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Down the Pan: New Directions in the Sociology of Dirt

Introduction: Dirty Scholarship and Dirty Lives: Explorations in Bodies and Belonging

What is dirt? What is it to be dirty? What processes are required to transition from a state of dirtiness to cleanliness? Are such transitions always possible? By what processes? And who decides? This volume of new research sets out to explore the ways in which dirtiness is experienced by those who are labelled dirty and those who manage and process the waste of others. In bringing together scholars, practitioners and activists from sociology, anthropology, geography, urban planning, philosophy and education, we examine how dirt is experienced, made sense of, processed and resisted.

Belonging is central to the analyses of dirt presented here: questions of who is welcome in what spaces emerge through discussion not only of those who feel their material or symbolic dirtiness renders them unwelcome in certain spaces but also those charged with maintaining boundaries between clean and dirty and transitioning objects and spaces from a condition of dirt to a condition of cleanliness. Belonging is thus an active rather than a passive process: work is done to shore up boundaries, erect new ones, and occasionally break them down. Belonging may appear on one side of a binary with exclusion as its opposite, as clean can be polarised against dirt. Yet belonging is processual, it requires work, and so does cleanliness. Thus a processual view runs in various ways through the work brought together here. This process may be a historical one of increasing access to public space through public toilet provision over the course of decades, the everyday repetitive work of cleaning a home, or processing waste into new, productive (and symbolically 'clean') materialities.

This introductory chapter explores the marginalisation of dirt within the academy, examining some of the key ways in which dirt has been understood and explained, dwelling on the tensions between dirt as material substance and dirt as symbolic

category or categorial outlier, before introducing the individual contributions and some of the threads that weave between them.

Why Dirt?

Dirt, rubbish, detritus, bodily waste – all these things have a history of marginalisation within the academy. In 2002, Dutton, Seth and Gandhi defended their decision to dedicate a special issue of *Postcolonial Studies* to the toilet, despite the Call for Papers resulting in a deluge of responses both “inappropriately condemnatory” and “inappropriately celebratory” – inappropriate, they felt, because they turned on the apparent “shock value” of the subject. In the introduction to their 2009 edited volume on toilets and gender, Gershenson and Penner, describe similar outrage. And in asking himself, “Is there some good philosophical reason [to examine dirt] beyond freak appeal?” (2018, p. 4), Lagerspetz shows that these concerns persist. Are they – are we, in undertaking this project – merely seeking to shock, to sensationalise, titillate or otherwise trade on the ‘freak[ish]’ qualities of filth?

That we and they even need to ask this question suggests otherwise. All of us have been ‘caught short’ and needed the toilet when none was available. Think how much more likely this is to happen to a taxi driver (Norén, 2010), disabled (Wiseman, this volume) or homeless (Davis, 1998) person, and it rapidly becomes apparent that the serious examination of unequal public toilet access is far from mere frippery or desire to shock. The short walk from spotless shopping mall toilets to waterways filled with human excrement can be found in almost every developing world city, as Terreni-Brown (2014; this volume) shows us for Kampala, and if you have made such a journey you will have seen, smelt and likely felt under your feet the inequalities of access, health, privacy and dignity encoded into the unequal distribution of technologies of waste disposal. If you have ever unblocked a plughole filled with someone else’s hair, cleaned excremental stains from a toilet bowl or simply washed up again, you will know the differing affective terrains of removing your own and someone else’s bodily exuvia, the tedium and repetition of stemming

an unstemmable tide against domestic dirt, and the lines of race, gender and class along with the distribution of mess-making and mess-removing run.

These, then, are far from neutral topics. We do not discuss them merely to shock, or provide an intellectual spectacle. We discuss them because when it is *you* who is carrying a bloody tampon in your pocket because yet again there is no space for it in the disposal bin or when it is *you* who must tell your friends you can't join them in that pub because it doesn't have a toilet accessible to you, you do not wish to discuss these things to shock. You want to shout them from the rooftops because you understand – you embody – their profound injustice.

And shout we must. Although things are beginning to change and the last decade has seen a welcome burgeoning of work on trash, toilets and filth (see for example Blumenthal, 2014; Gershenson and Penner (eds), 2009; Haslam, 2012; Molotch and Norén (eds), 2010) nonetheless dirt has remained on the sidelines of academe. Referring specifically to the humanities but as applicable to the social sciences, Dutton et al defend their attention to the toilet against the accusation that they are part of the “the sorry transition from Shakespeare to shit”, and explain that they are not “attempting to launch some defacing crusade against the endangered purity of the ‘pure’ humanities” (2002, p. 139, p. 140).

To talk of dirt, of leakages, to talk of excrement and waste is to threaten the ‘endangered purity’ of the academy. Such an idea rests on a division between what the proper subjects of scholarly enquiry are, and what they are not. And despite the myriad forms of Othering, denigrating and marginalising that occur in and through dirt and its containment, it still falls on the wrong side of the divide. A decade after Dutton et al's defence of the toilet, in introducing their edited volume on dirt in geography Campkin and Cox could still be found worrying that dirt is “hardly the reified substance of conventional academic enquiry” (2012, p. 3), and Gershenson and Penner go further, explaining that,

“The outraged attacks on [their Call for Papers for an edited volume on gender and public toilets] must be seen as both an attempt to police the boundaries of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable within both academia and society at large and an effort to ensure that certain things remain “in their place” – unspeakable – or only spoken about in a certain fashion. Most of those who objected to our project believe that the mere mention of the toilets, with its invocation of the body, gender and sexual, contaminates the purity of academia” (Gershenson and Penner 2009, p. 3).

