

Chapter 1

Three Doings of Excretory Dirt

Disgust, Humour, Emphasis

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Although disgust is a negatively valenced emotion, and people generally avoid environments or people that elicit the emotion, humans also exhibit a clear fascination for the grotesque, the lewd and the filthy.

—Valerie Curtis et al., ‘Disgust as an Adaptive System for Disease Avoidance Behaviour’

Introduction

Mary Douglas’ well-known concept of ‘matter out of place’ in the introduction to her *Purity and Danger* (1966) became for me the leading notion for making sense of the ambiguities around ‘dirt’. Nothing is dirty by itself; dirt is defined by its context. It is disorder and carries an invitation or rather an obligation to restore order. In order to better grasp what dirt does, in particular when, how and why it causes disgust, I focused on a type of dirt that is usually considered to be the most abject: bodily excrements. To make Douglas’ concept work for faeces – which seem to be always dirty, independent of context or place – I added a social dimension to her concept of (out of) ‘place.’ The social situation, the relatedness of people who are involved in the dirt experience, prove a stronger predictor of disgust than physical or geographical places discussed in Douglas’ work. That widening of the concept of ‘place’ made the experience or absence of disgust regarding defecation (for example of one’s baby or one’s own) not only understandable but also logical. Shit is not a

neutral substance; it is linked to people (Van der Geest 2007). It carries the identity of the one who has produced it.

In this chapter I will discuss three effects that the encounter with shit and related dirt can produce. The first and most discussed is disgust, which is intertwined with the identity of social actors who produce the faecal and urinary dirt, as I just indicated. I will then return to Douglas and argue that 'matter out of place' does not necessarily produce dirt and disgust; it may also cause fascination and attraction, for example in humour and in proverbs and other rhetorical devices.

Disgust

How useful is Douglas' perspective for our understanding of excretory substances and the disgust they provoke? Are faeces ever not out of place? Can they ever be clean and orderly? Is shit not always dirty, by itself, by its nature, wherever it is: in a lavatory, in the sewer, in a nappy, in the street, or on a sandwich? These very examples suggest that there are degrees of dirtiness. Faeces in the pipes of the sewerage system are just dirty without worrying us, but on a sandwich that I am supposed to eat they become unspeakably disgusting. The problem, however, lies with the faeces in the sewers. Are they not in the right place and therefore 'clean'?

A Dutch plumber studying anthropology told me that he was not worried about shit in the sewer. Dealing with it in that place had become normal practice to him, but a turd in the lavatory bowl would disgust him. A night soil collector in Ghana whom I accompanied during his nocturnal work had no problem scooping the faeces of his customers into his own bucket with his bare hands. He was used to it. Nurses – or, should I say, good nurses – help defecating patients without feelings of disgust (Lawler 1991; Van Dongen 2001; Zaman and Van der Geest 2020). Each profession develops its own subculture with specific standards of order and disorder.

Can faeces ever be clean, however? The faeces I carry with me in my body are in the right place (as long as they do not stay there for too long) and do not worry me. They may become dirty if someone starts to draw special attention to their presence and tries to discredit the human body as 'a sack of shit.' By doing so, the faeces are as it were removed from their orderly place and placed before our eyes by the mere fact of talking about them. The same is true for faeces in the lavatory. They do not disgust us (as long as they are our own). We deal with the situation daily and do not feel stressed during the activity of defecation. However,

bringing them up in conversation – or writing, as I am now doing – makes them dirty because we feel that they should not be discussed in public. Shit is an intimate product. We part with it in private and there it should remain. By talking and writing about it, it becomes a matter out of place; it disturbs the order of proper behaviour.

Faeces out of sight, out of conversation and out of mind are clean. Contamination does not only work physically, it also takes place in metaphoric and metonymic ways. That is the reason why a wall that bears the text ‘Do not urinate here’ is almost as dirty as a wall against which people have actually urinated. A Ghanaian proverb warns: ‘Shit stinks and if you talk about it, the smell clings to you.’

