Fall 2015

“Rude Noises” : Homocore, unsettling the symbolic, and enjoying abjection

Meredith L. Ruff
“Rude Noises”: Homocore, Unsettling the Symbolic, and Enjoying Abjection

by

Meredith L. Ruff

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Rhetoric Studies.

Whitman College
2016
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... iii
Abstract ............................................................................................................................... iv
Introduction........................................................................................................................ 1

Chapter One: “What the Fuck is HOMOCORE?” ................................................................. 3
  Queer Zines ..................................................................................................................... 3
  Homocore’s History ........................................................................................................ 5
  Gay or Homo .................................................................................................................. 5
  What About Punk? ......................................................................................................... 7
  Homocore and Abjection ............................................................................................... 8

Chapter Two: Abjection, Enjoyment, and Death ............................................................... 10
  Abjection ...................................................................................................................... 10
  Jouissance and the Death Drive ..................................................................................... 18
  Method .......................................................................................................................... 26

Chapter Three: Paging Through Homocore ................................................................. 29
  Disturbing Places: Abjection in Homocore ................................................................. 29
  Feeling Alive: Enjoyment Alongside the Death Drive ............................................... 34

Chapter Four: No One Knows For Certain .................................................................... 39
  The Power of Horror ................................................................................................... 40
  Excessive Radicals ....................................................................................................... 41

Appendix A ....................................................................................................................... 44

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................... 45

Notes ................................................................................................................................. 49
Acknowledgements

Honestly, I just want to thank all of my readers for working with me on this project. I am especially grateful to Professor Culp for explaining the purpose of Oxford Commas.

A special acknowledgement goes to Professor Hayes for her willingness to constantly meet and talk about my (many) concerns throughout this process, even if those meeting had to happen at 8:30 am.

I would also like to thank Penrose Library for being a comfortable home for me for these past four months.
Abstract

Abjection is not only a harmful way of being outside of culture. While scholars mobilize Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic concept of abjection in many different ways I argue that the process of abjection offers up the margins of culture as a potentially productive space. Reading the queer/punk fanzine *Homocore* through a method of tropological economy, I illustrate what anti-assimilation subcultures can do in their place on the edge of normative cultures. Ultimately, *Homocore* demonstrates that abjection, accompanied by the feeling of *jouissance*, can unsettle existing power relations. Instances of abjection can thus transform “the center” of normative cultures by destabilizing the Symbolic order upon which the center relies.
Introduction

No significance (no bliss) can occur, I am convinced, in a mass culture.

– Roland Barthes, The Pleasures of the Text

What does it mean to be abject?

Many authors refer to abjection as the process by which objects (people, actions, identities) are forced into the margins of society. The term “margins” alone, however, does not fully address the experience of existing in those interim spaces.

For clarity’s sake, I define societal margins against a societal center. I define the center in order to more closely understand those borderline areas on the edges of a particular culture. The center refers to those beliefs, perceptions, values, and mores dominant in a given society. These values originate from those subjects in the greatest positions of power. Often times, the discourses mobilized to the greatest effect echo those values. Those who desire to inhabit the center favor dominant ideals and act accordingly. The dominant power, then, rewards those actions that reflect the norm. Thus, the public comes to consider some ways of being as normal and others as deviating from that standard.

Returning to the margins; if a person does not conform to the norm, they do not have access to the center. The more a subject (consciously or unconsciously) upsets dominant beliefs, perceptions, etc., the further they fall outside the center. While no one can exist outside of society without being understood as psychotic, subjects can exist far away from the center; Those persons inhabit the margins.

Abjection is a process by which subjects become marginal. In her text Powers of Horror, Julia Kristeva defines the abject as that which occupies unstable spaces, the
margins and borders of culture. For Kristeva, no person or group can embody the abject completely but representations of abjection alter how subjects move about the world. It is my claim that there is something productive about the uncertainty abjection engenders.

While inhabiting the margins may seem undesirable, I argue that the psychoanalytic concept of jouissance, alongside the concept of the death drive, explains the draw of the margins and the experiences therein. Jouissance, a feeling embodying both pleasure and pain, allows queer subjects to reach for that which is in excess of normative, meaningful culture. The repetitive attempts to access the excess comprise the death drive. It is this drive that allows for a particular manifestation of jouissance in abjection. Beyond the pale of stable meaning, the death drive, accompanied by jouissance, proffers an opportunity, not to demolish meaning but to grant that meaning cannot apprehend the world in its entirety. An abject orientation (a perception stemming from experiencing the margins of culture) acknowledges this ultimate instability of symbols.

