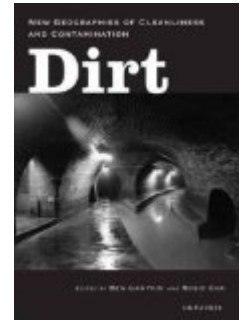


Ben Campkin, Rosie Cox, eds.. *Dirt: New Geographies of Cleanliness and Contamination*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2007. ix + 262 pp. £49.50, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84511-672-9.



Reviewed by Dolly Jørgensen

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Nothing is more basic than dirt. We all deal with it everyday, yet as Ben Campkin and Rosie Cox propose in the introduction to this essay collection, "we seldom question what precisely we mean by it, or why exactly dirt needs to be cleaned" (p. 1). Filth as a subject of scholarly inquiry is certainly not a new topic. Mary Douglas's groundbreaking *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Taboo* (1966) set the stage for much discussion of what cleanliness, and its counterpoint dirt, mean in social context. Recent scholarly contributions have focused on technological systems of dirt-handling, such as Martin Melosi's *The Sanitary City* (2000), and literary and cultural constructions of dirt, such as the essays in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life* (2005), edited by William Cohen and Ryan Johnson. One might think that with the high volume of recent inquiry there would be little more to say on the topic. Yet, Campkin and Cox have given us a fresh approach in a well thought-out collection of articles illuminating the "culturally, spatially and socially produced understanding of dirt and hygiene" (p. 7). The phrase "new geographies" in the book's subtitle is really what distinguishes this collection from

previous work because here the investigators attempt to move beyond ideas and technological systems into the construction of spaces and geographical understanding.

The articles are divided into three sections based on geography: "Home," "City and Suburb," and "Country." A number of the chapters were originally presented as conference papers in 2005; essay collections created this way often turn into a random collection of papers with little common ground. Campkin and Cox, however, do a marvelous job of knitting the articles together with well-written and enlightening introductions. In addition, the works often reference each other, adding to the feeling of a scholarly conversation within the book.

The "Home" section focuses on the meanings of dirt and cleanliness in domestic spaces. The section opens with Carol Wolkowitz's "Linguistic Leakiness or Really Dirty?" which unfortunately is the piece least tied to the geographical focus of the book. Building an argument using cases from other researchers rather than original research, Wolkowitz advocates a combination of "naturalis-

tic" and "symbolic" accounts of dirt in social theory--dirt is both really there and in our minds. This particular essay is more of a thought piece than a research article and does not really fit in with the overall book. The other articles in this section, however, are superb contributions to the theme. Livia Barbosa offers an anthropological study of Brazilian domestic workers and their spatial division from the employer's household. She creates a "cartography of the interior" (p. 27) of the home, tracing where the domestic staff is allowed to go and how physical boundaries, such as separate eating utensils and clothes washers, are created. Although Barbosa could have explained further *why* maids are considered unclean, she nevertheless gives us an interesting insight into the physical delineation of clean and dirty in the Brazilian household. Lydia Martens likewise presents a sociological study of the understanding of kitchen cleanliness. From data gathered through interviews and closed-circuit camera recording of family kitchen activities, she argues that there has been a shift from cleaning based on a temporal routine (e.g., cleaning done the same way after every meal or the floor mopped every Saturday morning) to a routine based on visual clues (e.g., the countertop appears physically dirty). This reveals how cleaning practices can shift over time as culture changes without necessarily becoming cleaner or dirtier. In "Bring Home the Dead," Kyro Selket gives us an fascinating look into the construction of private and public spaces in funeral homes as a method of separating the dirty unprocessed corpse from the clean embalmed loved one. Selket could have had more discussion of the historical development of embalming as the method of purification, but the author's description of doors as boundary objects is still thought-provoking.

The "City and Suburb" section contains seven articles with a heavy focus on London. Ben Campkin begins with a critique of Douglas's binary distinction between clean and dirty. He opts instead for the idea of "abjection" as proposed by Julia

Kristeva, which he says leaves room for us to be ambivalent about dirt. The section moves on to Paul Watt's contribution on London suburbs as havens from dirt, which puts the notion of abjection into clearer light. He shows that new suburbanites in the Eastside community near London constructed narratives of urban decline tied to how filthy and disorderly London's inner city had become, and in so doing, expressed their abjection (which Watt defines as feelings of anxiety and disgust) over the pollution of their imagined past community. Yet over time, these suburbanites came to recognize that even Eastside was not an area devoid of dirt--it was becoming a "spoiled suburb" as disorderly elements of city life moved into it. Watt argues that the pure, exclusive suburb exists only in the imagination of the upwardly mobile.