The strength of the disapproval of a matter out of place depends on a combination of qualities: on the substance of the matter itself, the place where the object is or the activity takes place, the manner in which its presence is communicated, and the identity of the actor who is directly associated with the matter or activity. I will now focus on this last aspect, the ‘social life’ of the dirty matter. The answer to the question ‘whose dirt?’ determines the experience of disgust much more than has been suggested by Douglas and most other authors who have written about the cultural meanings of defecation and faeces. Weinberg and Williams (2005) for example deal extensively with ‘faecal habitus’ (see also Inglis 2000), a *modus* of behaving to prevent causing disgust. Their focus is on the anticipation of creating (not experiencing) disgust in everyday circumstances. People must constantly pay attention to their bodies, which the authors convincingly illustrate with a rich collection of citations from their (172) respondents. My focus, however, is on what in the experience of ‘the other’ makes faeces disgusting. This is not the material substance, as many authors claim, nor the spatial context as Douglas suggests, but the social content of its appearance, the relation between the ‘sender’ and the ‘receiver’ of the faecal matter, between the disguster and the disgusted. Adding this social dimension makes Douglas’ theory of matter out of place more true to life and more effective as an interpretative tool.

Elsewhere (Van der Geest 2007) I have presented various categories of actors who may be involved in the production of faecal dirt that one encounters and how they affect the measure and intensity of disgust; I will briefly summarize them here. These ‘categories’ include ego, ego’s intimates (children, partner, friends), acquaintances with whom ego does not have a close relationship, strangers, and finally animals. It will be immediately clear that experiences of disgust will vary enormously with these different social settings. Whenever I presented these variations to an audience it hardly ever happened that someone disagreed substantially with my observations. The unanimity about what is more and what

less disgusting, based on personal taste and experience, was remarkable, but did not surprise me.

As far as ego is concerned, Erasmus's dictum that one's own shit has a pleasant smell (*Suus cinque crepitus bene olet*) is a humorous exaggeration, but it is no exaggeration to say that people are not usually disturbed by the smell (and sight) of their own faeces. Only if something goes wrong, technically or socially, may one's own defecation become embarrassing or disgusting for an individual.

Aversion is limited vis-à-vis faecal matters from *intimates*, but here is a significant nuance. A mother will experience little or no aversion when dealing with the faeces of her baby. The baby is still felt as part of herself and cleaning the baby is almost the same as cleaning herself. The father is likely to be less close to the baby and may in that case slightly dislike the task of handling dirty napkins. But when the child grows, it will slowly move away from this intimate connection with his parents; he will learn to go to the lavatory by himself and his faeces will become gradually dirtier to his parents. A baby's 'poop' is as innocent as the baby itself but when it grows into a human being with its own identity its faeces become more and more a matter that carries the identity of another person and becomes therefore more disgusting. The most intriguing observation in this category is how partners react to one another's faeces. My personal opinion is that growing aversion signals waning affection.¹

Being confronted with faecal matters of people one knows but with whom one is not close is more repulsive than when they are complete strangers. Complete strangers have no identity. Entering one another's intimate space is a coincidence, perhaps an accident, which does not leave any traces on a relationship. We do not know each other and we will probably never meet again. The anonymous character of the meeting is reassuring. However, when I am confronted with intimate body products of a person I know and with whom I do not want any intimacy, the encounter is far more uncomfortable and disgusting. I will be more upset because that awkward moment of disgust will linger on.

Let me now, for a moment, move to the faeces of animals. Animals are somewhat like children. They have no clear identity and they have no bad intentions. If they deposit their excreta in my private territory, it is hardly an intrusion into my life. Animals do not intrude. However, when I suspect the owner of the dog to be behind the dog's behaviour, my discomfort and disgust will grow. The owner is intruding through his dog. The neighbour's dog's shit found at my door is metonymically my neighbour's shit.

