sleep of reason. Kant had studied the bounds of "proper" reason from the inside, from within a pocket of light, the *lumen naturale*, but I would move beyond those bounds, probe the shadows and the low-rent districts where the brain goes slumming, where the intellect ends up in the arms of a whore improvising an ontology of perversion, the *metaphysical fuck*.

**“I know what I am. But what if I precipitate a deliberate change into the conditions and circumstances that make me what I am? What will I be if I consciously do something that’s, well, not me?”**

Perversity can be an instrument in the quest for self-knowledge, a protocol for performing experiments in selfhood. However, rather than allow you to wallow in quiet self-contemplation, perversity hurls you into the unknown, takes you somewhere new, puts you to the test. It can be a philosophy, a weird existentialism that, in contrast to Sartre’s emphasis on taking responsibility for your life, posits the irresponsible act as a venue of self-knowledge. Perversionism. If you’re an unthinking brute who simulates a perverse act in a paroxysm of mad lust, you won’t grok this. But if you bring a mind and a sensibility to your endeavors, then you recognize that the intentional-

**Maybe it’s all wrong to try to** take a philosophical approach to perversion. Philosophy is love — love of wisdom, as the etymology has it. The history of philosophy is populated with lovers, thousands of years of them, wannabe wise men bringing chocolates and flowers to truth. It’s wonderful and it’s grand, really it is, but is it appropriate to the understanding of the subterranean and the smutty? Romeo is out of place in the perveme, just as the pervert is out of place in the romance. (What a comedy. The pervert could con-

ceal himself in the romance, nobody would find him out until he asks his sweetheart to swaddle him in an adult diaper. Conversely, Romeo would stand out like a sore thumb in the perveme. “Jesus,” the pervert would think, “what is this sap doing in my fetish? I want to palpate him with surgical gloves and he’s prattling on about the moon and the stars and rainbows and unicorns...”)

A philosopher who sets himself the task of understanding perversion may well be putting himself into a position of danger.

ity of the perveme is completed by the opportunities for enlightenment that it leaves in its wake. This is as true of non-sexual perversity — deviant life choices, deliberate pursuits of failure, stubborn refusals of happiness — as it is of sexual perversity. They end in illumination, a light bulb hanging over a bed stained with body fluids.

Of course, that may be an ideal that perversity often fails to attain. In the stead of insight there are rationalizations deformed by impromptu lusts, cruelties committed by half-lucid zombies, atrocities in eternal night. Sometimes experiments in selfhood go desperately wrong. The conditions were ill-conceived, the controls went haywire, you end up bringing back the dead — Frankenstein! — but then the dead go on a rampage and kick your pretentious ass all over the lab. It happens. You want to break new ground in the epistemology of incest but

Lovers become perverts but perverts rarely become lovers. It’s a weird asymmetry, just as it is easy to fall off a cliff but difficult to climb back up. The philosopher begins nobly enough but — out of love — finds himself identifying with his subject matter. It’s like a bad joke. What do you get when you cross a philosopher and a pervert? One hybrid will betray love, become a pervosopher, a corrupter of wisdom, the sort who perverts the sense of Kant. Another will retain love but betray wisdom, become a philovert,

besot himself with the deviation. Imagine Kant as a compulsive masturbator.

These are not puns but dangers for thinking. How can a thinker elude them? I really don’t know. I wish I had the answer but I don’t. It’s the sort of thing you have to figure out for yourself. But I do know that a philosophy will only be worth what you risk for it. “What you have achieved cannot mean more to others than it does to you. Whatever it has cost you, that’s what they’ll pay.” (Wittgenstein) It makes for

only manage to hurt someone you love. It's a bitch and the only self-knowledge you gain is bitter as hemlock. Those are the risks you take, and those are the perils that lend both terror and sublimity to the perverse.

Given that experiments in perversity often fail spectacularly, given the fact that perversity accounts for some truly abhorrent human behavior, it may be white-washing to ennoble deviance with shades of enlightenment. It may be wrong-minded to think that, when perversity is usually portrayed as an expression of the body (animal lusts unrestrained by civility) or the unconscious (weird urges malformed in the black box of the psyche), it is possible to elevate it into a philosophical doctrine, the calculated use of depravity in the pursuit of self-knowledge. It may well be that this is not a proper concept — perversionism = perversity + illumination — but an aber-

38. Joel-Peter Witkin, *Testicle Stretch with the Possibility of a Crushed Face*, Photograph, 1982.

I try not to look at this image with my own eyes. My eyes react to the sight of pain, danger, self-injury. But my brain mediates this response, gives me another set of eyes that enables me to see something else. After all, why would someone put himself in this baroque setup if there weren't some freakish pleasure in it? "The testicle-stretch-man wasn't in great pain," said Witkin to an interviewer, "he was in a very erotic, sensuous condition." Indeed. We think it is perfectly natural when a lover does some crazy thing out of passion. Why, I wonder, must bizarre behavior be confined to love? Why can it not extend to sex too? When I look at the testicle-stretch man with my inner eye, I see that perversity is much more than just a sterile act. Like the lover's impulsiveness, it is also a little mad. It's like a man accosting you to say, "Hello, I'm Napoleon." Hmm, yes you are, and in sex, it's like someone accosting you to say, "Hello, rather than fuck you, I'd like to rig a pulley to my balls and stretch them out with weights that hang precariously over my face." Thus perversion is the sensualist's flirtation with madness.

rant conjunction of otherwise incompatible tendencies in the mind of a single individual, a one-man perversity think tank.