Moreover, existence within the abject allows subjects to (mis)appropriate symbols in service of finding something other than the order that exists.

As an entry point for positing a study of rhetoric within the abject, I analyze the fanzine (hereafter referred to as zine) Homocore. First, I offer a rhetorical history of Homocore and zines in general. I then review theories that explain how Homocore manifests abjection, jouissance, and the death drive. In particular, I look to Christian Lundberg’s method for reading psychoanalytic concepts within texts via Lacanian tropological economies. I project this method onto specific examples within Homocore. Ultimately, I argue that Homocore affirms abjection as a productive space where meaning can come undone, potentially subverting normative (centric) ideology.
Chapter One: “What the Fuck is HOMOCORE?”

Historically, individuals or small groups of people have created the pastiche material of zines by cutting and gluing images and pieces of text onto pages. These zinesters copied their pages, then folded and stapled them into small booklets. Zines were self-published so zine editors can create or arrange content without fear of censorship.

Zine production began in the 1930s when small groups of science fiction enthusiasts wrote about their interests, created art pertaining to sci-fi, and shared their ideas in pamphlet form. The practice of hand crafting and distributing booklets amongst others with similar interests soon caught on in other (sub)cultures. Zines come out of what Stephen Duncombe labels a “culture of the underground.” Most zines are “publications dedicated to discussing the intricacies and nuances of a cultural genre.”

From the varied categories of zines Duncombe discusses, I chose to work with Political zines. Since Political zines focus on specific subjectivities, reading them in conjunction with abjection (the marginalization of certain subjects) can be especially useful.

Queer Zines

In queer culture, zines have a long history. In the late 1980s, the Queercore movement used zines to facilitate connections between gay and punk communities. The movement’s discursive approach avoided the assimilation rhetoric frequently found within the more mainstream gay rights movements of previous decades. In general, communities that movements like Queercore fostered were less concerned with achieving rights by working within a state-centered system of laws. Instead, these groups established themselves as counter cultures contra the rhetorically constructed average American lifestyle normative society often celebrated. According to academic records
and narratives of subjects who were part of movements like Queercore, the movements were thus “anti-assimilationist.” Queercore focused specifically on non-masculinist punks who existed within the margins of both the hardcore, sexually straight punk culture and the mainstream lesbian and gay culture. Written publications were important to Queercore. These publications, many of them zines, allowed subjects to interact with the movement even if they could not physically inhabit anti-assimilationist communities.

I have chosen to analyze Homocore, a zine that spawned from the Queercore movement, for several reasons. First, I cannot read every queer anti-assimilation zine in existence. Access to many zines is limited. Second, time constraints on this project further narrow the scope of objects I am able to analyze. Several criteria I used when searching through zines led me to analyze Homocore. Primarily, I wanted to analyze a zine that was widely accessible to a large audience not only in the time that it was originally published but also today. Those with Internet access can find Homocore for free, both on its own website and via the Queer Zine Archive Project. Next, Homocore is one of the first zines to originate from a “queer” movement, demonstrating its cultural relevance. Additionally, the creator of Homocore self-identifies the zine as having an “anti-assimilation” orientation. An abjection framework would not be tenable with zines that desired to uphold mainstream culture. The anti-assimilation tag is also important because it shows Homocore as part of a larger queer movement, allowing me to make broader conclusions about queer anti-assimilation in general. Following this project, I hope that my argument might be extended to other artifacts in this genre, even if they do not fit into all of the criteria I outline above.
Homocore’s History

The name Homocore came from the first zine published as part of Queercore, J.D.’s.23 Between the years of 1988 and 1991, Homocore published seven issues, primarily edited by Tom Jennings. Issues are referred to as #1 - #7. At Homocore’s peak of production, sales grossed an estimate $4,000.24 The editor sold the zines for around 48 cents each, which means Homocore reached about 8,000 people in that issue alone. Moreover, since zines are frequently bartered as well as purchased, I can assume more people read Homocore than purchased it.25

Amy Spencer posits Homocore as an integral part of the creation of a queer/punk scene. Adding the identifier queer to an already alternative music scene resulted in a culture even further away from the center than either culture would be alone. That distance from the center was and continues to be the mission of Homocore.26 In the first issue, Homocore constructs itself contra normative culture (straight, white, middle-class, masculine-centric).27 Homocore’s editor begins the issue saying: “We're outlaws if we don't follow the usual rules and don't want to be part of mass culture. We're mutants if we try new things, things that are honest and human, like making our own cultures....”28 As I subsequently explain, Homocore was not part of the typical LGBT community, nor was it included in the typical punk community. Homocore engendered its own blend of the two subcultures that illustrated queer punks as doubly outcast.