The logic of relationships enlightens us on the experience of disgust towards dirty substances like human and animal excrements. However,

experiences of disgust also reveal the 'substance' of social relationships such as closeness and distance, inclusion and exclusion, affection and dislike, trust and fear. Disgust reveals the quality of my relationship with the person who 'delivered' the dirt. Faecal dirt is by definition an intimate substance. When it comes from a person I do not want to be intimate with, the disgust will be overwhelming. 'Unwanted intimacy',² therefore, is the root cause of disgust.

Humour

Shifting to humour (and emphasis, in the next section) as another 'doing' of excretory dirt also implies a shift from physical dirt, dirt as substance, to spoken or imagined dirt. But, as I argued before, the difference between substance and metonym/metaphor is not as wide as one may think. If shit is to be hidden, speaking about it is also out of place. The term was even excluded from English and American dictionaries until the middle of the 1970s. In most cultures and companies talking shit is improper. Especially during meals, it is considered wrong and 'bad taste' to 'touch' the subject. Through the words the substance itself appears on the table between the (other) dishes and spoils the appetite.

But the rule of avoidance also gives speaking about shit a special thrill. Together with sexual subjects, diseases and – to a diminishing degree – religion, excretion is a favourite ingredient for abusing and cursing. A quick check suggests that 'shit' is the most common term to express disappointment, anger and – in an interesting twist – surprise in most European languages. According to Alan Dundes (1984: 17–19) *Scheiss* in Germany is even part of the 'national character'. In Twi (a Ghanaian language) *ebin* (shit) is a rude term expressing severe disapproval. Abuses such as *Mene wo so* (I shit on you) are too terrible to write down. I refrain from quoting another one, even more disgusting. I heard them being used in nasty quarrels.

At the same time, however, scatological terms lend themselves to humorous communication and telling jokes. The out-of-placeness of scatological terms can have a comic effect when it turns the normal order upside down. 'Matter out of place' overlaps largely with the anthropological concept of 'anomaly', which Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1981: 119) defines as follows:

Anomaly refers to symbolic expression of some type of structural inversion. By structural inversion, I mean a state opposite to a classified world. That is a state in which a culturally defined classificatory structure is inverted,

reversed, contradicted, abrogated, nullified, or, in general, not in accord with the given structural principles.

In stories and jokes subaltern groups ridicule their oppressors and imagine another world where power and wealth are differently divided. These weapons of humour do not change their material and political living condition, as Billig (2001: 39) rightly remarks, but they do help people to survive and keep their self-respect in miserable circumstances. Folk rituals and tales have widely been interpreted as humorous rites of inversion (Apte 1986: 156–57; Bakhtin 1984; Wertheim 1974: 108–109; Wittenberg 2014; Schweitz 1979).

I still remember the first joke I learned when I was about five years old. There was a mother who had two boys; one was called Yesterday and the other Pudding. Pudding and Yesterday had been naughty and were sent to their room. Pudding said to Yesterday: 'I must poop'. Yesterday replied: 'We are not allowed to leave the room. Do it from the window'. Pudding did so but at that same moment the Mayor passed by the house and the poop fell on his hat. The Mayor was annoyed and rang the bell. The mother opened the door and the Mayor said: 'Something fell on my head when I passed your house'. The mother asked: 'Was it Yesterday?' The Mayor: 'No, today!' The mother: 'Was it Pudding?' The Mayor: 'No, it was poop! Hahahaha. When I told this joke to my six-year-old granddaughter, she told me another joke in return. There were two underpants in the laundry basket. One said to the other: 'I am going on holidays. What about you?' The other one said: 'I am not going. I am brown enough.'

Shit and other 'dirty' bodily substances are the favourite topics for jokes among children, to be replaced by sex at a later age. A joke is supposed to provoke laughter by presenting a story or a situation that is out of the ordinary and therefore experienced as funny. Shit on someone's head is unusual, out of place and, in the eyes of some, comical. For children that unusual event is enough to enjoy the thrill of the story. Excrement forms the hilarious denouement of the joke. 'Poop is always funny,' a Dutch writer of children's books remarked. The children's story is a joke told because of the shit and the piss.

