

**FETISH... FAD... FASHION...**

[Original pictures by courtesy of **FRANKO B.**]

This weekend, London's Olympia hosts the worlds biggest Fetish Fair. It's the first time such an event has happened in this country... Now there are more fetish clubs, bars, shops and phone lines than ever. Even a popular fetish movie - **PREACHING TO THE PERVERTED...** Three months ago, **QX** covered the queer fetish scene. Since then, this Fashionable Fetish Fad keeps growing from strength to strength.

*Nothing is less certain today than sex, behind the liberation of its discourse. And nothing today is less certain than desire, behind the proliferation of its images.*

**SEDUCTION** – Jean Baudrillard (N.W.P.,1990)

Fetish role-playing is a game of seduction. All meaning rests on the surface, in the outfits and props that display a symbolic order. What lies outside of appearance is not important. Surface signs are celebratory, enabling (within the rules of the game) harmless expression and exploration of problematic human traits. In other situations these expressions could be negative or destructive. Pain, domination, control, machismo, power – are among the darker, uncertain aspects of being human. It's like the rampant display of Nationalism, at the Last Night of the Proms. Usually we should feel intimidated by this display of flag waving and anthems. But confined to this playful arena, it is cathartic, not threatening.

Anthropological fetishism, pertains to primal rites, taboo breaking, and mythic or magical rituals, stretching back to the dawn of civilisation. But this century, psychological application has dominated. The word 'fetishism' has been much ameliorated.

Alfred Binet, the 19th century psychologist, first used the word. Accordingly, a fetishist is one whose initial sexual encounter becomes associated with an object. Subsequently, the fetishist can only achieve sexual satisfaction, through incorporating this object.

Karl Marx famously borrowed the term, making it a central platform in his critique of capitalist political economy. Commodity Fetishism describes the veneration which industrial society gives the product. It follows the alienation of the worker, from the product of his labour, after being exploited by lack of control over the means of production... Phew!

Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) and Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) pioneered sex study. Each in turn, heaped negative characteristics onto 'fetishism', classifying it as perversion.

Sigmund Freud elaborated the most fascinating and convoluted MISunderstanding of fetishism. First, Freud postulated that during childhood, the fetishist had desired someone and been rejected. But, an object had been noticed, "accidentally", in relation to the desired person. Through association, this object replaces the person, in the unconscious (of the fetishist). It becomes the object of desire. For example, feet might be fetishised, because (during childhood) you wanted some affection from your old man, so he gave you a good kicking! Then Freud changed his mind. The fetish (object) compensates for anxiety, arising from a man's castration complex (apparently, boys feel threatened, when they realise women don't have dicks). Actually, Freud's theories give us amazing insight into Freud's personality.

Against this pseudo scientific and intellectual onslaught, fetishists had little to fall back on. Sade and Masoch, are woefully inadequate - anachronistic tirades and second rate novels. The association of sympathetic magic with

fetishism, led fetishists to choose the worst of all options – black magician and Satanist, Alistaire Crowley...

Crowley, was bisexual, a hedonist and egotist, who amusingly provoked moral indignation from polite society. He engineered self-publicising scandals between WWI&II. Crowley became leader of a covert magic society, and claimed to be evil personified. Enticing superstitious rich kids into his group, he performed pompous, ritualistic orgies, using sex and drugs to summon evil forces... What a monstrous prank! But for one problem... Crowley wasn't joking - he believed his own bullshit!

That's not to say fetishism lacks 'magic'. For fetishists, it clearly has a joyful magic. This magic casts an unbroken spell, connecting a cornucopia of epochs and civilisations. But the point is that it's inexplicable. One problem with Crowley, is his arrogance and audacity in thinking he could master it.

Many fetishists consumed Crowley's voluminous platitudes. One example is gay underground filmmaker Kenneth Anger, whose *SCORPIO RISING*, remains a masterpiece for fetishising masculinity.