Why is this? For philosopher Olli Lagerspetz, it is a matter of ontology. For Lagerspetz, scholastic thought is concerned with that which is real; therefore, what counts as ‘real’ shapes what counts as appropriate objects of scholastic thought. Tracing back to Plato, he argues that concern with ‘form’ and with *telos* (the essence and purpose of things) left no place for dirt because dirt is that which adheres to and contaminates things and thus detracts from, rather than forming part of an entity’s ‘form’ and *telos*. This is mirrored in the “outraged” respondent to Gershenson and Penner’s CFP who asked, “Has Aristotelian philosophy now given way to scholarly discourses on toilet bowls, outhouse designs and architecture?” (2009, pp. 2-3).

A second key moment for Lagerspetz in the ontological neglect of dirt came with the rise of experimental science in the European Renaissance and a newly emergent distinction between nature ‘out there’ existing independent of human observation and subjective understandings of the world dependent on human perception. He argues that the former was and is understood to be ‘real’ in a way the latter cannot be. Given that dirt is fundamentally social (with different ideas about what counts as dirty in different societies, at different historical moments in different societies and even between genders, classes and even individuals within a single society) it cannot exist independent of human perception and thus falls outside increasingly stringent parameters of the ‘real’ and thus appropriate scholastic work.

Feminist scholars, by contrast, have taken a different tack (see, for example, Beasley and Bacchi, 2000; Grosz, 1994; Longhurst, 2000; Wahidin, 2019). Some, following Elias (1978), argue that there has been an increased division between forms of conduct appropriate to the public and private spheres, and that some aspects of social life have been relegated to the lower status realm of the private. This sphere has become the one where bathing, cleaning, excreting and the like belong. Van Krieken argues that within this bifurcation, these leaky, messy activities have been increasingly “removed behind the scenes of social life” (1998, p. 96). This can be read in conjunction with Goffman’s frontstage/backstage binary (Goffman, 1959) where the social life of academic enquiry has long been found only frontstage.

For much feminist research, this public/private binary has entailed a coding of the public sphere as masculine, rational and cognitive and the private sphere as feminine, bodily and emotional. Reading Lagerspetz’s discussion of ontology through a feminist lens it becomes possible to see the high value placed within and beyond philosophy and experimental sciences on the rational in gendered terms (although this is absolutely not part of Lagerspetz’s analysis). That which is the preserve of men is that which is worthy of study. Gershenson and Penner’s take on the hostility towards their project from both within and without the academy, is that their critics are nostalgic for Lagerspetz’s ‘real’ world: “a prefeminist and pre-postmodern era when idealist academic enquiries prevailed” (2009, p. 3). If Lagerspetz is right, then priority has been given to certain ways of answering questions. Thus a gendered reading of Lagerspetz flags up that the high value placed upon the ‘real’ within academic research is in fact not about what is real and what is not, but what counts as ‘real’ when human action is abstracted and that shifts in recent decades away from an exclusive orientation towards “idealist academic enquiries” can provide deeply and profoundly unsettling. This volume, then aspires to contribute to challenging the ontological claims of the likes of Lagerspetz, when they result in boundarying acceptable enquiry.

The contributors herein refuse to let dirt, bodies and toilets remain “in their place”, out of sight in both polite and academic conversation. Each chapter calls out in its

attention to the dirty the relegation of the “unspeakable” Other – that which, if spoken, risks “contaminat[ing] the purity of academia”. The neglect of dirt, filth and detritus is no mere accident of history: it is the “double burden” (Moffat and Pickering, this volume) of dirt research – that which is dirty must be processed and rendered invisible but so too must the processes themselves remain invisible.

What is Dirt?

Dirt Management and the ‘Civilising’ Process

While often peripheral, nonetheless dirt has featured in various guises in the works of key thinkers, and shaped the ways in which subject is approached. Already briefly mentioned is Norbert Elias’ *The Civilising Process* (1978). His history traces the co-evolution of bodily comportment, expression of emotion and forms of speech becoming increasingly privatised reinforcing one another and leading elite European society from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century in a particular direction. That direction was one of ever-more refinement, but also one of an ever-widening division between public and private. Of particular interest to us here is that matters of menstruation, urination, defecation, childbirth, butchery, cooking and the like – matters of bodies, particular female bodies, and bodies that leak and expel – were increasingly located in the private sphere, and rendered increasingly invisible within public space and public life. Thus the management of bodily dirt came to belong behind closed doors, and away from the gaze of others. Dirt in general, but particularly related to the body, was to be masked or hidden within the most private parts of the home.

This work has taken two key directions in toilet studies: towards a focus on body boundary management as a site of distinction and on the gendering of the bifurcation of private and public spheres. This first is a trajectory discussed by the likes of Jonathan Frykman (1987) and Stallybrass and White (1986), but perhaps elaborated at greatest length and in greatest detail by David Inglis in *A Sociological History of Excretory Experience: Defacatory Manners and Toiletry Technology* (2001).

Dirt and Distinction

Inglis brings Bourdieu's concept of distinction to bear on Elias's civilising process. Bourdieu developed the concept of distinction in response to the then-traditional idea that taste reflects individual preference, arguing instead that there are "economic and social determinants of tastes" (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 95) and that distinctions are made on the basis of those tastes and everyday practices. Critically, distinction emerges in acts of consumption, whether they are performed in order to be seen or not (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 730). Inglis applies this analysis of consumption and taste to excretory practices and attitudes to examine the ways in which excretory practices operated as a site of distinction.

He notes that Elias took as his materials the etiquette guides and court regulations of European elites, who had sufficiently similar access to the resources to develop, demand and utilise technologies that facilitated increased excretory privacy (WCs, indoor plumbing, space to build a room solely for excretion and so on). By looking at excretory experience *across classes* over the same period, Inglis brought in to the picture inequalities of access to waste disposal, and those who were not able to embody or enact ideals of body boundary management. As the upper classes became increasingly clean of skin and clothes, increasingly able to urinate and defecate away from others and in designated closed spaces, the continuance of dirty skin, dirty clothes and open excretion emerged as a site of distinction. It is through this process of distinction in bodily hygiene that the hitherto 'poor' or 'working classes' became 'the Great Unwashed' in the nineteenth century¹. In the hands of Inglis and others, Elias' linear trajectory fragments: a shared set of social rules, but unequal capacity to enact them.