I agree with Henk Driessen (1997: 222) that humour often has a relativizing effect. The joke permits us to look behind the scenes of standard meanings and conventions and shows us another world that can only exist as a counter reality, resisting what is public and conventional. We know that there is more to life than what directors, ministers, bishops and family heads preach and we share this tacit understanding in several ways, one of them being humour. Douglas (1968: 363) remarks: 'Frozen posture, too rigid dignity, irrelevant mannerism, the noble pose

interrupted by urgent physical needs, all are funny for the same reason. *Humour chastises insincerity, pomposity, stupidity* (emphasis added). The joke is 'an attack on control'. 'The joke connects and disorganises. It attacks sense and hierarchy' (ibid.: 370). The mayor with shit on his hat is an enticing illustration of this view. The anti-hierarchical effect of humour will return in the next section on proverbs and other wise sayings.

In Bangladesh I came across the stories about Gopal, a court jester from medieval Bengal. The tales are humorous, for children as well as adults, and teach lessons of relativity. Some of them are about defecation. Today the tales have been adapted to comics for children. More than two hundred of them can be found on YouTube. Here is one tale that was told to me. In it, defecation is used to teach an important wisdom about a fact of life:

One day the king's wife gave birth to a male child, and so the king was rejoicing. At that moment, Gopal entered the room, and the king said, 'Gopal, on this very, very happy occasion, please tell me what do you have to say? Tell me exactly how you feel at this moment.' Gopal replied, 'Frankly, at this moment, I feel very happy after passing stool.' 'Gopal! How could you say such a thing?' The king was mortified. 'On this auspicious moment, that's all you have to say? I'm completely disgusted. It's not funny and I don't appreciate your humour at all.' After this, the relationship between the king and Gopal was strained for some time. But one day, Gopal was rowing the king down the river, when the king suddenly had an urgent call of nature. Gopal said, 'On this side there is a very heavy jungle area. It's not very suitable. Let us go a little further down and we'll find a suitable place.' The king said, 'Go over to the side!' Gopal said, 'Not here. There is danger. Thieves and robbers. Your life may be in danger. There's a place ahead.' The king said, 'Gopal, I cannot wait any longer. Go over immediately!' Gopal had to go over and the king jumped out. He could hardly contain himself. When the king returned, Gopal asked him, 'How are you feeling?' The king replied, 'I am feeling very happy after passing stool.'

The academic literature on children's faecal and urinary humour may be scarce but concrete examples of children's enjoyment with poop stories abound. The absolute favourite is the story about *The Little Mole Who Got Pooped On* (originally in German, Holzwarth and Erlbruch 1989). I assume that everyone with a child has a copy of this little book and read the story several times to his/her child while pointing at the pictures of different animals with different shapes of poop falling to the ground. The little mole wants to find out who dropped a turd on his head. He goes from animal to animal but each proves not to be the one by demonstrating his type of poop. Finally, two flies, shit experts, tell the little mole that the turd comes from the butcher's dog. The little mole takes his revenge

and deposits a tiny little turd on the head of the dog and disappears happily underground. The dog does not even seem to notice his action.

Another celebrated children's story in the same category is *Walter the Farting Dog* (Kotzwinkle et al. 2001).³ By now there are five parts about Walter, a sweet dog with one problem, his vicious farting. In part one, Walter becomes a hero when he chases away two burglars with his awful farts. The story has been translated in about fifteen languages and sold more than a million times. It took the authors eleven years before they found a publisher willing to print their story. The books have been subjected to occasional complaints and attempts to have them removed from libraries.

When my children were small they loved to watch a television programme called '*De film van Ome Willem*' (Uncle William's movie), a kind of talk show of Uncle Willem with a group of children. His opening song always ended with the line '*Lusten jullie ook een broodje poep?*' (Do you like a sandwich with poop?) followed by loud protesting of the kids 'Bahhhhhh.' The programme was broadcasted between 1974 and 1989 and was repeated in 2000, 2004 and from 2007 to 2012. I enjoyed the show as much as my children. I watched the sketches and interactions as a father through the eyes of my children. In fact, I imitated some of Ome Willem's jokes in daily conversations with them. I felt that the little poop jokes encouraged their sense of a humorous dimension of life.

