

## Mud Society

August 16, 2021:

At the end of every ideology there is total collapse. Currently we are no doubt witnessing such a collapse. But this time it is a collapse of a hegemonic ideology, a worldview which cunningly beat out every other only to then ruthlessly invade every macroscopic corner of the globe, every microscopic nook and cranny of our minds. It should come as no surprise then that the collapse of globalized neoliberal capitalism would be tightly bound with the collapse of the globe itself. It was prophesied for over 130 years, first by economists and then by scientists, and now we need no more prophets because we are watching the climate apocalypse unfold outside our windows.

On Wikipedia, Wet and Messy (WAM) fetishism is described almost exclusively in terms of tactile sensation— that the fetish might be more linked to the feeling of having the body's surface and its clothes completely soiled in mud or pudding or mess, than it is to the object. To be sure, WAM fetishism is not about tactile sensation— if this were the case we might rather refer to WAM as a kink as opposed to a fetish. The original concept of fetish was concerned primarily with the totem; some sacred object with special powers symbolizing a group or idea(1). This original conception, the non-erotic fetish, could be thought of as existing in the realm of the symbolic. The symbol manifesting in physical reality; a material diagram of signification. One object coming to stand for, or signify, another. This anthropological signifier / signified object relation would soon come to be challenged by Freud, who rather likened fetishism with an act ostensibly similar to that of signification, however substantively entirely distinct from it; the *substitution*. The distinctions between the sign and the substitute are subtle but important. Substitution is an errant process within the symbolic formation; it occurs when one signifier is replaced by another, while the signified remains the same.

At this point we can start to see that covering oneself in copious amounts of mud or dirt does not represent some other idea, thing, or desire, but more pertinently this soiling of the body and clothes is a coping mechanism, a substitution for confronting some other forbidden desire, some horrible truth. The irony is that the mud fetishist, in unconscious response to some impossible or incompatible sexual desire, substitutes their repressed desire with an act which is itself appropriately rich with meaning. We might here start to think of the expression “to bury one's head in the sand,” itself a form of denial. In being confronted with some desire which is so incompatible with the subject's concept of self, the mud fetishist enters the mud; hiding themselves from the uncomfortable real by diving into it head first. The mud fetishist substitutes a difficult implication which may threaten to ‘dirty’ their ego, with physical dirt itself. In this way the WAM fetishist is less engaged with substitution than with obscuration, with ‘camouflage’. In the same way that army camouflage is meant to disappear into the foliage, the mud fetishist tries to disappear into the difficult and dirty reality by mirroring it, covering himself in mud so that no other can see his filthy desire through the opaque camouflaged veneer of material filth.

The sexual deviancy of sullyng oneself in mud presents an individual who has substituted, not some *thing* as their object of desire, but rather the state of filth itself. There is of course the additional psychoanalytic divergence of the transgression of filth. But of more interest is the fetishist's mirroring of the way that western liberal democracies have responded to the multitude of crises which they themselves are responsible for, such as the climate apocalypse or the rise of reactionary political formations.

If we extrapolate these individual psychological concepts to a mass psychology some interesting things begin to happen. First we might consider the present climate collapse as one such 'dirty' reality. The fetishist soils himself with the earth, mirroring the 'soiling' of the planet, making oneself dirty so as to not need make his object clean. As we are now entering the language of essences, I should make a point to speak of the WAM fetishist's primary objective, a 'literal' playing out of Freud's original conception of the death instinct. Freud initially described the death drive as the organism's fundamental desire for equilibrium. The example he gives is that of the inorganic, death; complete material stasis; that once in the ground dead, there are no instincts to satisfy, no biological processes, no dynamism. His implications are such that the death instinct is the desire to be totally satisfied, which is to be in the ground, to become a rock, dirt, mud, which is to have attained equilibrium, to be dead.

The mud fetishist is uniquely engaged with the literal text of Freud. More than any systems of representation or substitution; the deviance of the mud fetishist is that the impossible object, the incompatible desire is replaced with itself, albeit more sensually.

If, in rather contrived fashion, we take up metaphor as a tactic for understanding the relevance of WAM fetishism to the present moment, then we will find our uncomfortable reality at every turn. So unpleasant is this reality that we choose to bury our heads in the mud, opting to relish in the unpleasant truth itself. We have known for over 100 years the ecological effects of fossil fuel emissions. The uncomfortable reality is so present, so glaringly obvious, so completely dire that we prefer to hide ourselves from implication by totally 'soiling' ourselves with the very 'filth' which generates this incompatible truth. We substitute confronting our impossible desire by piling on more impossible desire.

We do this by continuing to fly pears from southern Chile to the Northeast of the United States, we do this when people in Florida buy kiwis shipped en masse from New Zealand, we do this by cheaply flying on massive jets between two cities already linked by rail, we do this by vacationing in a Hydra shrouded in wildfire smoke, we do this by continuing to drive petrol combustion automobiles, we do this by continuing to subsidize unsustainable farming practices, by continuing to eat as much beef as we possibly can because we all know the uncomfortable reality that we try to obscure or camouflage by becoming. The incompatible object of our desire could be understood as a bittersweet trope of capitalist realism; if it is between capitalism and the end of the world, we are choosing apocalypse. The horrid truth, the impossible desire is not hidden or obscured from us, instead it is dived into, it is smeared on our western bodies, the tactile sensation of immutability, we wallow in our incompatible desire to imagine a different world than one presently decimated by late unbridled capital. Our hysterical society today does not deny any of these incompatible desires, these wretched truths, instead it substitutes them with themselves, ecstatically; with *more*.

This is a moment of concretized decadence, reified entropy; the contradictions are viscous. We are mud fetishists, rejoicing in our inseparable identification with our own mess. We are mud fetishists, distracted by our attempt to reach climax through the mess we continue to make. We are mud fetishists in quicksand, demanding an erotic experience from the very thing that is killing us.