Gay or Homo

In the 1970s, gay and lesbian identities represented non-heteronormative subjectivities. One Homocore contributor describes the early community, saying,
People were doing things like wearing a dress with a beard, wearing makeup from outer space, making preposterous costumes that left trails of glitter and sequins wherever they went. They called it genderfuck, and the idea was to break down all traditional sex roles.  

The gender in this early community appears very fluid. Later, *Homocore* contributors argue that gay and lesbian communities grew more mainstream. The same contributor laments: “…like the old hippies, [gays and lesbians] were real big on classifying you. Either you’re gay or you’re straight. And if you’re gay you have to act just like us.”

Certain gay communities required adherence to specific norms. Sometimes, these norms reflected those of the center. For instance, “mainstream” gay communities prided themselves on being gay but refused to preface sexual acts as main aspects of their identities, instead professing a desire to be productive members of society by having families. Many of these homosexual communities would not accept people who did not affirm their particular ideology, like those who performed gender fluidly.

Being gay or lesbian, then, is not a good indicator of whether or not a certain subject can relate to *Homocore*. There were many gay and lesbian subjects who would have been seen as “assimilating.” Editor Tom Jennings intentionally denounces assimilationists in #2, defining them as “gay people who want to be part of mainstream culture” and using italics to sarcastically label assimilationists as “respectable.”

Importantly, the editor also argues that *Homocore* is not just a zine seeking an audience of homosexuals. Jennings writes, “You don’t have to be a homo to read or have stuff published in *Homocore*. One thing everyone here has in common is that we’re all social mutants; we’ve outgrown or never were part of any of the “socially acceptable” categories.” The purpose of *Homocore* is thus not to set up its own gay society with echoes of mainstream values but rather to reject the center even when the center
manifests in homosexual communities. One of the ways *Homocore* places itself outside these homosexual communities is by participating in punk culture.

What About Punk?

Although *Homocore* ostensibly represents a split from the greater punk movement, the zine still embodies some of the characteristics of punk. Dick Hebdige gives an encompassing account of subcultures after the Second World War, paying special attention to punk culture, including style of dress, mannerisms and purpose. One enterprise of punk Hebdige identifies is that of “adapting images, style and ideologies made available elsewhere on television and in films, in magazines and newspapers, in order to construct an alternative identity which communicated a perceived difference: an Otherness. [Punks] were, in short, challenging at a symbolic level the ‘inevitability’, the ‘naturalness’ of class and gender stereotypes.”

Punks extricate symbols from mainstream culture and repurpose or undermine them. While mainstream culture can repossess the symbols, their meanings would no longer be singular. Hebdige also indicates that punks specifically attack the meanings of stable cultural categories like class and gender. Early punk, especially, has few gender and sexual norms that reflect those of mainstream culture.

What punk communicates to those inside and outside of the subculture is difference.

Additionally, Hebdige connects punk culture directly to Kristeva’s earlier ideas about signification, writing “the signifying practices in punk were ‘radical’ in Kristeva’s sense: that they gestured towards a ‘nowhere’ and actively sought to remain silent, illegible.”

Punks use mainstream ideology as a barrier against which to define themselves, while they simultaneously harness illegibility to escape complete definition.
Punks undermine mainstream meaning, not in order to create new stable meanings but rather to create a lack of meaning. Overall, punks use ironic re-presentations in order to undermine the ideology of the “center.” By re-appropriating mainstream ways of being to their own ends rather than completely rejecting them, punks occupy a position that cannot be completely ousted from society. Therefore, punks can cause anxiety in the center because they hang onto the border between in and out.

According to *Homocore*, punk culture allows subjects to be “weird and antisocial, like back in the early hippie days, but in a way it was better, because you didn’t have to pretend to like people or smile all the time or act like you believed in peace in love. In fact, the more pissed off and alienated you looked, the cooler you were.” While punk offers a certain kind of community, the punk scene does not expect its members to act in typical community fashion by building a cohesive counter culture.