Emphasis /Rhetorical Power

Recently I read an interview with someone who was going to attend a very expensive meeting. Defending his decision to spend so much money, he remarked '*Voor niets schijten de mussen op je kop*' (literally: For nothing, the sparrows shit on your head). The meaning is clear: Good things are not free; they cost money. The colloquial equivalent in Dutch would have been: '*Voor niets gaat de zon op*' (For nothing, the sun rises). This man's expression hit its target more effectively than the usual saying. It made an impact thanks to its slightly scatological wording (and its comical image). The truth about getting something worthless for free is driven home and 'stays' longer because of the presence of that single word 'shit'. The word is vulgar and draws attention when spoken in a 'clean' environment. I had a similar experience when I delivered my inaugural lecture as Professor of Medical Anthropology. Many years later friends and colleagues still remembered one colourful quote from one of my uncles: 'If your turd is all right, *you* are all right.' In fact, it was the only thing they remembered from my 45-minute presentation. A similar example

comes from Heinrich Böll's (1971) famous novel *Gruppenbild mit Dame*. A nun, nicknamed Haruspica, at a girls' boarding school daily inspected the girls' defecatory products and kept records of her findings. The girls were not allowed to flush their faeces before the sister had examined them. Several people who read the book reported this interesting detail to me, knowing it was in my 'field' of interest. Again, it was the only thing they still remembered of this wonderful novel and, to be frank, the same applies to me. Allan Dundes (1984: 42) quotes Böll's passage to underline his central vision that German society is preoccupied by daily stools, but in my opinion it is rather a convincing illustration of the rhetorical power of shit.

As mentioned before, there is force in out-of-placeness. In a literal sense, 'out of place' is synonymous to extra-ordinary. What is out of the ordinary may create fear as well as admiration, rejection as well as attraction, offense as well as tenderness. Ohnuki-Tierney (1981: 131) points out that human beings, animals, plants and objects with an anomalous status possess extra-ordinary qualities: 'beings and objects that have anomalous qualities are apt symbols of power.' She could have added 'anomalous language'.

Its ambiguity can take many directions. Calling a little child (in Dutch) 'my sweet turd' (*lekkere drol*) is warmer and more intimate than a conventional term. Lovers' communication may contain 'shit' indicating that the other is as close as one's own faeces. In the company of love faeces are joyful, and clean. In a Dutch novel I read the affectionate line 'I could eat one metre of your shit' (Ruebsamen 1999): shit as a term of endearment. There are very many more examples of this loving 'scatological' terminology but these ones suffice, I hope.

The use of 'shit' and associated words in proverbs and folk sayings is not an expression of resistance or abuse but an example of 'shit' as rhetorical enhancement. It underscores the statement, intensifies its impact and makes its truth stay longer, as the smell after defecation and my uncle's turd after my presentation. Examples abound – I mentioned two a few paragraphs ago. Let me give some more illustrative ones from the literature.

Yasa people in Cameroon who defecate in the sea where fish eat their excrements say: 'The fish knows where man shits, but man does not know where the fish shits.' The saying refers to sharing and not sharing secrets (Ndonko 1993: 251). In Malawi a greedy person is characterized as 'eating in the toilet' (Alister Munthali, personal communication). The condemnation of asocial behaviour can hardly be expressed more graphically. In my family-in-law I heard the rhetorical question (in Frysian) 'Shit, who shit you?', passing a hard judgement on someone's complacency

