

Book Description

On the threshold of forever changing what it means to be human, we have entered the Age of Perversion, an era in which we are becoming more like our machines and they more like us. *The Age of Perversion: Technology of Desire in Psychoanalysis and Culture* explores the sea changes occurring in sexual and social life, made possible by the ongoing technological revolution. Addiction to the Internet, human cohabitation with life-size, technologically-enhanced love dolls, DIY body hacking, widespread government surveillance, unbridled corporate corruption, militarization of the police, S&M gone mainstream, and extreme reality TV are all manifestations of a perverse society.

Until now theories of perversion have limited their scope of inquiry to sexual behavior and personal trauma. The authors of this book widen that inquiry to include the social sphere, and they find perversion's existential roots in the human experience. Perversion involves transgression, illusion, and dehumanization in challenging boundaries in every sphere of life, but it offers creative as well as destructive possibilities.

This volume presents several clinical cases taken from Dr. Knafo's private practice, including a man who lived with and loved a sex doll, a woman who wanted to be a Barbie doll, a man who used the Internet to seduce minors, an Internet sex addict, and a man who "catfished" to lure sex partners. Also examined are cases involving widespread social perversion in large corporations, the mental health care industry, and even the government. George Orwell's novel *1984* is presented as a nearly perfect model of the malignant perverse state.

In considering the continued impact of technology on society, the authors discuss changes already taking place in psychotherapy that make use of technology and speculate about what the future may hold for a species moving toward its own mechanization.

From the Preface

In this fascinating psychological exploration the authors analyse what they call "the crooked path"—the way that perversity turns away from what the mainstream turns towards. And they do so with particular reference to technology, noting how a plethora of amazing personal and social possibilities evolve from the 21st century's technological revolution which, through technologies such as virtual reality and sex robots, will ultimately change what it means to be human. With their approach the authors probe towards the future the thesis of Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together*, one of my favourite books of the present decade, in which she analyses what we *have* become through our use of technology. Here Knafo and Lo Bosco analyse what we *will* become and why.

As the boundary blurs between humanity and technology, we humans are becoming ever more tempted, subconsciously, to form emotional attachments to our electronic devices which already, within a couple of seemingly brief decades, have come to seem

indispensable to our daily lives. The effects on our humanity, the progressive integration of technology into every aspect of human life, the creation and progression of seductive virtual realities, all point to a culture which the authors classify as perverse.

Psychoanalyst Danielle Knafo's exposé of the rationale behind some of her patients' love and devotion to their sex dolls and machines is on the one hand poignant, but on the other it points to what I believe will be the biggest benefit to society of the advent of sex robots, namely, that they will fill a void in the lives of the many, many millions who cannot form satisfactory loving and sexual relationships with other humans.

David Levy, Author, AI Expert and Robotist; Author, *Love and Sex with Robots*

Additional Endorsements:

Knafo and LoBosco have written a veritable atlas of human perversion, which includes, among its delights and surprises, the perverse practices of the NSA, the APA, and the Vatican. Knafo, a renowned analyst, takes us into her consulting room where she works with men who marry dolls and women desperate to look like dolls while Lo Bosco illuminates the perversity of various corporate practices. The authors leave the reader thinking differently not only about sexual acts but also about the perverse strategies we all use to violate boundaries, toy with the forbidden, and deny death. This disturbing and remarkable book makes it clear that the very way we define our humanity is changing before our eyes.

---Deborah Anna Luepnitz, Ph.D., Author, *Schopenhauer's Porcupines: Intimacy and its Dilemmas*.

Through their exquisite clinical/sociocultural observations, Knafo and Lo Bosco render virtual, robotic relations frighteningly sensible. With depth and breadth, they broaden the gender spectrum to include dolls, robots, gynoids and androids. They describe perverse forms of relating as psychogenetically adaptive, salvation-seeking efforts while warning that the capacity to damage social life is profound. The authors also make important connections between techno-perversion and trafficking, genocidal atrocities and black markets for organs, guns, and drugs. If there is a redemptive quality to this disturbing, dark subject, it is the authors' ability to find meaning and method in these dangerous acts. They have crafted an insightful, disturbingly relevant book that all clinicians should read.

Andrea Celenza, Ph.D., Author, *Erotic Revelations: Clinical Applications and Perverse Scenarios*

The Age of Perversion courageously explores the impact of technology on human life— sex dolls, electronic devices, robots, the Internet, and more. Based both on broad research and in depth clinical investigation, the book has several merits. It acquaints the reader with an astonishing range of perversions that have only become possible through new technologies. It explores the social side of perversion and examines how perversion has entered mainstream culture. Finally, it shows how psychoanalytic theory helps us understand the seemingly weird and unintelligible in human and humane terms.

Carlo Strenger, Ph.D., Author, *The Fear of Insignificance: Searching for Meaning in the Twenty-First Century* and *Freud's Legacy in the Global Era*

Danielle Knafo and Rocco Lo Bosco have produced a book that is equally frightening and enlightening. By considering the boundary between the human and the machine, they touch on issues in the philosophy of science, ethics, sociology and social psychology as well as clinical psychoanalysis. Their synthesis of these fields and their combination of depth and breadth make theirs a book well worth reading.

In a unique combination of daring, scholarship and compassion, the authors enter the world of a future where the line between the human and the machine is blurred so badly, it is merely smudge on the horizon. While considering the difference between love and perversion they give the reader a sense of how technology provides a substitute for human love that can satisfy some men more than interaction with another person could do. In her case studies, Dr. Knafo dares to raise the question of whether we should regard this as pathology or as the best some people can do in finding satisfaction in their otherwise isolated and lonely lives.

In contrast to Knafo's psychoanalytic view of the use of dolls as sexual partners, this book contains a sociological view of sexual and aggressive aspects of perversion provided by the authors. The world of no feeling but mastery and of no communication but constant chatter predicted by Orwell provides a framework for the scary projections of a future in which machines think better than humans and humans exist to serve machines. The possibility of such a world is chilling. So the authors warn readers against what the readers have little or no power to avoid or control.

--

Arlene Kramer Richards, Ed.D., Author, "A Fresh Look at Perversions" and *The Perverse Transference*

The Age of Perversion is a riveting (pun intended!) existential psychodynamic account of perversion in the 21st century. Building on Freud's pioneering insights -- fortified by wide-ranging interdisciplinary scholarship, clinical case studies, and empirical inquiry -- Knafo and Lo Bosco explain how perversity, for better and worse, is the inevitable manifestation of self-conscious human animals protesting their corporeality and finitude: desperately striving to maintain a sense of meaning and value in a sexually saturated, narcissistically inflated, commercially

inundated, technologically permeated, rapidly changing cultural milieu. Playful, profound, and provocative; a must read."-Sheldon Solomon, Author, *The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life*