CFP: “The State of Abjection”

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Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection suggests that the formation and maintenance of both individual subjectivity and group identity depends on the management of a psychological and corporeal imperfection that our enculturation requires we repudiate. What is abject in ourselves we disavow, and through transference shift onto the Other who, in turn, becomes the guarantor of our bounded selfhood and our group identifications. This ideal state, defined through metrics of subjectival coherence themselves based on a fantasy imposed by the logic of late capitalism – the fear of lack and of loss that today drives unprecedented levels of industrial and corporeal incorporativity – is one whose attainment haunts and motivates us. Abjection theory further suggests that this economistic narrative, in which boundaries and the flow of goods (and bads) define the embodied self, is closely tied to an idealist narrative of personhood whose widespread adoption creates opportunities to place subjects and social groups in a gradated, hierarchical scheme according to their accession to the ideal-as-norm. This narrative also furnishes opportunities to criminalize/diagnose and punish/treat difference from the norm it creates, and supplies an immanent logic of repudiation productive of both rhetorical and physical violence aimed at non-ideal subjects.

Abjection theory has been immensely productive, and the variety and number of contributions to the theoretical conversation continue to be impressive. Perhaps due to its critical fecundity, ‘abjection theory’ is in danger of becoming codified as a lesser version of the theory Kristeva actually proposes in *Powers of Horror*, and fundamental aspects of abjection theory - the role of sexual difference in processes of subject formation/abjection and its central importance in theorizing those processes, Kristeva’s identification not only of femininity with abjection but of masculinity with normate subjectivity, the theoretical implications of an intersectional reading of *Powers of Horror* that acknowledges its roots in a specific psychoanalytic genealogy - are too often ignored in scholarly practice. This call for papers seeks theoretically-informed sumissions that reflect on ‘the state of abjection’ as lived experience, as a scholarly practice and as a descriptive/prescriptive framing of modern, Western subjectivity in texts and contexts from across all disciplines (NOT limited to the humanities), and especially seeks contributions from scholars reflecting on major texts in abjection theory (e.g. *Powers of Horror*, *Gender Trouble*, Tyler’s “Against Abjection,” Scott’s *Extravagant Abjection*) and important trends in abjection theory (e.g. recuperative or reparative abjection, anti-maternal abjection, abjection in masculinity studies, quantitative studies of abjection).

Questions contributors might consider include:
• Are there identifiable trends in applications of abjection theory within or across disciplines? For instance, how has the role abjection theory plays in Gender Trouble and in theories of performativity marked queer theory as scholarship and as political practice? How has abjection theory changed the ways the social sciences envision the subject? Why has abjection theory played a large role in literary studies but not in the study of history, for instance, or in the philosophy of science? Has the widespread use of abjection theory in visual studies been negative or positive for the field, and in what ways?

• What is the utility of abjection theory in clinical applications? Does it actually describe subjectivity or the process of subject formation in quantifiably accurate ways, and does it have diagnostic value in a therapeutic setting? Do citations of abjection theory in trauma studies do justice either to abjection theory or the lived experience of trauma?

• In what new critical directions are scholars working with abjection theory traveling? What older texts in abjection theory deserve more attention, and why?

• Should abjection theory be applied to texts that originate from somewhere other than the context in which abjection theory originates, and why? What are the advantages/disadvantages of imposing what has been called a Eurocentric theory on non-European texts, and are there theories originating from non-European theoretical traditions that can be put in productive dialogue with abjection theory?

• How can we move beyond the simple identification-to-implications model of theorizing abjection in a text? Should we do so? Does abjection theory have any explanatory utility if it is divorced from narrative?

**Deadline for Submission: December 1, 2016**

Abstracts should be no more than 350 words, accompanied by an author biography, including affiliation, and four key words. If the special issue proposal is accepted by *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, completed articles will be 8,000 to 12,000 words including supplementary material. Abstracts will be reviewed by co-editors Thomas Spitzer-Hanks and Darieck Scott, and externally reviewed during the issue proposal process.

Please submit your abstract, biography and key words to stateofabjection@gmail.com.