¹ The phrase 'the Great Unwashed' was originally coined by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1830, before going on to be the name of Thomas Wright's popular book on the working class in Victorian England in 1868, thus cementing this association between cleanliness and class. Even today, it is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "People who are not usually in a clean state, regarded collectively; the 'lower classes'".

Dirt maintains the same sorts of properties as within the civilising process: it is muck, filth and bodily excretions adhering to skin, clothes and hair; it is the management of snot, farts, menstrual blood, urine and faeces. It is material but also social. The material substances of dirt may have remained the same but how they came to be understood changed profoundly. Dirt interwove between that which marred your clothes and skin and the practices that put them there (manual labour, outdoor work) together with the failure of practices to remove them. That both the practices that minimised exposure to and ensured hasty removal of dirt were unequally available enacts hygiene as a site of class (and other forms of) distinction.

This refrain of dirt as distinction has been further explored in relation to race, migration and its intersections with gender and class. This emerges, for example, in Suellen Hoy's 1996 history of cleaning in the United States of America. She documents how, among other things, European immigrants were taught that enacting a particular vision of cleanliness was "a route to citizenship, to becoming American" (1996, p. 87). Americanization programmes for European immigrants taught 'good' hygiene as early as they began teaching English, while the social conditions in which the majority of immigrants lived made such expectations an unacknowledged fiction. Similarly African-Americans' great migration to the urban north in the wake of the Civil War were extolled to aspire towards and enact this vision of cleanliness, and were similarly hampered in their capacity to do so by their living conditions.

McClintock (1994) has taken this focus on reform and examined it in relation to soap and the British Empire. "From the outset", McClintock tells us, "soap took shape as a technology of social purification, inextricably entwined with the semiotics of imperial racism and class denigration" (1994, p. 212). In line with Burke (1996), McClintock shows how colonised subjects were framed as Other by their relationship to 'dirt' and their cleaning practices, and how efforts to bring 'civilisation' to colonised peoples were bound up in efforts to improve these practices, and thus their relationship to 'dirt'. Looking at contemporary soap adverts in South Africa, Ally (2013) show how even now South African whites extol black South Africans to adopt

their standards (i.e. their contingently developed practices) of hygiene, even when “white colonists depend on those same ‘dirty’ heathen blacks to keep themselves Christianly clean” through their use of black South Africans as the domestic workers who clean their clothes and homes (2013, p. 324).

In contrast to work focused on distinction and access to technology (as present in the works of Frykman (1987), Stallybrass and White (1986) or Inglis (2000)), these works examined cleanliness as a site of distinction *and reform*. Attempts to reform and civilise through colonial encounter or through ‘Americanization’ programmes were predicated upon ‘saving’ “‘dirty’ heathen blacks” (Ally, 2013, p. 324) through exposure to white cleanliness. White cleanliness in these setting depended upon difference to – distinction from – the racialised and hygienic Other through efforts to bring these practices into line.

This Othering through reform ran along not only raced, but also classed lines: just as Edwin Chadwick’s mid-nineteenth century proposed sewage system beneath London was designed to both improve health and promote “orderly behaviour”, so the emergence of the bathhouse in the same period sought to inculcate not only clean skin but also the inevitable moral reorientations that would follow (including, according to reformers of the day, greater cleanliness of the home, a disinclination towards drunkenness, and increased punctuality and general productivity) (Crook, 2006, pp. 25-26). Middle class reformers of this period sought to remake the poor as well as the racialised Other in their own disciplinary, moral and hygienic image. Thus as attitudes and technologies changed in Europe and the USA, so dirt became a site of both distinction and reform.

Public Life, Private Dirt

A second thread focuses less on progress, civilisation and reform than on the making and maintenance of a public/private binary. Elias traces a pattern in which over time there was an increased bifurcation between those activities appropriate for public spaces and those private, and some appropriate only for that most private space: the bathroom. In his Foucauldian analysis of the British Victorian bathhouse, Crook

(2006) highlights that entry into the bathhouse was voluntary, indeed the Victorian poor were required to pay for the privilege of cultivating their own appreciation of privacy: it was not imposed from above. Once inside, “the Great Unwashed” splashed in communal swimming baths but, significantly, learned to value and understand as normal their 30 minutes alone in a single-occupancy bathing cubicle.

This division between public and private space (and appropriate conduct in respect of these) has been read by many feminists through a lens of gender. This gendering of the public sphere as male, and the private sphere as female is one that has been commented on numerous times. It gains weight, at least in the context of this discussion, when combined with attention to the body. Many feminist body scholars have located this neglected within a hierarchised binary of male/female, mind/body, public/private (e.g. Beasley and Bacchi, 2000; Bacchi and Beasley, 2002; Grosz, 1994; Longhurst, 2000). By emphasising bodily control in public and moving “bodily functions” or responses to the “call of nature” to not only the home but the most privatised back regions of the home, those whose gender is defined by its bodiliness, by its leakiness come to be equally ‘naturally’ located within the private sphere. And that gender is female. Thus, for many feminist scholars, the ‘civilising’ process becomes one whereby women have become associated with an increasingly invisible private sphere, their gender defined by bodiliness and the domestic (and thus not with intellect, rationality or the mind).