I wanted to write a work of philosophy about sexual perversion, but this raised an obvious problem. What constitutes a philosophical as opposed to, say, a psychological or anthropological analysis? I wanted to define perversion but this seemed to require that I first define philosophy. Fuck. This was going to be a big job. I didn't want to fall into an infinite regress. I didn't want to paralyze myself. I set aside every definition of philosophy that I'd ever encountered. I figured the smart thing would be to start with a sort of artificial ignorance, like Descartes. Keep it simple, stupid. I asked myself how the man in the street would define philosophy. "It's a pursuit of truth," he said in my head.

It's not a bad definition. Some eminent philosophers have made similar proposals. But as it turns out, this was a rotten place for me to begin. Whenever some-

a dangerous game. If you really want to understand, you have to play chicken with derangement. You don't have to fuck yourself with a lizard in order to formulate a philosophy of perversion. The danger is interior to thought itself. You can begin with the noblest of intentions, a desire to shed light where there is darkness, but then your torch goes out and you find yourself lost in the very darkness you hoped to dispel. In a psychiatry journal — I wish I'd photocopied it — I once read the case history of a philosopher who

went insane. He was working on a metaphysical system in which the existence of the world depended on his left testicle. Clearly he was the type for whom the sordid vector becomes a downward spiral.

**All we have are the definitions** of normal men, or men posing as normal. What is the madman's definition of madness? What is the pervert's definition of perversion? If you hear the normal definition of perversion, you can object, "Well, the definer is normal, how can he possibly understand

body offers me a truth, I have a gut impulse to reject it. The moment you say "it is true that..." is the moment I want to sock you in the mouth. Fuck you and your truths. It may be a consequence of having lived in a cynical age, but the only verities I can trust are the ones at which I arrive myself. Any others might just be a covert attempt to sell hemorrhoid cream.

This poses a terrible difficulty for a philosopher. Presuming that others are like me — that others have knee-jerk reactions against impartations of truth — how could I possibly compose a credible work of philosophy? I could construct an argument as tight as a spinster's thighs and you'd reject it precisely because it's tight. Success on a logical plane would lead to failure on another. Hmm... I wondered if I shouldn't reverse the whole process. If I were to fail deliberately on the logical plane,

the perverse?" If you hear the perverse definition of perversion, you can object, "Well, that's self-referential, like the Liar Paradox. The normal definition of perversion is typically non-reproductive sexuality. But the pervert, out of perversity, might define it as something else entirely — pink flowers arranged in a black leather boot, the smell of axle grease, just a thing I do, a hobby, coprophagia." And how would the pervert define normality? Could he understand it? Maybe he would define normality as a brick, or as

a milk truck, or as a single note that everybody sings in unison, aaaaaahhhhhh. Well, what good is that? Does that help me to understand? I have the normal man's definition of the pervert, why not the pervert's definition of the normal man?

These are the sort of methodological difficulties you run into. Do I define myself as one or the other? If I declare my perversity, do you dismiss everything I say as propaganda? If I admit my normality — I'm a regular guy, you know, I shop at The

would I succeed on another? Hell, it works for religions. The worse their logic, the greater their adherents.

At the same time, I couldn't just dispense with truth. It's not impossible for falsity to lead to truth — a lie can speak volumes — but I wanted to say something true about perversion, something that hadn't been said before, something that would illuminate perversion in a philosophical way. To this end, my approach had to be devious. I did not want to convince you of any truth. That is the job of propaganda. What I wanted was to tempt you with the possibility of a truth. This would set you thinking, and perhaps you would arrive at truths parallel (on your side of the reef of solipsism) to mine.

But how can a philosophy be made over into a temptation? How does the thinker's demonstration become the seducer's diary? Ironically, this is a question of

artifice — of style. Truth may be thought in the depths but it is deployed on the surface. Recognizing this, I wanted to achieve two things: first was to excite, to agitate, to inspire; second was to do this without remaining wholly on the surface, among the throngs of words. I wanted to return you to the depths somehow, your depths, shut off the flow of my own bullshit into your ear. Perhaps I would leave echoes — *perveme, pervensity, perversion-ism* — but at least you'd have a little solitude to think them over.

To this end, I tried to make a philosophical use of precipitous variations in density — solids and voids.