## **RUBBER FETISH**

Since the rubber mackintosh and wellies in the 1920's, rubber fetishists have been growing in number. Traditionally, partners were found through esoteric contact advertisements. Excitement is generated from its look and sensuous feel. Symbolic association suggests black is evil, a masked dominant is executioner, boots for mastery. Outfits are genderless – offering the user both male and female fantasy roles. In a typical game, the sub plays a criminal, unaware of his crime, but punished by his dom while seeking help. (Very Franz Kafka!)

For rubber nights, bounce into **GUMMI** (second Sunday, monthly) @ Central Station

## **SADOMASOCHISM and LEATHER**

The skin texture of leather makes it the sensual favourite with fetishists. SM role-play involves dominance given in trust and received voluntarily, according to a strictly pre-defined economy of pain. (So don't try this at home, kids!) Pain becomes a symbol of sacrifice and submission to divine authority. 'Magic', follows the master's ability to induce ecstatic states of pleasure – physical and mental, in the consenting slave. A leather head-mask causes controlled deprivation, severing a slave from his sensory environment. Handcuffs, chains or ropes, restrain normal movement. Your dog collar is symbolic of obsequious total submission to another (like a wedding ring). Algoragnia is uncommon among gays (frequent in straights and movies). Whips play a symbolic role, in the hand of authority.

## **PIERCING and TATTOOS**

With cultural development and modernisation, customary piercing almost died-out. It remained endemic to cultures, least affected by change. However, after centuries of maintaining the illusion, the myth of “progress” is cracking in the developed world. Multiple piercing and tattoos have become extremely popular. For some, its appeal is purely aesthetic. But others see piercing as ritualistic marking, celebrating a stage of personal change. It is also sexual, an object penetrating and becoming an extension of the body, opening new erogenous zones.

If being stabbed with gigantic needles is your poison, you can try **INTO YOU**, 144 St. John Street, London, EC1: 0171 253 5085

## **FANTASY**

Role playing fantasies are essential to the compulsive fetishist. Often more important than props and outfits (because fantasy can compensate). Clear-cut antinomies like dom/sub, butch/fem, master/slave, define the boundaries. Although roles are allocated, and a plot discussed beforehand, it's common for fetishist couples to vacillate roles between games. Plots can be enormously complex, involving cross-gender roles. Sometimes scripts are ritualistically adhered to, others are apt to inspire spontaneity. Roles often character and ridicule, figures

commonly associated with wider social authority, like judges and cops.

## **SIGNS AND MEANING**

Each fetish has a different sub-culture, with its own esoteric language or sign system, known to its initiates. Outfits and props play an important role – both in finding partners and engaging in sexual fantasies. Clones are the iconoclasts in this tradition. Marlon Brando inspired black, leather motorcycle jackets and trousers, in *THE WILD ONE*. The machismo was intensified by subsequent bike gangs. A peaked cap on a top guy suggests austere authority. Chaps on a bottom guy manifest total availability. Key rings and chains, on the left or right hip pocket display a preference for top or bottom roles (likewise cockrings on jacket epaulets). A coloured handkerchief, flying from his rear hip pocket, gave the clone a touch of elegant sophistication in the Dandy tradition – the flaneur of his day! More importantly, colours communicate sexual tastes: red is FF, brown is scatology, yellow is water sports (piss encompasses animal territorial marking)... An older method used to find fetish partners, was coded, classified advertisements. CP is corporal punishment, Roman Showers is vomit, CB is cock and balls torture...

## **THE HOIST**

If you got whip-lashed, to mark the positive benefits of a club, this one would probably kill you. *THE HOIST*, is everything you could want from a regular fetish club. At the entrance, Kurt welcomes you. At first glance you may mistake this truculent hunk, for the door! Definitely one you want to be on the right side of. The building is perfect. A cavernous vault under railway arches. Interior design is suitably enhancing, sort of minimalist, high-tech, seediness. Seediness here, being purely atmospheric – not an excuse for sloppy housework. Actually, it's meticulously clean – like a gallows full of slaves has been at work! Strategically placed red spot lights, cast arabesque shadow plays... Dark enough for anonymity, light enough to see whom you're cruising. Follow the sleek bar along one wall. At the rear, a raised wooden platform facilitates cruising and voyeurism, above and below. Swinging from the platform, a huge, industrial hoist - what else? Overall the ambience reflects a concentration on space, rather than fetish ornamentation.