The move to bring the body and dirt into public view, into scholarly scrutiny and debate is to revalorise the female. The myriad, at times conflicting, enactments of this is beyond the scope of this Introduction but empirical research focused on the body has worked to both demonstrate the worth of work in this area and expose the ways in which these interlocking binaries exist to the detriment of all genders. Empirical research has exposed the fiction of the male body as hard, bounded and rational and the female as soft, leaky and emotive: Longhurst (2000) conveys this in her exploration of men’s use of the bathroom in New Zealand, and in addition conveys the affective burden this imaginary places on men. Feminist toiletologists such as Clara Greed (this volume; Greed, 2003; Ramster, Greed and Bichard, 2018;

see also Birchard, 2015; Penner, 2013) have worked tirelessly over recent decades to position gendered parity of access to public toilets as a serious political issue. They argue that until it is understood as a 'real' problem, solutions are unlikely to be forthcoming, and lack of provision signals to women not only symbolically but through their aching bladders that they do not belong in public spaces. And the same is often true of civic spaces, the architecture of which were long designed with only able-bodied, adult men's needs in mind. In taking toilets as a site of scholarly research, these feminist researchers have been advocating for a reassessment of male/female, hard/soft, public/private binaries and for reform of the consequences of these binaries in urban design.

Menstrual scholars and activists such as Natalie Moffat (this volume) and Chella Quint (2017; this volume) show that this battle for equal female access to public and civic spaces is far from won, while disability scholars open up new fronts by documenting the ways in which material infrastructure limit disabled people's access to the public space, their own 'bladder's leash' reminding them that their correct location is within the home, symbolically feminising them – and indeed, it is only in recent years that disabled public toilets have stopped being primarily found within the women's toilets, at least in the United Kingdom (Kitchin and Law, 2001; Wiseman, this volume).

The civilising process, the trajectory towards greater distinction between public and private and the appropriate activities and forms of conduct for each sphere tells a story about dirt: that bodies are inescapably dirty (or at least a source of a particular sort of dirt that cannot be bypassed or avoided); that when bodily exuviae must be encountered (in sex, in excretion, in farting or managing snot) this should be as privatised as possible, ideally in a private room (be that bedroom, bathroom or outhouse) within the home. And that the provision of private spaces for the public management of exuviae carries political weight. If civic buildings were built with only men's toilets because the only people who used them at the time of building were men, this makes them difficult spaces for women to remain in for any amount of time. If civic buildings were built with only toilets for able-bodied people because the

only people who used them at the time of building were able-bodied, this makes them difficult spaces for disabled people to remain in for any amount of time. The marginal property of research into dirt, bodies and toilets carries serious political ramifications: The discomfort of a fit-to-burst bladder is as political as it is sensory and sends the message to non-male, non-able bodied: You do not belong.

Dirt Management and Histories of Contagion

However, as Elizabeth Shove (2003) reminds us the civilising process is just one kind of historical story. There are others we can tell ourselves to make sense of shifting ideas about dirt. The most common of these is a tale of scientific progress. It is, like the civilising process, a tale of a particular places, of European thought and practice, but unlike the civilising process, it does not tell of a smooth trajectory in a single direction; this tale happens in fits and starts, usually in three chapters. The first talks of dirt in the context of humoral understandings of health, the second, miasma, the third, microbes.

Humoral ideas of bodily wellbeing were based on the existence of the four humours of blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm, which should ideally remain in balance in the body; an imbalance in humours was a prompt for intervention. Particular actions risked threatening this delicate balance, and according to Vigarello's delightful history of cleanliness in France (Vigarello, 1988), during the sixteenth century, bathing was such a site of danger. In this time and place the skin was understood as porous and a route through which dirt and contagion could enter the body. This meant that bathing was usually discouraged, but laundry important: clothes were worn tight to the skin to protect the pores, water a site of contagion.

Over time humoral ideas of bodily wellbeing and accompanying ideas about risk and contagion came to be supplanted with the idea of miasma. Miasma refers to the "bad air" that rose from rotting and decaying material, identifiable by its bad smell. As Corbin (1986) notes in his historical analysis of smell in France, miasma was a complex and contested scientific concept, but also a fatal one – he provides multiple accounts of individuals dying after opening up cemeteries, on ships, in courtrooms

after prisoners brought in and so forth. Miasma was a contested theory, but one aimed at a significant social reality: after contact with often foul-smelling air, people became sick and sometimes died.

Whereas in a previous era stoppered pores and tight clothes offered effective protection against contagion, now minimising contact with foul smelling air was inimical to good health. This meant the development of new individual strategies based on avoidance of areas filled with decaying matter (easier for some classes than others); but is also bound up with the early origins of public health. Civic reformers sought to protect the poor against miasma through strategies to manage decaying matter, minimise air stagnation and encourage air flow. It also meant that ideas about personal cleanliness changed, and Corbin traces a trajectory from the use of strong, animal smells such as musk to overpower – both aesthetically and miasmatically – dangerous smells to an aromatic aesthetic based on floral scents to minimal artificial individual odour as theories of miasma began to give way and, he argues, the concept of the individual became more firmly entrenched in European thought. To be clean was not to smell sweet but increasingly to smell of nothing at all (see also Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994; Shove, 2003).

With the arrival of germ theory in the nineteenth century, however, dirt took on a new, potentially terrifying dimension. Too small to be seen by the naked eye, an absence of visible filth, an absence of “bad smells” no longer signalled an absence of dirt – germs, these new harbingers of contagion, could be there, ready to enter your body even if you could not see them. Danger could be anywhere, and a spotless appearance no longer reliably equated to an absence of dirt, an absence of contagion-risk. This produced a new form of linkage between dirt and morality, and as Shove summarises,

“If germs cause disease and if they can be killed by scrupulous hygiene, it is reasonable to interpret the visitation of illness not as an accident of fate but an indication of domestic failure and lax standards” (2003, p. 87).