The next three pieces all deal with moral polluters in the city: sex offenders, gays, and prostitutes. Pamela Gilbert shows how sex offender registration laws create ideas about the ability to spatially control pollution dangers. Under many current U.S. state laws, sex offenders, who are defined in extremely broad ways and often include prostitutes, are banned from living within certain distances of schools, churches, and daycare centers. Gilbert argues that these spatial restrictions give area residents a foci for loathing and a false feeling of civility and safety; the mapping of sex offenders "offers the fantasy of a city whose dangers are made entirely legible" (p. 101). The laws have opted to protect sites where children are present, although many of the offenders actually targeted women, which reveals how the laws are more ideological constructions than functional legislation. Johan Andersson deals with the development of new, hygienic gay bars in London in the 1990s. He argues that the new pubs were a direct response to publicity about dark, dirty gay bars and their association with AIDS. Although this may be true, one could ask if the trend to create upscale "continental bars" was only a gay bar phenomenon or if was it a broader aesthetic trend

in the 1990s. If it was a broader trend, then perhaps some of Andersson's argument does not have as much force. And what happened to the older pubs? Did they upgrade their look as well? If not, did they suffer because of their continued "dirty" appearance? These questions go unanswered. Dominic Janes examines the reform of streetwalking prostitutes in Victorian London using the case of the Pimlico refuge for women which was set up to address both the spiritual and physical pollution associated with prostitution. Unfortunately, Janes does not give us much detail on the refuge itself, nor does he tell the reader how representative the experience at Pimlico was, e.g., how many other such institutions there were, what their success rates were, and whether or not they stressed the spiritual aspects to the same degree as Pimlico.

The last two articles in this section delve into city sewers. Paul Dobraszczyk takes a historical approach, looking into Edwin Chadwick's attempts from 1848 to 1851 to map both London's surface and underground as part of his sanitary infrastructure improvement plans. Although much detail was collected by the sewer surveyors—often at great risk—little of the information made it onto final maps because it was too difficult to reconcile the orderly surface with a disorderly underground. This article is a fresh and interesting approach to Chadwick's sanitation efforts. David Pike moves into the realm of imagination through a brief look at the contradictions of sewer representations in cinema. He makes a fascinating comparison between images of Paris' sewers, which tend to be a space integrated into the world, and New York's, which are the home of mutants and otherness. Unfortunately, he does not really offer an analysis of the social milieus that would have given rise to such different sewer interpretations.

The third section of the book, "Country," examines the construction of rural dirt. The first article by Alyson Brody complements Barbosa's

piece in the "Home" section. Brody examines the working conditions of rural migrants employed as janitors in an urban mall in Thailand. In the mall setting, order and discipline served as markers of civility and cleanliness; hygiene was associated with progress. "The visible management of dirt was key to the projection of a degree of modernity in the space of the shopping mall" (p. 163), regardless of the fact that most of the cleaners lived in a nearby dirty slum. Brody hints at subversion of discipline by the workers at the end of the paper, and I wonder if more should be made of the fact that toilet areas served as a key site of illicit activities such as gossiping with coworkers.

The final three articles all deal with the perception of food as dirty or clean. These contributions are tied to geography only in the most generic sense of rural production. The articles by both Gareth Enticott and Lewis Holloway et al. challenge our preconception that foods with more impurities are inherently considered dirty. Enticott looks at the case of unpasteurized milk consumption in a small English town and notes that interviewees believed that clean/pure foods were suspicious whereas those with impurities were healthful. Holloway et al. likewise found that participants in alternate food networks wanted to see dirt on their vegetables because it was testament to the natural origins of the produce. Both eye-opening cases will force scholars to rethink about the positive associations with dirt. The final article by Bruce Scholten returns to a more traditional interpretation of food risk perception. His work shows that the perception of risk associated with mad cow disease is socially constructed and tied to locality. Not surprisingly, interviewees in the United Kingdom, which had a media-intensive mad cow scare in 1996, were more conscious of the risks than their counterparts in the United States. Yet, Scholten also found that there was no simple relationship between defining meat as dirty and changing consumption patterns.

Overall, this is a collection well worth reading for anyone interested in sanitation, the construction of otherness, or the definition of clean/dirty categories, as well as those looking for fresh approaches to how the ideological and cultural interact with the spatial. In general, the articles are well written and the introductory texts by Campkin and Cox really set the historiographical stage for the collection. The interdisciplinary nature of the collection also reveals how various disciplines can contribute to the same research questions using radically different methods.

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