

On Dirt

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Different cosmologies, or ideas of how the world works, result in different notions of contamination, the environment, and how the body is susceptible or impervious to its surroundings. Dirt, the cause of pollution, contamination and the taboo, is interpreted according to pre-existing anxieties and social norms, including those of religion, empire, individualism, race, gender, and class. While the readings will be arranged in roughly chronological order, it will become clear that ideas of sacred dirt or social hygiene are not relegated to the past, but continue to influence scientific and ecological notions of pollution today. The course will focus on uniquely American concepts of dirt and pollution, especially in terms of early urban sanitation, racial hygiene, the spotless domestic interior, pesticides and environmental engineering.

Learning outcomes

Students who successfully complete the course will be able to demonstrate:

- advanced skills in the application and communication of critical and interpretive skills
- knowledge of critical vocabularies, methods of analysis, histories and concerns related to social and material pollution
- the ability to apply this knowledge to contemporary discussions of social contamination and ecological pollution

Course Work

Assignments: Blog posts are required 24 hours before each class. Blog posts can be reviews of readings or reviews of current events or popular culture related to the readings. You can skip two blog posts during the semester without repercussion. Because we will use these blog posts to fuel discussion in class, it is expected that you will post on time and review your peer's posts before class.

Final: Your final project will be an in-depth analysis of a contemporary pollution/contamination issue using primary source materials such as advertisements, scientific reports, law proceedings, pamphlets, etc. Topics are to be chosen in consultation with professor.

Schedule (based on a 12-week course that meets twice a week)

Week 1 & 2: **Sacred Dirt & Ambivalence**

Douglas, M. (1984). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London, Ark Paperbacks.

Hippocrates (400 B.C.E). *On The Sacred Disease*, The Internet Classics Archive.

Dickens, C. (1865). *Our mutual friend*. London, New York,, Oxford University Press.

Week 3: **Early Scientific Dirt: Miasmas**

Macculloch, J. (1824). *Malaria; an essay on the production and propagation of this poison, and on the nature and localities of the places by which it is produced*, London, Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green.

Nash, L. L. (2006). "Body and Environment in an Era of Colonization," *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Week 4: **Urban Dirt and Moral Decay**

Griscom, J. H. (1845). *The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York*. New York,, Harper & brothers.

Excerpt from Burnstein, D. E. (2006). *Next to Godliness: Confronting Dirt and Despair in Progressive Era New York City*. Urbana, Ill., University of Illinois Press.

Week 5: **Autonomous Dirt and the Rise of Germ Theory**

Sanders, L. (1889). *A modern superstition in disease: the germ theory reconsidered*. New York. Pamphlet.

Excerpt from Tomes, N. (1998). *The gospel of germs: men, women, and the microbe in American life*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

Week 6: **Race and National Hygiene**

London, J. (1914). "The Unparalleled Invasion." *The Strength of the Strong*, Macmillan.

Otis, L. (1999). "Kirchow and Koch: The Cell and the Self in the Age of Miasmas and Microbes," *Membranes: metaphors of invasion in nineteenth-century literature, science, and politics*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.

Patterson, Andrea. (2009). "Germs and Jim Crow: The Impact of Microbiology on Public Health Policies in Progressive Era American South," *Journal of the History of Biology*, 42(3): 529-559.

Week 7: **Domestic Dirt**

Collection of Advertisements: Lux Luxury soap, "The Pretties, the Dainties, the Flimsies," (1919), Listerine, "Listerine Mouthwash Gets rid of Dandruff" (1930), Dr. West's Double-Quick Toothpaste, "NIX! Not for me... Sailors with dull-white teeth can stay on their battle wagons!" (1935), Kotex, "Phantom" Kotex Sanitary Napkins – Absolutely new" (1932), Pepsodent Toothpaste, "Beauties of All Races" (1922), and others.

Cox, R. (2011). "Dishing the Dirt: Dirt in the Home." *Dirt: The Filthy Reality of Everyday Life*. K. Forde. London, Butler Tanner & Dennis Ltd.

Week 8: **The Rise of the Pollutant and the Environment**

Rome, A. W. (1996). "Coming to Terms with Pollution: The Language of Environmental Reform, 1865-1915." *Environmental History*, 1(3): 6-28.

Cowell. (1968) "Possible Pollution Scale," pamphlet.

Clark, R. B. (1986). "Assessing Pollution Damage." *Marine Pollution*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Week 9 & 10: **Pesticides and Endocrine Disruptors: Porous Borders, Porous Bodies**

Carson, Rachel, Darling, et al. (1962). *Silent spring*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin.

Nash, L. L. (2006). "Modern Landscapes and Ecological Bodies," *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Birnbaum, L. S. and P. Jung (2011). "From Endocrine Disruptors To Nanomaterials: Advancing Our Understanding Of Environmental Health to Protect Public Health." *Health Affairs* 30(5): 814-823.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009). *Fourth National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals*. D. o. H. a. H. Services. Washington DC.

Langston, N. (2010). "Sexual Development and a new Ecology of Health," *Toxic bodies: hormone disruptors and the legacy of DES*. New Haven [Conn.], Yale University Press.

Week 11: **Twenty-first century global dirt**

Gabrys, J. (2009). "Sink: the dirt of systems." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27: 666-681.

Climate Change and Plastics (lecture)

Week 12: **Presentations**

Ralph, B. (2011). "Crud Club: A Graphic Novel." *Dirt: The Filthy Reality of Everyday Life*. K. Forde. London, Butler Tanner & Dennis Ltd.