Today, cleaning products found on supermarket shelves routinely promise to 'kill 99.9% of all known germs', and in their wake a new discourse is emerging about the perils of killing domestic germs: perhaps newer, more potent ones will emerge in their place, or even the cleaning products themselves become the site of danger (Klass, 2017; Gabbatis, 2018). Perhaps in cleaning with these products a person is not clean enough, and should do more; perhaps they are too clean, killing off the benign bacteria and clearing the way for the truly harmful. We cannot tell just by looking.

These two narratives tell stories of change over time. But 'progress' is encountered differently in them. The civilising process is a complex interweaving of the high level political and the quotidian but that essentially shows progress moving in a single direction. A tale of scientific progress is marked by a series of paradigm shifts, of new ideas supplanting (and occasionally sitting alongside) old ones. As Latour (1988) discusses in relation to the emergence and acceptance of germ theory, when new ideas emerge they are not straightforwardly accepted as the new truth of the world: they have to be accepted as ideas (a profoundly social encounter), and from there appropriate ways of doing that fit with these ideas must be identified and adopted. As Latour notes, germ theory was relatively readily accepted because the practices required of dirt-management within the context of germ theory were sufficiently similar to those of miasma-based theories of contagion. However this process of adoption is not always straightforward: many took to Victorian public baths with enthusiasm, but some did not (Crook, 2006); contemporary Chilean and British doers of domestic work do so with varying levels of enthusiasm and attention (Alvaraz, this volume; Pink, 2005); and rejecting dominant hygienic practices can play a key role in countercultural sub-culture movements (Pickering, 2010). And of course, not everyone has equal access to the technologies that facilitate such choices in dirt management.

"Factual Dirt" and "Matter out of Place"

Some have taken a very different approach to changes in domestic hygienic practice. Shove (2003) argues that "concepts of cleanliness are of surprisingly limited value in

understanding contemporary conventions of bathing and laundering" (2003, p. 92). This is based on Hackett (1993) and his claim that cleaning practices are constitutive of the goal they serve: cleanliness is the outcome of the actions people undertake in the name of cleaning. In other words, while ideas about contagion matter, and do shape how people think about dirt, cleaning practices are as much a product of technological changes and broader social norms than medical and popular ideas about infection.

Because her orientation is towards cleaning rather than dirt, and because she sees cleaning as a set of practices tautologically as the orientation towards and outcome of that which is cleaned, cleaning is not a direct and straightforward response to dirt. Rather, dirt is that which is or can be removed by cleaning. Thus she, as with many other scholars in this field, take Mary Douglas' work on dirt as her starting point. Shove follows Douglas to argue that "cleaning is at heart about the symbolic reproduction of order" (2003, p. 83). For Shove, as for Douglas, cleaning and other responses to dirt are about creating a sense of order in a disorderly world. While people may use the language of infection, contagion and hygiene to describe cleaning, their practices, she argues, are not as strongly shaped by this than by what lies at the heart of Douglas' framing of dirt: that it is "matter out of place" (1966, p. 34). It is matter out of place because it falls between the cracks of classifications, it is dirt precisely because it is that which cannot be contained within classifications, and its marginality becomes the site of its power and potential to pollute (see Norris, this volume) Dirt framed thus depends on a symbolic order, and cleaning – managing dirt – is ultimately about reproducing that symbolic order and suppressing that which threatens it.

Here, then, the likes of Shove (2003) and Moffat and Pickering (this volume) stand in contrast to Lagerspetz (2018), for whom the dirt that is of interest is "factual dirt" – matter that adheres where it is not wanted, potentially contaminating through contact, and which can be potentially cleaned away. In his focus on "factual dirt", Lagerspetz dispenses swiftly and brutally with Douglasian framing of dirt as "matter out of place" and the idea that "where there is dirt there is system" (Douglas, 1966,

p. 36; see also Ablitt and Smith, this volume). For Lagerspetz, to locate dirt as that which becomes polluting and powerful by virtue of its failure to sit within, and thus potentially undermine, accepted categories is redundant. It has some value for him as an articulation of the importance of *rejection* in understandings of dirt, but offers no explanation of why “we” (i.e. he) reject some materials as dirt but not others. Because Lagerspetz is interested in those epistemologies, those questions, that are concerned with the real (i.e. that which exists independent of human perception), work that understands dirt as relative misplaces its focus onto the “*merely* symbolic, culturally specific and historically contingent” (2018, p. 98, emphasis added), and fails to engage with dirt proper, with “factual dirt”.

Lagerspetz's new, critical reading of Douglas' work is insightful, but given that he claims it offers so little insight, his analysis fails to account for why Douglas' work remains in his own words the “*locus classicus* of contemporary theories of dirt and pollution” (2018, p. 87). As he notes, this reflects its canonical status, but perhaps it also brings us back to the question of what is real and what is not, and what is worthy of study and what is not. The “*merely*” cultural does not exist prior to human perception; within Lagerspetz' framework, then, it is not “real” and thus not a worthy object of study. Douglas, by contrast, was trying to answer different sorts of questions: she was less concerned with what was ‘real’ than with how people make sense of the world. In some ways a functionalist – she was interested in how dirt is created, made sense of or fits within social systems – she also shared with the likes of Lévi-Strauss a fascination with the ‘grammar’ of social life. Different societies understand dirt differently, but all societies have a concept of dirt, just as different societies eat different foods, but meals in all societies follow some sort of structure enabling them to be understood as meals (Douglas, 1972). Thus her project is of a different sort to the likes of Lagerspetz. She is not interested in whether a particular substance is dirt or not, whether it is ‘real’ or not, but in what it is that ties together that matter which is rejected as polluting in different societies. All societies categorise the world, but do so differently, thus producing different sorts of substances and practices as dirt. But what they all have in common is identifying

some things as falling outside these categorisations, and understanding these things as both threatening and powerful, and often therefore in need of active suppression.

