



KEEP IT DIRTY, vol. a., “Filth” (2016)

## ETYMOLOGIES / CORPSES / CORPUS

Christian Hite, ed.

*Existence not only requires excrement (as such: a cyclic element): a body is also, and makes itself, its own excretion. A body spaces itself; a body expels itself; identically. It exscribes itself as body: being spaced, it is a dead body; being expelled, it is a filthy body.*

—JEAN-LUC NANCY<sup>1</sup>

*We are made as the filth of the world, the dirt wiped off by all, even until now.*

—1 CORINTHIANS 4:13

**FILTH (n.)**— Old English *fylð* “uncleanness, impurity, foulness,” from Proto-Germanic *fulitho* (cognates: Old Saxon *fulitha* “foulness, filth,” Dutch *vuilte*, Old High German *fulida*), noun derivative of *fulo-* “foul.”

**FOUL (adj.)**—Old English *ful* “rotten, unclean, vile, corrupt, offensive to the senses,” from Proto-Germanic *fulaz* (cognates: Old Saxon and Old Frisian *ful*, Middle Dutch *voul*, Dutch *vuil*, Old High German *fül*, German *faul*, Gothic *fūls*), from PIE *pu-* “to rot, decay,” perhaps from the sound made in reaction to smelling something bad . . . . Old English *ful* occasionally meant “ugly” (as contrasted with *fæger* (adj.), modern *fair* (adj.)), and this sense became frequent in Middle English. The cognate in Swedish is the usual word for “ugly.”



Fig. 1: Anon., *Death's Universal Summons* (1650).



**FILTHY (adj.)**—late 12c., *fulthe*, “corrupt, sinful,” from *filth* + *-y*. Meaning “physically unclean, dirty, noisome” is from late 14c. Meaning “morally dirty, obscene” is from 1530s. In early use often hardly more emphatic than the modern *dirty*, it is now a violent expression of disgust [*OED*].

**FILTH (n.)**—(1) The quality or state of being foul; a filthy state or condition; filthiness; in *pl.* foul treatment, indignities. *Obs.* (c1300).

(2) Foul matter: (a) Putrid matter, corruption, rottenness; in later use, purulent matter, pus. *Obs.* (b) Uncleanly matter, dirt. Now only in a stronger sense, expressing violent disgust: loathsome dirt. Rarely in *pl.* filth of various kinds, filthy matters. (c) Vermin (formerly *pl.*). In modern use restricted to insect parasites.

(3) Figure: (a) Moral defilement, vileness; corruption, pollution; obscenity. (b) *pl.* Moral impurities, corrupt or impure actions, transgressions. *Obs.* (c) Foul or obscene language; vile or loathsome imputations.

(4) Said of a person: A vile creature; a scoundrel; a slut, drab, whore. *Obs.* 1608 Shakespeare, *King Lear*, xvi, 38: “Filths savor but themselves.”



Fig. 2: “Headless,” from *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493).

## Notes

1. Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Corpus*. Trans. Richard A. Rand. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, 105.

