

This book has much to recommend it. It is well-organized and written in a style that is clear and appealing. The tight construction and step-by-step explanation of her theory makes this book a valuable tool for exposing undergraduates to theory construction and to the relationship between theory and critical analysis. In addition, the book is highly informative about a variety of topics. Schloesser instructs readers about Enlightenment political philosophy, early American economics, and laws regarding property, marriage, suffrage, education, and employment. She clearly shows how important it is to understand the relationship among such cultural factors in order to understand their consequences. Finally, the topic is a timely one. As Schloesser states in the epilogue, contemporary issues such as affirmative action, the reparations movement, and calls for increased “family values” suggest “parallels between cultural struggles of the early nation period and those of our own” (193). Schloesser’s theory of racial patriarchy is a tool that has the potential to provide greater insight into these and other complex social problems of the twenty-first century.

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Blasphemy: Impious Speech in the West from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century. By Alain Cabantous, translated by Eric Rauth. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001; pp x + 288. \$29.50 cloth.

History of Shit. By Dominique Laporte, translated by Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury. Reprint. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002; pp xiii + 192. \$12.95 paper.

In his elaboration of the child’s developing psyche, Freud reminds us that the first product of human creativity is not speech, but matter or *hyle*, the very stuff of life itself. Unquestionably mindful of the ontic primacy of the neonatal gift, in outlining his grammar of motives Kenneth Burke was led to (de)posit a “demonic trinity” of the fundamental principles responsible for the invention of “cloacal ambiguities” in discourse: “the erotic, [the] urinary, and [the] excremental.” These principles, argued Burke, can be said to organize the any number of tropic innovations in the register of the purely purposive—particularly in terms of mystical speech. The use of “rain” as poetic metaphor, for example, could be said to stimulate the erotic pleasure of urination. “Similarly,” continues Burke, “the ‘excremental’ nature of invective or vilification would allow for a translation of erotic purpose from ‘love’ into ‘war’” (*A Grammar of Motives*, 300–303). Whatever the rhetorical labor Burke’s “negative theology” can be said to exert, however, at the center of its logic is the triumph of the sign—most especially the triumph of the sign-as-image within the logics of capital—over the Real, the ability of language to mediate our relationship to the universe and isolate us in a mental world of symbolicity: the

words *rain* and *love*, like *invective* and *war*, do not smell. In the civilized world, the gift of speech supplants the gift of rectal excreta, and the divine positivity of God and His word sentences humanity to a never-ending, religious hygienics. As Burke has observed, after our entry into language, we automatically become “rotten with perfection.”

Within the last ten years, there has been a fomenting interest in scholarship devoted to returning smell—the material, the repressed—to the body, particularly among scholars working in a feminist, psychoanalytic, or Foucauldian/Deleuzian idiom (as Deleuze and Guattari bluntly remind us in *Anti-Oedipus*, the subject is a “desiring machine” that “breathes . . . heats . . . eats. . . . shits and fucks”). In keeping with this general trajectory of interest in the materiality of the body and discourse (not to mention the gleeful dispatch of profanity into academic space), a number of recent studies have focused on “bad language” as a way to peel back layers of historical discourse to expose the body’s primitive, dialectical exchange with the symbolic. These studies might be said to complement Burke’s Demonic Trinity, which begins with the material body and works up, with a parallel “Unholy Trinity,” which begins with language and works down: It is comprised of the obscene, the profane, and the blasphemous. Read together, Alain Cabantous’s *Blasphemy* and Laporte’s *History of Shit* provide an insightful description of discursive formation of the public subject vis-à-vis the rise of the Modern State through an examination of the blasphemous and the obscene. Each study marks an attempt, in other words, to capture the formation of publics and public bodies by examining that which is expressly evacuated from speech and sight—the Unholy Trinity.

As “France’s most respected historian of the sea, pirates, and the navy” (jacket), Cabantous was undoubtedly led to write about impious speech as a consequence of studying pirates and other cursing seamen. His study begins with a premise first popularized by Mary Douglas’s anthropological 1966 investigation of the purity/pollution dialectic. In her widely read *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Douglas asserted that “eliminating is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment,” and that “some pollutions are used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order” (3). Focusing on symbolic pollution of blasphemy, which is defined variously as an offense to God, the church, or an otherwise sacred ritual or thing, Cabantous argues that a genealogy of laws against impious speech (“God damn it!”) and profane behavior (spitting, worshipping idols, and so on) maps emerging social orders, particularly the Modern State’s eclipse of institutionalized religion as a dominant authority.