To make sense of Douglas' work as the "*locus classicus*" of scholarship on dirt, then, is to make sense of her work as not at all concerned with "factual dirt". Rather, to make sense of it requires an understanding of dirt not quite as metaphor, but as distinctly non-literal: as concerned with the order of things, with systems. To make sense of Douglas as *locus classicus* therefore requires an orientation towards the symbolic. It requires a disinclination towards understanding that which is real as that which is prior to human perception and an inclination towards the cultural, the historical and the social as specific and contingent, and that specificity and contingency as worthy of study.

In contrast, for Lagerspetz, dirt is not in the eye of the beholder, "matter out of place" (Douglas, 1966), or an insight into "the symbolic reproduction of order" (Shove, 2003, p. 83). It exists prior to human perception: "factual dirt" is asocial dirt. But for the contributors to this collection, dirt is profoundly social. It is about the ways in which ideas about the body and ideas about social order mirror one another (Martin, 1994; Moffatt and Pickering, this volume), about who decides what counts as 'acceptable' dirt and how others are treated as a consequence (Inglis, 2000; Ablitt and Smith, this volume), about who cleans whose mess to whose standards (Ally 2013; Pink, 2005; Álvarez-López, this volume). The "dirty work" of cleaning for others reproduces and reinforces hierarchies between the relatively *powerful* and the relatively *powerless*, but as the fears of white householders in Ally (2013) or the consequences the actions of just a single street cleaner in Ablitt and Smith (this volume) show, "dirty work" is not only a site of denigration, but also a site of power. Dirty work produces purity, but danger also.

The Othering Work of Dirt

This compels us to think again about "the Great Unwashed" and what work is done by this and other metaphors ('untouchables', 'dirty wetbacks' and the like) for marginalised groups. Not only do these pejorative terms shore up a distinction

between we (the clean) and they (the dirty), but they suggest that 'we' are clean because 'we' wash, and 'they' are dirty because 'they' do not despite differences in values and access to resources. Because 'they' are dirty (and this is knowable through, among other things, unpleasant odour – complete with all its miasmatic connotations), 'they' potentially pose a risk to 'us'. When viewed through the lens of distinction, "the Great Unwashed" and the like offensive terms which seeks to differentiate between groups on the basis of hygiene, implicitly suggesting that there are those who choose to wash and those who do not, and that this difference is a difference that does, and ought to, matter.

Zygmunt Bauman (1997; 2013, p. 4) uses a close analysis of the Holocaust to examine how the creation of the 'stranger' (Bauman, 1989) rests upon the construction of the Other as dirt, threatening and contaminating. He builds on Sartre's notion of the sticky (1969) to examine the construction of Jews as a contaminating force in Modernity, threatening order and purity (Bauman, 1989; see also Bauman 1991).

This links to his work on belonging, of particular significance here in relation to the 'stranger' and migration. For Bauman, those who move across borders have and continue to be understood and articulated, by states and individuals, as dirt(y) – that those who move are "human waste or more correctly wasted humans" (2013, p. 4). In the same vein, humans as waste or as dirt(y) can be seen in the construction of women's bodies as Other, as excessive, disgusting and wasteful (Grosz, 1994), disabled bodies as monstrous, volatile and leaking (Hughes, 2012; this volume), and black male bodies as polluting, aggressive, perverse and filthy and particularly threatening to white women (Shilling, 2012). Those classified as dirty, historically and contemporarily, are those who don't belong: the strange, the wasted and the other (Bauman, 1997).

So what does this mean? As May (2011), Miller (2003) and Yuval-Davis (2006) point out, the idea of 'belonging' encapsulates many things – it is a sense of being welcome, of fitting in, of being 'at home' and as Wiseman (this volume) examines it

is also a phenomenological *feeling* of being included and “in place”. Dirt doesn’t fit, it is removed, made clean, covered up or otherwise removed. The act of removing dirt mirrors acts of or desires to remove people, to maintain an imagined purity through the attempted destruction of another.

So if we layer abjection upon distinction, it becomes possible to see “the Great Unwashed” not only as different, not only as inferior, but as actively threatening. In 1969, Jean-Paul Sartre explored the horror of the sticky: what horrifies about sticky materials (think plunging your hand into a jar of treacle and then trying to extract it again) is that it threatens a cherished boundary between self and other. As my hand withdraws, treacle comes with it, clinging onto fingers, forming tiny, inescapable bridges between my body and the jar in front of it. I can withdraw my hand but I cannot extract myself. I am tainted by treacle; the boundary between it and I is blurred.

This threatening blurring of self and other lies at the heart of Kristeva’s work on the abject. For Kristeva, “abjection is above all ambiguity” (1982, p. 9) but it is ambiguity of a particular sort – where boundary between self and other or self and the world is unclear. An attention to abjection necessarily brings contagion back in to the study of dirt. As a psychoanalyst, Kristeva’s focus was on the development of self within the context of relationships, and abjection a concept through which to work through the child’s separation from the mother: this not only entails increasingly understanding oneself as a distinct entity from one’s mother, but actively rejecting the “(m)other” as part of the process of developing autonomy. However, it is most often the allegory through which Kristeva explains the boundary between self and other that is explored in relation to dirt: Kristeva admits to a particular horror at the skin that forms on the top of warm milk sticking to her lips.

This could be read as “matter out of place” (the place for milk is inside cups or mouths but not forming a tendril between the two). Or it could be read as compromised form or interfered-with *telos* (that the purpose of milk is to be drunk, not to stick to our lips). But the reading that Kristeva is nudging us towards is closer

to Sartre's revulsion at the sticky. The milk, in the form of skin stuck to lip, blurs the boundary between I and milk, between self and other. And it is not enough to simply ignore this threat to the bounded self; it must be actively rejected in Kristeva's analysis of the self. Thus while Kristeva is not explicitly concerned with dirt, she is concerned with contamination. She is interested in the rejection of that which threatens the bounded, autonomous self, but also the ambivalence of that rejection. The abject attracts as well as repels. It is not neutral. As Kristeva explains in relation to a fetid wound or decaying flesh,

"A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death — a flat encephalograph, for instance — I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being.... The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject" (1982, p. 3).