On Saturday nights, it's packed and heavin'. But efficient air conditioning keeps you cool. The crowd is surprisingly mixed, for a robust leather/rubber/uniform dress code. You can wear jeans, counter to most fetish clubs (which ban this most fetishised leg-ware). Apart from the usual, clapped-out, moustached, beer guts, you'll find lots of young fetishists. Assertive Techno sounds, back'tunnels' and changing rooms, complete the horny, cruisy atmosphere. No wonder its reputation has spread throughout Europe's fetish scene.

Friday-Sunday @ Railway Arch, 47c South Lambeth Road, SW8: 0171 735 9972

## **BACKSTREET**

Veteran, East End, leather membership club (not obligatory). You must wear a leather jacket to gain admittance. But if you're mugged en-route, the charming patron may choose to lend you a jacket, with the politeness of loaning a bow tie at Clarriages. Step inside and back in time, to a classic, original leather bar, unchanged for centuries... Beneath the hanging emporium of overhead fetish kitsch, lines of immaculate, leather-uniformed warriors stand at attention, fixing you under their gaze, as you mince along the catwalk. There's a dark playpen - behind steel cages and oil drums, a quieter bar area to chat, and even rows of those good old benches – especially designed to maximise discomfort. Let's hope it stays that way!

Thursday-Sunday @ Wentworth Mews, London, E3: 0181 980 8557

## **BLACKSMITHS**

This low-key, intimate fetish weekly, is cheap and cheerful. A sleazy, atmospheric basement hung with the obligatory camouflage netting. Dress code is relaxed (although no jeans) discipline is lax. The emphasis is towards biker leathers, but as ever at this fun-time venue, whatever you can remove quickest will do. Attracting comfortable numbers, neither overcrowded nor dead.

Monday @ CENTRAL STATION, King's Cross

### **DEVIANT**

Masters and Slaves theme for men-only. As ever, the ex-Mildmay crowd, offer a self-styled, fantasy floorshow, with their instant dungeon kit. This includes serious racks, benches and other Gothic style torture furniture – and enough rope to hang yourself! Could do with larger crowd. At least attendees take their fetish clobber seriously. Monday @ H2o, Balls Pond Road, N1

### **BARRACKS**

Recently started, leather, rubber, skinhead, boot-boy and uniform night. Saturday @ THE ORANGE,

### **BOOTCAMP**

Preferred dress code is uniform, leather, jocks, and boots. Wednesday @ SUBSTATION SOUTH.

The **FIST** is dead... Unfortunately, Suzie Krueger's unbeatable, monthly fetish club is closed seeking new premises.

### **EXSPECTATIONS** – Clobber Shopper

Fetish gear shops are currently booming. In well-established shops, like **REULATION** or **EXPECTATIONS**, you'll find high-quality workmanship, a wide-range of choice, and often prices are more reasonable than your **EXPECTATIONS**. Their exquisitely designed catalogue comes in a kinky vinyl folder (you'll want to wear). It's available by post (as are the contents) for £5. Flicking through, for example, they sell original American Patrolman leather jackets – complete with fur collar and trimmings, for £215. Last year, I paid £300 for one in Silverman's Army Surplus. And that was the cheapest I could find! Their range of sartorial rubber and leather pouch jockstraps, will probably outlast your next three cotton Calvin equivalents, but ranging in price from £10 to £17, are substantially cheaper... And much more sensual around parts other jocks just don't reach!  
@ 75 Great Eastern Street, London, EC2: 0171 739 0292 / Internet: [www.expectations.co.uk](http://www.expectations.co.uk)

### **LAST WORDS...**

Ironically, Freud inspired more radical notions of fetishism. The avant-garde Surrealists, used fetishism in their art, realising its potential to shock and disturb. This peaked with Marcel Duchamp's **READY-MADE**. (A urinal the artist took from a factory production line, and signed. It remains a fetishised modern art treasure.)

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, argued Freud's work to its apotheosis, rejecting notions of normality. Lacan insists that we are all fetishists, because the desiring gaze objectifies, or reduces everything and everyone to an object.

**Chris Barber**