Beginning with an analysis of the Christian “war against blasphemy” in the 16th and 17th centuries, the author provides a narrative of the gradual decline of Protestantism and Catholicism as institutional authorities in Europe (chapters 1 through 3), the emergence of the Modern State (chapters 4, 5, and 8 through 13),

and the formation of the public subject (chapters 6 and 7 most directly, but implicit throughout). In the “early modern” period (the 16th and early 17th centuries), the punishment of blasphemous speech or acts was justified as a war against heresy. Associated with “the very wording of hell itself” (27), impious speech was often believed to be the result of demonic possession or dabbling witchcraft (pacts with the devil, after all, require the blasphemous act of kissing the Devil’s derriere)—an association that persists to the present (for example, the litany of profanities that come out of a possessed youngster in William Peter Blatty’s *The Exorcist*). Tracing the state-sponsored bans on blasphemy through the seventeenth century, Cabantous uncovers “the progressive abandonment of turf by ecclesiastic juridical power,” and an increasing monarchial “determination to monopolize the jurisdiction of select tribunals over criminal cases” concerning blasphemy. In order to “safeguard the public order,” a number of European monarchs insisted that the church had to be divested of its “power to prosecute blasphemous speech” (58–59). By “avenging a dishonored God,” the king made himself “a supreme judge here on earth and guarantor both of the natural order . . . and of the public peace” (62).

In a manner that closely resembles Foucault’s narrative of the emergence of the Modern State in *Discipline and Punish*, in the transition from the 17th to the 18th century Cabantous describes how laws against impious behaviors and speech reflect the demise of the monarchy and the arrival of a more indirectly governing state. Instead of the threat of public humiliation or torture, a public spectacle of the state’s power, the state gave birth to various self-disciplinary techniques for regulating the foul-mouthed rabble indirectly. For example, in the modern era states appropriated vernacular speech and abandoned Latin, but only to promote “a purification of vocabulary and taste for refined speech” (194). This appropriation led to a more conspicuous class system, and impious speech and behavior came to be associated with those who lived on the margins. Further, the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere and civil society in Europe coincided with the notion of public education; those “who refused to receive the enlightenment of civility, education, or morality and who kept on submitting to such unseemly gestures and words” became socially undesirable (197). Cabantous suggests that by the nineteenth century blasphemy was significantly weakened as a challenge to power. Today, blasphemy and profanity refer “less to impious speech than to the sacred,” broadly conceived (205).

Two elements of blasphemy, however, have remained constant since biblical times. First, blasphemy and profanity are expressly forbidden in public spaces that are not marked for entertainment (for example, a movie theatre); foul speech in a public forum quickly classes one as a marginal individual. Second, more broadly conceived as an affront to the sacred, fear of blasphemy continues to perpetuate a common superstition, that impious speech or behavior will invite the wrath of God. Jerry Falwell’s widely condemned remarks about the destruction of the World Trade

Center, for example, quickly come to mind. Falwell argued that pagans and other followers of alternative religious practices, pro-choice advocates, feminists, homosexuals, and the ACLU “helped make [the destruction of 9/11/01] happen.” Although its power to provoke and invite punishment has severely weakened over the last 400 years, perceptions of blasphemy continue to perform rhetorically.

In distinction from Cabantous’s largely sober and descriptive prose, Laporte’s *History of Shit* is a delightfully profane offering, extending Cabantous’s history of the impious into the obscene and repressed “anal imaginary” in one ironic turn or pun after another. The recent paperback reprint of this cleverly argued polemical essay is somewhat disappointing, because its plain brown cover pales in comparison to the extravagance of the hardback version (2000). The hardback edition better highlights the dialectical ambivalence central to Laporte’s analysis: This book, which concerns the homologous interplay of the Modern State, language, and the public subject in the idiom of human dejecta, is exquisitely encased in black velvet cloth and bound in gold thread. The velveteen *History of Shit* is symptomatic of both the seriousness and playfulness of Laporte’s prose. Yet as Slavoj Žižek has warned, this book is “far from being a theoretical joke,” just as Joyce’s *Ulysses* is far from being pulp fiction. As with Cabantous, the basic premise of Laporte’s study is that an analysis of the obscene can tell us much about transformations of the social world; although riotously funny at times, Laporte’s *History of Shit* is nevertheless a serious chronicle of the unfolding of the modern subject and State.

A practicing psychoanalyst in France until his premature death in 1984, Laporte begins his book with a very simple Freudian residuum: “To produce is literally to shit” (131). Human invention—speech as much as civilization itself—is a feculent formation necessarily tied to that sphincteral source of all gifts, the anus. For Laporte, social order is not excremental in a simple metaphorical sense, but is literally fabricated by the logics of hygiene and waste management, particularly in urban settings. Understood in terms of our inability to come to terms with our own waste and waste-making, modernity is constitutive of a hidden anal economy in which the Modern State, as the ideation of purity and cleanliness, is a functional “Sewer” aiding the public in perfuming, masking, and channeling away the odor of origins and, by implication, our sense of humanity (42–56). A wily dialectician through and through, Laporte argues that when things appear the most civil and sanitary—such as in a business transaction in a boardroom—they are actually the most filthy. Money, the *ca-ca* of civil society, depends on the existence and erasure of the private surplus made in the water closet. “Insofar as the State signifies clean money,” says Laporte, “it immediately becomes the *sine qua non* condition of reproduction. . . . from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries onward, economic theory and practice are completely severed from the kinds of ethical considerations that dominate earlier eras. Never before did the economy so unreservedly occupy the place of shit, the place of corruption devoid of all moral concern” (42).