Abjection is the space between self and other. It attracts but must also be actively rejected. It is not neutral.

No wonder, then, that the moral reformers of the nineteenth century worked so hard. Their actions were not simply oriented toward protecting the poor from their own degenerate morality and willingness to live in squalor, but toward the risks they, their miasmas, their germs, and their loose morals posed to the established order of things. Despite their occasional presence, middle class British Victorian ladies rarely took advantage of the few available female public toilets: to do so was to share space with – and consequently risk contamination by – working class women who made their income on the streets (Cooper, Law, Maltus, and Wood, 2000). It was not until the development of the department store (unaffordable to the flower sellers and prostitutes who sold their wares on the street) that middle

class Victorian women could safely leave their homes for longer than the time between ingestion and excretion.

Contagion, therefore, remains a centrally important concept in the study of dirt. Yet dirt as an object of study sits at a junction between diverse ways of knowing the world, diverse questions, diverse ontologies even. It sits at a juncture between psychoanalysis, anthropology, sociology, philosophy and history; between self and other, the body and perception, ways of categorising the social world and coping with marginalia, and histories of atrocities (large and small) humans have inflicted upon humans in the name of both rejection and reform.

Dirt has power. The contributors to this volume do not necessarily share conceptual foundations, but at some level all are engaged with this basic claim. They have a shared commitment to research that both describes a social world and challenges the status quo where the status quo rests on and reproduces inequalities. In attending to a topic at the margins of academic respectability they show that the concerns articulated across these pages cannot be simply dismissed as “the sorry transition from Shakespeare to shit” (Dutton et al., 2002, p. 139) for they reveal dirt as a site where relations of gender, race, class and power are played out. So to dismiss the study of dirt as “merely symbolic” (Lagerspetz, 2018, p. 98), a “defacing crusade” against pure scholarship (Dutton et al., 2002, p. 140), or even just “hardly the reified substance of conventional academic enquiry” (Campkin and Cox, 2012, p. 1) is profoundly problematic. In making these claims about what belongs in the academy (and indeed in apologising, however implicitly, for sullyng the academy with enquiries into dirt), certain questions remain unanswered, the value of understanding how people make sense of dirt, and make sense of the world through their interactions with dirt, brought into question. And in that process, certain voices and stories do not get heard. They are told they do not belong.

Ways of Talking about Dirt

Belonging lies at the heart of this volume and it begins with small, everyday acts of neglect and the production of non-belonging through those everyday acts in **Natalie**

Moffat and Lucy Pickering's "Out of Order": The double burden of menstrual etiquette and the subtle exclusion of women from public space in Scotland. Here, they examine the spaces where bodies and material infrastructure meet, and identify the subtle forms of exclusion born of inadequate and neglected provision. Like Quint (below), they explore the ways in which menstruation is learned as shameful. However, in analysing the accounts of young women it becomes clear that the technologies necessary for this process of masking are wanting, producing what they call a 'double burden', resulting from and reproducing this spatial hierarchy: menstruation must remain hidden, but the processes by which that hiding is done are themselves hidden and consequently frequently neglected or difficult to discuss. This 'double burden' serves to remind menstruators that their bodies, and thus they, are Other to a bounded, able, heteronormative male imaginary.

The intersection of bodies and exclusion is also central to **Phillippa Wiseman's 'Lifting the Lid: Disabled toilets as sites of belonging and embodied citizenship'**. She unpacks the perspectives of young people who did not always see themselves as disabled until coming up against social structures that drew attention to their impaired bodies, that made their bodies 'dys-appear' (Leder, 1990). A key site in which this occurred was being unable access public toilets, and forcing these young people to re-frame themselves as Other to those from whom the city was designed. Through taking seriously the phenomenology of non-belonging, Wiseman exposes citizenship itself as profoundly bodily. In these moments, these young people felt that public space was not built to accommodate their bodies, and therefore them: the intersection of their bodies and urban design reproduced not only feelings of exclusion but also spatial and moral hierarchies.

The theme of public toilet access as reproducing and reinforcing non-belonging can also be seen through **Stephanie Terreni-Brown's 'Maps cannot tell the whole story: interpreting the shitscapes with a mixed methods approach'**. Through mapping a transect of the Nakivubo River she unpacks the linkages between morality, space and sanitary practice, examining the ways in which

residents of Kampala, Uganda manage their excrement in widely different material and socio-economic land- or 'shit-scapes'. Kampala's shitscape is one of widely varying infrastructure, enabling some to use flush toilets and compelling others to use flying toilets (defecating into a plastic bag and throwing it away). Terreni-Brown emphasises the continuity, rather than difference between, these forms of performance by emphasising their shared moral framework and that 'both methods contain waste and smell and enable shit to be disposed of'. Despite this shared moral framework, unequal access to sanitary options produces different practices. It is this difference in practice that enables city officials to blur the boundaries between infrastructure and personal hygiene and from this to deny access to flush toilets to some city residents on the grounds that their excretory practices are abject.