and arrogance. A popular Dutch children's rhyme says *Koning, keizer, admiraal – Schijten doen ze allemaal* (King, emperor, admiral – they all shit). Alan Dundes (1984) provides many German proverbial expressions with excremental metaphors. To start with, the title of his book *Life is Like a Chicken Coop Ladder* is a magnificent way to point out the inequalities in society: those who find themselves at the bottom get the shit of those above them on their heads. I find this saying extra pungent because – as we have seen – shit represents the basic equality of all people. Another German folk saying with a philosophical thrust reads *Das leben is wie ein Kinderhemd: kurz und beschissen* (Life is like child's undershirt: short and shitty) (Dundes 1984: 9). Occasionally, anthropologists resort to this imaginative style of writing, for example Sahllins (1976: 10) when he catches the economic basis of kinship in the phrase: 'Manure is thicker than blood'. 'Shit' can even be used for wealth.

My own language Dutch is very rich in 'shitty' and 'pissy' proverbs and colloquial expressions that can be said in decent company. A few weeks ago a football coach complained on television that his team had played with 'shit in their pants'. In an interview in my newspaper a female police officer remarked: '*Ze maken me de pis niet lauw*' (They don't make my piss warm, meaning: I don't get nervous), referring to the public criticism of Dutch police. A favourite expression of politicians and other people with authority is that it is easy to judge something after it has happened: *Achteraf kun je een koe in de kont kijken* (Afterwards you can look into a cow's ass). My Frysian in-laws, who live in an area with more cows than people, like to cut a discussion short by saying that the farmer does not care whether the cow or the bull shitted; it is not important to quarrel about the exact cause of something that happened. Someone who has made a serious mistake, for example committed adultery, 'has pissed outside the pot.' In the south of the country, which used to be overwhelmingly Catholic and where the Church had considerable political power, the following expression had a lot of truth in it: 'If you piss against the church, you will become wet yourself.' This proverb conjures up the common picture of men leaving the pub after having consumed a lot of beer and going literally to urinate against the nearby church.

An anthropological publication on Church and politics in that part of the country carries this proverb as its title (Bax 1982). I could continue with many more eloquent examples, but the reader may by now be approaching his point of saturation. Let me complete this exercise with a few proverbs from Ghana where nearly all my fieldwork is located.

I scanned two collections of Ghanaian proverbs, one Akan (Twi), one Dagbani, and found many more examples of proverbs enhanced by the rhetoric power of shit and shit-related terminology. Below are two

Dagbani (Lange 2006) and three Akan proverbs (from a list of 25 Akan scatological proverbs, see Appendix):

Human beings hate the sight of excreta, but everyone has them in his stomach.

(Certain things are part and parcel of life, whether we like it or not.) [Dagbani]

If you want to see your father-in-law's hair on his buttocks, you give him a farm on a hillside.

(If you want to do something questionable, you achieve it in a roundabout way) [Dagbani]

If a goat despises its tail, flies will enter its anus.

(If you don't appreciate what has been given you, you will suffer) [Akan]

It is the fly that is in a hurry that the big excrement crushes.

(Too much hurry leads to grief). [Akan]

This last proverb, which I heard myself in a bar, needs a bit of explanation. It refers to the act of defecating. If the fly goes and sits on the first excrements that arrive, it runs the risk that it will be smashed by the next much bigger load.

If you eat alone, you will also shit alone.

(Criticizing the stingy person; he will have to bear the consequences of his greedy behaviour) [Akan]

I frequently heard this during my discussions with and about older persons. Going alone in the night to visit the toilet is considered an unpleasant thing (see also the Malawian proverb cited before).