Punk eventually became “sexually straight” in a way that tends to bash “fags.” When punk became popular, “…bands started singing about fags and cocksuckers [and] it was pretty obvious that people of ambiguous sexuality no longer were welcome in this scene.” Eventually, people who mixed queer proclivities with punk were ostracized in both punk and gay communities. The Queercore movement began as an answer to this exclusion of queer punks who experienced abjection in their place along the margins of centric culture, gay culture and punk culture.

*Homocore* and Abjection

There is no direct mention of abjection within *Homocore*. The absence of “abject” from the text, however, does not mean the theory cannot be applied to the artifact, nor that reading the artifact cannot result in a more nuanced theory of abjection. As I move
into chapter two, I account for themes I find within *Powers of Horror*. I explain how myriad scholars make use of Kristeva’s particular conception of abjection in relation to various objects. I then discuss associated theories surrounding *jouissance* and the death drive as they relate to Kristeva’s abject. I end by explaining my method for reading such concepts alongside the zine. Ultimately I do so to indicate how these theories can interact with *Homocore*’s queer text.
Chapter Two: Abjection, Enjoyment, and Death

The theory of abjection and the ways rhetoric scholars have used that theory are central to my thesis. While rhetorical scholars constitute abjection in many ways, I engage specifically with the abject Julia Kristeva addresses in her text *Powers of Horror*. Although abjection is my primary theoretical concern, there are two related ideas intertwined with abjection. The first of those ideas is that of *jouissance*, loosely translated to mean “enjoyment.” Discussing *jouissance* always entails some discussion of a second idea, “drives,” an internal pull of desire to a conclusion. I focus on “death drive” to make my inroad into the realm of psychoanalytic critique because of the established connection between the death drive and queer theory.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the idea of abjection. I then turn to how *jouissance* and the death drive have been understood in rhetorical studies. After I discuss these theoretical ideas that are imperative to my thesis, I explain my method for using psychoanalytic concepts to do rhetorical critique. I do so in order to eventually perform a reading of *Homocore* that exemplifies these theories.

Abjection

*Kristeva’s Abject*

As Kristeva’s abjection remains my focus, I begin with a review of her text *Powers of Horror* (henceforth *Powers*). Kristeva’s writings come from a psychoanalytic tradition that draws from both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. As a result, I refer to Freud and Lacan throughout this chapter but remain grounded in Kristeva’s text for the purposes of this thesis.
The process of abjection first entails exclusion. When experiencing abjection, subjects fall out of the Symbolic order or as Kristeva says, “What is abject... the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.” Abjection, therefore, takes place on the margins of culture where meaning becomes unstable. These marginal spaces, Kristeva explains, have the ability to “disturb identity, system, order.” Close to the beginning of the text, Kristeva gives another concise definition of the abject. She writes, “We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity.” She argues that to be abject is to be in a state of permanent instability and uncertainty, a state of in-between-ness. Abjection, however, has important attributes aside from ambiguity: horror, impurity and femininity.

**Horror.** Kristeva begins her discussion on horror by hailing Freud’s Oedipal triangle. She writes, “the father is the mainstay of the law and the mother is the prototype of the object.” Kristeva immediately complicates Freud’s depiction of the mother as a bounded object. Instead the mother cannot be apprehended as a complete whole. Kristeva attaches horror to this figure of the mother saying, “From the start, fear and object are linked.” Fear manifests because the law can never quite apprehend the incomplete object. The object represents a lack, a place where meaning cannot be found. Using a child’s fear as an example, Kristeva says, “[Freud] detects the fear of castration – of [the child’s] mother’s ‘missing’ sexual organ, of the loss of his own, of the guilty desire to reduce the father to the same unmanning or to the same death, and so forth.” Fear of lack causes the child to desire the body of the mother and death of the father. Since the mother and father signify greater constructs (object and law), fear of castration
represents fear of becoming object via entry into the Symbolic; desire to reduce the father to death would be a desire to undo law and return to a pre-Symbolic state.

There is something horrifying about the blurred outline of the object, about how little the signifying system can actually capture. In Kristeva’s words: “Confronted with states of distress that are evoked for us by the child who makes himself heard but is incapable of making himself understood, we adults, use the word ‘fear.’”⁴⁹ Lack of a complete Symbol causes horror. In order to combat fear, subjects invest more heavily in meaning making. As Kristeva says, “Language learning takes place as an attempt to appropriate an oral “object” that slips away, and whose hallucination…threatens us from the outside.”⁵⁰ Language and meaning are ways of repudiating the threat of not being understood, of emptiness symbols that do not make sense.