Bill Hughes' **'The abject and the vulnerable, the twain shall meet:**

Reflections on disability in the moral economy' further unpacks the idea of abjection through engaging with the ways in which disabled people have been treated as dirt is treated – they are good to be bad to. He moves from antiquity to modernity drawing attention to the ways in which disabled people are simultaneously understood as being "good to be good to" and "good to mistreat". For Hughes, a view to disability exposes the "murky shadow side of existence" – that the messiness of impairment disturbs a "normate sense of being human" through its very presence. Hughes argues that there is a long history of both pity and disgust towards disabled people, but that while superficially opposed, both in fact turn on a shared Othering of the impaired body. Within this framework disabled bodies are encountered by the non-disabled community as already disgusting. By drawing on Kristeva (1982), Hughes explores the ways disabled bodies operate as reminders of corporeal vulnerability and decay. This leads in Hughes' analysis to the legitimation of treating this group of people like, as the saying goes, dirt: to be swept aside, rendered invisible and understood as threatening and so within this moral economy both pity and disgust have the same outcome – the creation of the Other.

Valentina Álvarez-López takes this focus on morality and shifts attention from public space to the home, and specifically cleaning and laundry in **'Valued**

womanhood and cleaning practices among working class Chilean women’.

Here, Álvarez-López presents an ethnography of older Chilean, working class women and their relationships with cleanliness, dirt and stigma. She reflects on the long history of devaluing working class people in Chile, and in specifically working with older women is focusing on a group who have internalised this over an extended period. Her analysis stands in contrast to much work in this field, which emphasises the low status of domestic cleaning, to draw out the ways in which these women can see these practices as sites of self-worth. In common with Ablitt and Smith (this volume), the women Álvarez-López is working with live in an area historically understood to be ‘dirty’. These women, then, are constrained in their choices. Álvarez-López’s analysis draws out the ways in which these women make choices between competing domestic demands, but in so doing exposes the powerful imaginary of the dutiful working class housewife.

Jonathan Ablitt and Robin James Smith’s ‘Working out Douglas’ aphorism:

discarded objects, categorisation practices, and moral inquiries’ similarly addresses the ‘dirty work’ of producing cleanliness, in this case through close analysis of the ways in which Stephen, a street cleaner in the Upper Town district of Gibraltar, makes decisions about which ‘discovered objects’ to treat as waste or not in. The aphorism of the title refers to: “where there is dirt there is system”, focusing on the practical work of categorising objects into waste and non-waste. This turns on an understanding of ‘discovered objects’ as ‘inference-rich’ resources for moral reasoning: objects do not ‘tell us’ about people, but rather, through his choices about what to discard and what to leave, Stephen creates categories of things and through that of people and places. This paper addresses the power of classification of waste and non-waste for distinguishing insider from outsider, those who belong from those who do not, and in making moral distinctions between polluting and non-polluting.

Lucy Norris’ ‘Waste, dirt and desire: narratives of material regeneration’

picks up the thread of moral reasoning and categorisation in relation to the fashion industry. This multi-sited ethnographic account specifically relates to the emergence

of the 'circular economy' in fashion, in which old fibres gain new life as new garments. What Norris identifies through unpacking the narratives of fabric producers, retailers and consumers is that despite the efforts of producers to celebrate recycled fibres as integral to an ecologically sustainable circular fashion economy, consumers remain largely reluctant to knowingly wear them. Turning used fabric into fibres, and processing them into new fabrics do not for many consumers, it is revealed, do the necessary work to render them 'clean' and wearable. Thus this chapter develops themes emergent in the previous chapter about who makes the decisions about what is waste and what is not, what is clean and what is dirty, and what can be made clean through processing.

Clara Greed's 'Join the Queue: Including Women's Toilet Needs in Public Space' brings us back to the politics of space as she turns her attention to the toilet queue as a social site of distinction where women can still be frequently seen queueing where no queues exist outside the male counterpart. As a practising urban planner who has been advocating for equal toilet provision for over thirty years, Greed challenges the recent turn towards the de-gendering of toilet spaces by reminding us that women still queue, and that on these grounds women remain discriminated against, and, critically, that they continue to be of low priority in public space. Greed asks the important question of what the shift from seeing gender as a binary to seeing it as a continuum has had on the shape and form of public toilet provision, thus interrogating the recent rise of gender-neutral toilets (GNTs) from a second-wave feminist perspective by bringing them into conversation with notions of power and the allocation of resources.

The final contribution to the volume comes from the comedian and activist **Chella Quint**. '**From embodied shame to reclaiming the stain: reflections on a career in menstrual activism**' provides an autobiographical examination of her early encounters with menstrual shame, which she unpacks in the context of her career as a comedian and activist and the relationship between shame and consumer capitalism. She thus seeks to reclaim dirt as positive through her use of comedy and work as a high school educator to challenge existing socio-structural

articulations of menstruation, particularly menstrual leaking, as disgusting in the UK and beyond.

We have sought to include voices from across the social sciences to build a strong, inclusive sociology of dirt. But the perspectives of scholar-activists such as Greed, practitioners such as Terreni-Brown and comedian-activists such as Quint operate as a reminder of the practical implications of this work, the directions in which sociological analyses can be taken to produce social change, and the learning for sociology that comes from listening to activist voices.

This volume has sought to present a range of views, some in stark contrast to each other. Our intention is less to provide a steer on how we should be thinking, talking, and making change about dirt than to open up a space for new, messy and contrasting ways of engaging with complex intersectional impacts of discourse, practice, exclusion and belonging. In their different ways, then, all the contributors to this volume explore what it is to belong to a community, to feel or make others feel welcome in a space. All are interested in the processes that place things in and out of place, in the intersection of categorisation and morality. All do this through a focus on dirt – what it is understood to be, why is it understood to be problematic, whose role is it to manage this, and what the consequences of individual dirt-management strategies are. In so doing, they resist the treatment of the study of dirt as dirt is treated – they refuse to be swept aside, rendered invisible or to see their work as somehow polluting to an imagined purity of the academy (and a purity which reproduces some ways of knowing the world at the expense of others). They talk of dirt because dirt is part of the social world, and as such is never “matter out of place” in scholarship.

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