But it is not only dirty language that lends rhetorical force to communication, political testimonials and proverbial wisdom. The substance of (faecal) dirt has even more effect in such statements, although it lacks the civilized licence that words may have. Let us first look at some examples. Begoña Aretxaga (1995) reflects on a prison protest in 1978 in Northern Ireland; IRA women smeared faeces and menstrual blood on the walls of their cells. Aretxaga points out that their 'dirty' protest was a response to the degrading physical treatment they were receiving from the prison guards. Dirt thus proved a means in hands of those in power to harass and humiliate the powerless as well as an effective weapon in hands of the latter to counter the physical violence against them. Their protest was however so shocking that initially even IRA supporters were repulsed and failed to grasp its political message. Eventually, however, the prison protest succeeded in provoking political discussions in Ireland and Britain

and attracted the attention of the international press. The excremental image of violence and protest was literally brought 'home' to the British public when horse dung was thrown at the members of Parliament (137). Aretxaga concludes: 'I have conceptualized the feces and [menstrual] blood characterizing the protest as primordial symbols. These symbols are invested with political power; contrary Douglas, though, they are not just an expression of the social order [and disorder, SvdG]... like speech acts, they have a performative character' (144).

Throwing animal dung in or in front of government buildings to express anger and rejection of political decisions is not uncommon in many societies, especially by farmers who have easy access to this material. Urinating on or against national symbols is another demonstration of profound contempt and disapproval. My final and ultimate case of a dirty expression of protest and political opposition is from hearsay (I am still looking for the exact source). An Austrian student told me how during the student protests around 1968 one student climbed on the desk of the Rector of the university and deposed a voluminous turd: a performance of unspeakable and unforgettable disgust. It was the physical enactment of the Akan abuse mentioned before: 'I shit on you.'

Conclusion

I have tried to elaborate on (and sometimes disagree with) Mary Douglas' concept of 'matter out of place' by exploring three effects of faecal dirt on human interaction and communication: disgust, humour and rhetorical emphasis. The very mundane condition of being dirty lends itself eminently as metaphor to express negative valuations of nearly everything in human lives. Its efficacy as metaphor lies in the intense visceral emotions of aversion and fascination concerning what is physically dirty. 'Dirt' (and 'cleanliness'!) are therefore felicitous terms for an anthropological discourse on everyday experiences. This exercise has led me to nuance the theoretical underpinnings of Douglas' observations regarding dirt.

With regard to disgust I have proposed that it is not so much the physical or spatial attribute of 'out of place' which provokes disgust but rather the social and interpersonal situation in which the confrontation with faecal dirt takes place. The ultimate dirt comes in the form of unwanted intimacy.

The section on humour has shown that the out-of-placeness of dirt does not necessarily imply a negative judgement about disorder and an invitation or command to restore order. The out-of-place character of words and substances can also provide a welcome opportunity to

relativize the cultural imperatives of the established order in a comical way. Children in particular find the innocent scatology around hidden processes and products of digestion exciting elements for jokes that explore a world where things happen that are not possible or not permitted in their 'normal' world.

Finally, the discussion on dirt lending emphasis and rhetorical persuasion to spoken words has revealed another effect of dirt thanks to its out-of-place capacity. Anomaly contains emotional, political and mnemonic power. I have illustrated this doing of dirt with terms of endearment, abuses, colloquial sayings, proverbs and political statements.

The everydayness of the biotope of the experience and management of faecal and urinary dirt gave me the opportunity to rely as much on my own daily involvement with dirt as on academic treatises on the subject.

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Appendix: Akan (Twi) Proverbs about 'Shit' and Related Terms

From: Peggy Appiah, Kwame Appiah and Ivor Agyeman-Duah. 2000. *Bume be: Akan Proverbs*. Accra: Centre for Intellectual Renewal.

1. Human beings hate the sight of excreta, but everyone has them in their stomach. (1352)
(Certain things are part and parcel of life, whether we like it or not.)
2. If you touch your anus with your hand, then you have touched all filthy things. (1429)
(Your own disgrace is as shameful as a stranger's. Or said of a situation, which is the worst you can ever expect to handle.)
3. I have eaten, I have eaten, and I have defecated, I have defecated, go together. (1893)
(If you are greedy, you suffer the consequences.)