*Impurity.* Impurity, as something that upsets order, is a cause of abjection. Kristeva defines impurity as “that which departs from symbolic order”⁵¹ and “a power (maternal? natural? – at any rate insubordinate and not liable of being subordinated to Law).”⁵² Impurity is not part of Law, otherwise known as the Symbolic order. Impurity disturbs order. Thus, abjection cannot be found all the way inside or outside that order. Impurity, moreover, is often accompanied by disgust which typically relates to the mixing of separate entities – like femininity and masculinity, clean and unclean food, bodily fluids with space outside the body etc.⁵³ Undoing borders culminates in intermingling of different elements – now impure. The resulting instability, the fact that the elements can no longer be separated out to make sense as singular pieces, is an aspect of abjection.
Femininity. Kristeva posits a masculine/feminine split as important to abjection. Kristeva articulates the feminine as that which lacks the phallus, that constitutes the lack of the symbolic order. Abjection originates from the space in between the father and the mother. To this point, Kristeva says,

The abject confronts us… with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling. The difficulty a mother has in acknowledging (or being acknowledged by) the symbolic realm…

The Mother is important to Kristeva as the Mother lies on the border between the Symbolic and the unassimilable. It is this feminine figure that lies at the origin of abjection. As the (ostensible) child attempts to come into being through language, the Mother pulls them back toward the unknown or rather, the unnamable. The Mother exerts a certain power that may be desirable (but that may also be unpleasant (“stifling”). In sum, the Mother exemplifies the abject in that the maternal inhabits the margins of meaning and pulls subjects away from the Symbolic.

Not only does the feminine occupy a border and disrupt order, the feminine can also instigate fear. Of the relationship between feminine and masculine Kristeva remarks, “One of [the powers], the masculine, apparently victorious, confesses through its very relentlessness against the other, the feminine, that it is threatened by an asymmetrical, irrational, wily, uncontrollable power.” Masculinity must constantly confront the feminine’s power, a power that would ostensibly wreck the symbolic order where the masculine finds safety. The feminine has its own brand of power outside symbolic order, a power that cannot be understood.
Abjection in the Field of Rhetoric

Overall, the literature on abjection in rhetorical studies focuses on the same themes I mention above: horror, impurity and femininity. While the categories may sound distinct, each theme may allude to or directly connect to other themes.

*Horror.* Scholars maintain that the horror found within abjection comes from experiences of uncertainty, disgust, unrelenting fascination, and the “monstrous feminine.” Most works deal with abjection and horror in horror films. This work often occurs at the intersection of rhetorical criticism and film studies.

Film scholars discuss abjection in films as it portrays ambiguity and border crossing. For instance, Katherine Goodnow discusses the archetype of “the stranger” in horror film, arguing that the particular figure of the stranger represents that which is outside, unfamiliar, that which breaks into the safe spaces the subjects of horror films occupy. Goodnow identifies situations where abjection takes place and how abjected Others are integral to the horror genre.

Disgust speaks to an experience of bodily revulsion in reaction to something unpleasant. In horror film, however, that revulsion is often tied to unassimilable desire. Both characters and audiences return to the places of their disgust – characters to their haunted homes or nightmarish dreams, audiences to theaters where they first became afraid. Such repetitious viewing practices, the authors argue, “destabilize the lines between self and other and further render the drive for consumption abject by transferring the urge for possession.” In this way, consumption is rendered abject as something that upsets boundaries and causes fear of the unknown within the self. Horror film, then, can simultaneously embody disgust, fascination, and uncertainty.
Horror film also uses images of the abject feminine to inspire fear. Barbara Creed discusses abjection in terms of horror and femininity in the film *Alien*. Creed argues that the abject maternal figure translates to horror film as the “monstrous feminine,” represented in *Alien* as “images of blood, of the all devouring vagina, the toothed vagina, the vagina as Pandora’s box… the chameleon figure of the alien, the monster as fetish-object of the mother.”\(^{59}\) Creed concentrates on Kristeva’s discussion of the temptation to fall back into the ambiguous realm of non-meaning (and potential death) – the feminine.\(^{60}\) Ultimately, there are multiple ways for abjection and horror film to crossover each applying various aspects of *Powers* to distinct films.

*Impurity.* Authors often use theories of abjection when discussing disgust and impurity. In some cases, this discussion focuses specifically on bodies and food, but always in the context of “mixing.” For the most part, “mixing” entails an inside space coming into contact with a, usually undesirable, outside.