The solids are agglomerations of concepts, perspectives, insights. They push collage from style down into thought itself. I am not Hegel. You won't proceed from thesis to antithesis and then on to synthesis. Nobody is

39. Francesca Woodman, *Some Disordered Interior Geometries* (Detail), Artist's Book, 1981.

Is there a line separating normality from abnormality? Or a line leading from perversion to madness? (Lunatics do ostensibly pervy things — take off their clothes in public, masturbate like idiots, make advances on family members and healthcare personnel — and perverts often do insane things, risk everything for a ten-second spurt of fluid.) Diagram the perveme. Psychiatry speaks of the Oedipal triangle. What about the necrophiliac line segment (extending from perv to corpse)? The zoophilic square (man, woman, daughter, dog)? Pervemic pentagrams, orgiastic octagons, fuckgrids, n-dimensional matrices of the obscene... "Whether as a moral kink or a crooked twist given to the will, vice has often the appearance of a curvature of the soul." (Bergson) Perversion is a curve, a sordid vector, and you can trace its arc down inside yourself. The difficulty is not to get caught in your own interior geometries, not to suffocate in solipsism but to find a line back to the outside — not to normality, exactly, but to functionality, i.e. more life.



genuinely convinced by the synthesis anyway. Here the argument takes a structure more like thesis, antithesis, well, fuck knows, let's try another thesis, or let's see what happens when two syntheses are juxtaposed like fragments of newsprint. Maybe you won't end up in a quiet state of conviction. ("You're right, that's perversion, now I understand.") Maybe you run the risk of ending in confusion. ("I just don't get it. What is perversion exactly?") But hopefully you will experience a state of turbulence, excitement, stimulation, hyperstimulation, concepts roiling in the brain, terms colliding into each other like particles in a solution — Brownian motion in the gray matter — and these will lead you to conceive for yourself the notions I would otherwise have hoped to impart.

(Some techniques I used and perhaps you can use too. For example, several times I read through this

Gap just like you — then what are my credentials for speaking of perversion? Am I not doomed to misunderstand? Or maybe it's not so black and white. Maybe I'm a pervert sometimes and a normal guy other times. Maybe I oscillate like a flanger between the two. But then how do you know which one is writing? Some of this could be a pervert's definition of perversion, some of it a normal man's definition — and, hell, why not, maybe some of this really is a pervert's definition of normality, which he perversely causes to

resemble perversity. How can you know?

Ideally I wish I could occupy a negative space between the two. I wish I were ignorant. Then I could learn about perversion and perhaps learn the truth. Instead I'm full of shards. I have been bombed by pornography and the shrapnel has stuck in my flesh. I am full of vaginas and other men's sperm. I've been strafed by Sade, carpet-bombed by literature, a bullet is lodged in my skull and it's leaking particles from the history of philosophy. The only way

while pretending that I was no longer myself but one of the people mentioned in the text. It's like method acting except that it's proofreading, and it enabled me to step outside the linear flow of my own outlook — to extend collage into the process of conceptualization. Another technique was deliberately to write sometimes when I was tired or sleepy. Often writers are looking for a voice, but what I wanted was to lose mine a little, get underneath it, get closer to the discourse that occurs in my brain when in anartistic moments. I thought I might get closer to truth by snatching ideas from the clutches of dream.)

While theorists of collage often focus on the vibrations and resonances that occur between elements placed in proximity, I think that something very important also happens in the gaps between juxtapositions. To read

I can approach perversion is by vivisection, dismantling myself, pulling bits of sex and thought from my flesh, letting them drop, plop plop plop, then what do you get?

If I'm not able to begin with a tabula rasa, perhaps I'm able to end there. The pervert aims not just at pleasure but at satiation, which is to say a state of exhaustion, emptiness, and I think that thinking about a problem is sort of the same. What I arrive at is not an understanding of the problem but rather a

state where the problem no longer troubles me. I may even be dumber at the finish than I was at the beginning because I've lost the drive to nail it down. The pervert's conception of perversity? The normal man's conception? I don't know, perversity is what it is, or since it's perverse maybe perversity is what it isn't. All I can tell you is that I've gotten it out of my system, poured it all out, emptied my brain. I have a new hole there now, it's dark and it's quiet and I very much look forward to poking around in it.

is to subordinate yourself, at least temporarily, to the thoughts of another. So what happens when the writer deliberately introduces a gap or a void? Your thoughts break free for a space. That's really where philosophy happens. Reading Spinoza is good for your brain — it's exercise, strengthening, conditioning. But you're not doing philosophy until you're in the gap, on your own, trying out your wings, thinking for yourself. It's a leap into the void, like the Yves Klein photograph.

This helps to explain why I have worked so hard not just to compose a text but to puncture it with holes. For example, illustrations would have added to the book. I hope you google some of the images to see them for yourself. Knowing full well that I wasn't going to reproduce a single one, I put a lot of effort into thinking about them, selecting them, creating blanks to signify their absence. My goal was to endow them with a certain intensity — can a void have an intensity? holes gleaming with their nothingness, absences sparkling with non-being — so you would realize, consciously or not, that you really were missing something.

Ironically, the text has a visual organization, it threatens to become a sort of imagery, and yet images in the book edge toward nothingness. It's a vortex. Sex drains off in asexual holes, breaches in understanding become openings for thought, the sordid vector spirals down into an abyss. I may not have convinced you of anything, but I don't think that's my job anyway. The task of a philosopher is not to persuade. The task of a philosopher is like that of a homicidal lover. He should take you right up to the edge, charming you the whole while with his observations — Perversity? Why, it's just the other side of this here chasm — then give you a last sudden shove.