4. If you hold in your wind, you fart in your stomach. (1896) (If you try to avoid small problems, you will let yourself in for big ones.)
5. We go to the latrine (lit. the tree) with our own age group. (2062) (This colloquial expression comes from the time when everyone went behind a tree! Such things you only did with your own age group. Hence: some private things are only discussed between members of the same generation.)
6. If you don't need to defecate you say: 'Today I won't visit the latrine.' (3248) (You refrain from normal activities only when you don't need to involve yourself in them.)
7. A chief whom we dare not advise is the one whose faeces drop on his heel when he goes to a durbar. (2555) (If you resent honest criticism, you let yourself in for ridicule.)
8. If your body smells, you don't fart as well. (2692) (Don't make things worse.)
9. If you go and meet someone who is excreting foam, you don't say to them: 'give me hard faeces and take this foam.' (3591) (Don't add insult to injury.)
10. The faeces along the path do not stink to only one person. (3902) (Some unpleasantnesses affect all alike.)
11. If you know that we are going to make you eat dog's stools, as soon as it defecates, you must eat them at once. (4365) (It bests to get over an unpleasant task as quickly as possible.)
12. When the corn-cob enters the pit-latrine, it is because of what the hair around the anus has said to it. (4674) (The dry corn-cob is use as toilet paper in the villages. Hence: if someone accepts an unpleasant job, they know what they are after.)
13. If an elder does not know how to fart, he dies. (4903) (Old people are full of wind and must get rid of it. You must sometimes do anti-social acts to survive. In Akan society it is very rude to fart in public.)
14. If you want to see your father-in-law's hair on his buttocks, you give him a farm on a hillside. (5028) (If you want to do something questionable you achieve it in a roundabout way.)
15. A vexatious case makes the duck make despising noises when it defecates. (5503) (No one acts without reason. Or: if you are angry, you show it.)
16. The young elephant does not ever excel its mother in farting. (5750) (An inexperienced person does not excel an experience one.)
17. A stick has attached itself to your buttocks. 'Let me remove it.' You say: 'I will fart over your hand!' (5755) (If someone is trying to help you, you don't abuse him.)

18. If you are conscious of wind having been passed, then you smell it more. (5808) (Sometimes it's only when something is brought to your attention, that it worries you.)
19. An unmarried person is sensible; that is why if he defecates, he cleans his behind, even though he and someone (else) do not look at each other's behinds. (5860) (I.e. because he is not engaged with anyone in mutual inspection of behind – as he might be if he married. Hence: some actions are taken for personal satisfaction and not to please others.)
20. A large loincloth bunched behind cannot stop farting. (6273) (If you make a law against nature, it will not be observed.)
21. It is not difficult to insert medicine in your anus, but as for keeping it closed! (6359) (Peppers are sometimes inserted in the rectum as a treatment for constipation. Hence: some things are easy to do, even if their results are hard to bear.)
22. Who are you to say that the chief of the Zongo has farted, (for if you do so) where are you going to go to buy cola? (6578) (It is a taboo to fart in public. Cola is sold mainly by the Northerners whose chief is the chief of the Zongo area where many of the Muslim and Northerners live. Hence: if you insult a man, don't expect to get favours from him.)
23. If you have no hair around your anus, then you don't play at farting. (6658) (It is believed that if you have hair around your anus, it helps you to fart without making a noise. Farting in public is a disgrace. Hence: if you have no protection, don't do what you should not.)
24. No one can get enough ginger to put up an elephant's anus. (6833) (Ginger root is used as a suppository. Hence: if you ask for too much, people will not be able help you.)
25. It is not a thing which the chamber pot has never heard: a fart. (6871) (If you are familiar with something, you are not shocked by it.)

Notes

1. A reviewer of this chapter drew my attention to the movie 'Love and Other Disasters' which also presents disgust as a signal of waning affection. In the movie the psychiatrist tells her client: 'Relationships are best managed by farting.'
2. 'Unwanted intimacy' (*ongewenste intimiteit*) is the standard Dutch term for 'sexual harassment'. It conveys more effectively the experience of harassment than the English term.

3. See also the movie 'Thunderpants' (2002) about Patrick (eleven years old) who was born with two stomachs, which gave him a 'talent' for producing wicked farts. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0283054/>.

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