Like Cabantous, Laporte grounds his analyses in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century battles over language and its use, or during what he calls the emergence of “the treasure of language, King and State” (15). He begins the book with a comparative analysis of two edicts, one being the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterets, which ordered all future laws to be written in the French language, and the other an edict by King François I, which ordered all human waste (from animal remains to dishwater and urine) to be stored in the privacy of one’s home until collected by the State on specified days. The cleansing of language and the public streets, argues Laporte, are intimately related and circulate within a larger, discursive field of power. In general, the story Laporte tells is that as the Modern State emerges as the regulator of civil society, the management of human waste becomes privatized in ways that mold the Modern Subject as an autonomous, self-disciplining individual, obscuring and repressing the centrality of bodies and body functions to social being in favor of the purified public body. By the time industrial capitalism arrives, the Modern Subject is a private individual who contracts publicly to exchange money and labor in an economy laundered of moral concern, as well as an economy of language cleansed of the obscenities and profanities that remind the subject of her repressed anality. In actuality, however, the Modern State is really proclaiming, “*To each his shit!*,” which becomes the “ethic of the ego decreed by a State that entitles each subject to sit on his ass on his own heap of gold.” Laporte continues that “as a ‘private’ thing—each subject’s business, each proprietor’s responsibility—shit becomes a political object through its constitution as the dialectical other of ‘public’” (46).

The emergence of the modern subject as a shitting self who willingly forgets his or her shitting to enter public space is not simply a materialist critique of capital (although this critique is emphasized throughout). In the second and fourth chapters of the study, for example, Laporte also shows how a cartography of the gradual purification of cities by hygienics is simultaneously a history of the human hierarchy of sense. “Bowling to the demands of the gaze,” signaled by the arrival of perspectivism in art and later by the ocular bias of modern philosophical aesthetics, the sanitization of the city heralded the eventual “disqualification of smell” (38). In works on the beautiful and sublime by Kant and others, “smell is toppled to the lowest rung of the sensory hierarchy,” for there are “no beautiful smells” (84–85). Thus in modernity, perfume appears. Like today’s “handi-wipes,” “Febreze,” and pellets that make one’s toilet water blue, the arrival of perfume represents the myth that “infection can be exorcised through the eradication of smell, or by finding ways to camouflage bad smells with good ones” (81). Ultimately, once smell is caught within the logics of capital, like bad speech, it becomes associated with those marginal subjects unwilling or unable to deodorize: the classed, the raced, the “shit” of society. On this basis, Laporte launches a powerful critique of colonialism and racism as “sanitation” (56–75).

Together, Cabantous's and Laporte's studies illustrate how an analysis of bad words and deeds, as well as the censoring rhetoric that orbits them, creates an opening for observing the origination of the public subject in the body politic. Precisely because both works touch on the taboo, each book provides a fresh way to look at the conduct and management of public affairs from the vantage of what is excluded, repressed, unspoken, vacated. Scholars interested in public sphere scholarship, civility, decorum, and other matters related to the modern public subject will find that Cabantous and Laporte help to fill in a number of gaps in the stories we tell about the emergence of publics. For example, Habermas has argued in his widely read *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* that the bourgeois public sphere emerged to protect civil society from the encroachment of the state. The democratic values embedded within the ideation of the public sphere, of course, led to its demise and the subsequent emergence of many publics and counter-publics. What is missing from this story are the many ways in which the Unholy Trinity figures into the very idea of "publicness" and the public subject: Part of the education required for admission to the public sphere—that is, learning to be civil—concerned the privatization of bad speech, impiety, explicative, and bodily recreation. Civility is a pedagogy of "In God we trust"; to curse Him or renounce him as a public figure is political suicide. Cabantous would suggest the impious politician is doomed, however, not so much because of her lack of faith, but because the superstitious fear of God's wrath and impending doom structures the taboo of public impiety. Civility is also a pedagogy of "holding it in," of cleanliness of speech, body, and spirit (letting a fart slip in an elevator, for example, quickly reveals the importance of the repression of anality for modern subjectivity). In this sense, the civil, public subject is a willful constipation, a signifier for the repressed odors of the private sphere and the social threat of private parts.

In the end, I suspect scholars and students interested in understanding the history and function of publicness and the public body will find these "back door" approaches to the subject highly stimulating, if not utterly irreverent.

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Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914–1920. By William G. Jordan. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001; pp 241. \$39.95 cloth.

Violent conflict in pursuit of freedom and democracy has served to illuminate the hypocrisy of racial injustice in America since 1770, when Crispus Attucks, a black colonial patriot, was the first to die in the Boston Massacre. Less than a decade later the tenets of the Declaration of Independence—specifically that all men are created equal and have certain inalienable rights—erroneously led colonials of African