Christine Harold discusses the rhetorical function of abjection in representations of the bodies of heroin users. For example, the abject bodies of heroin chic “preserve neither the inside or the outside; rather [they show their] viewers that both positions are constructed and unstable.”\(^{61}\) Harold continues this argument by focusing on the way bodily fluids contribute to an understanding of “bodies as unstable, fragmented, or even dispersed across a field of discourse – in other words, as posthuman.”\(^{62}\) These bodies, according to Harold’s conception, are not complete, making them particularly susceptible to abjection. Once again, the abject inhabits the margins and potentially destabilizes the center.
Another example of Kristeva n abjection that has been taken up in rhetoric studies is the discussion of mixing elements, especially food. Lynne Houston uses this particular understanding, remarking, “These diseases [mad cow disease] suggest a radical connection between the human and the animal through the body, wherein for the goal of racist abjection, the problem of “meat” and immigrant bodies is all one of contamination.” Mixing elements, whether “good” meat with “bad” or foreign immigrants with native ranchers, allows for the abjection of those elements. Since mixing causes instability, some elements can be pushed further into the margins.

Femininity. Many authors adopt the feminine as a basic point of entry into discussing abjection, albeit in different ways. Most articles in the field posit the feminine as that which disturbs order and is therefore abject. Often times, the feminine that scholars speak of is already abnormal, connected to women of color or the phantasmic. Some authors concern themselves with feminine bodies but others place emphasis on the feminine’s place in the Symbolic order.

In a piece about female suicide attackers, Marita Gronnvoll and Kristen McCauliff reference two of Kristeva’s tenets: “the abject does not cease challenging its master” and the abject “does not respect borders, positions and rules.” When women perform violent acts, through what news accounts refer to as trickery and (ab)using their position as potential mothers, they are rhetorically constructed as more transgressive and therefore more abject than their male counterparts. Gronnvoll and McCauliff continue, arguing that there is a “peculiar anxiety over the ‘uncontrollable’ female body” as if “the very presence of the female body is disruptive and has potential to cause chaos.” Women’s bodies are innately dangerous precisely in their femininity.
Often times, authors connect the feminine to other possible positions of abjection such as race and bodily impurity. Isis Giraldo demonstrates the female abject as attached to blackness, fatness, and foreignness. She argues, “the fat black female body is constructed in Colombian media and culture as that entity corresponding to a different ‘Other’ which threatens an established order.”69 The body threatens the order both in its femaleness and in its status as Other race. In Mary Phillips’ article juxtaposing the original Starbucks logo with the Starbucks CEO’s memoirs, the feminine abject as impure underscores both texts. Phillips argues that the monstrous figure of the two-tailed mermaid, Melusine, intersects with the gender inversion of the Starbucks story by highlighting the abject undertones in both texts: “The female and feminine are abject, and therefore threaten the intrusion of pollution, disorder, subversion, excess emotion and uncontrollable bodies into the rational and disembodied organization.”70 As the mermaid represents a human mixed with an animal, readers cannot apprehend Melusine as a complete subject. Melusine’s body is horrifying both in its femininity and its impurity.

Accounting for the feminine in the symbolic order, most authors posit the feminine as the dissolution of apprehensible meaning. Dominique Russel posits that cinema constitutes matricide as justified because matricide always involves the killing a mother turned monster.71 Russel reiterates the distinction between the law (the father, the Symbolic) and what threatens the law (the mother, the abject). Similarly, in his reading of The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Briggs, Michael Davis asserts the mother as “pre-symbolic” and the father as “symbolic,” referencing Kristeva’s conception.72 The mother, the feminine, is lack and cannot be apprehended in the symbolic order.
Some works on abjection does not neatly fit into the categories of horror, femininity, and impurity. These works still, however, contain themes important for this thesis. Claire King, for instance, speaks both to abject’s interspace, and to the way bodies themselves can be used to disturb the typical order. Of the abject body, King asserts, “Experienced as transgressive and ambiguous, the abject beseeches and pulverizes, compelling and disturbing those that encounter disruptions.”73 Her abject body is white and masculine but it is still an ambiguous representation that exists between fantasy and reality.74 Finally, like many of the articles concerned with the horror immanent to abjection, Todd Kesselman’s argument reads Kristeva alongside conceptions of the sacred and brings abjection back to the unbounded body once again.75 Kesselman, like other authors, foregrounds the abject body’s ability to cause uncertainty.

Concluding this section, what much of the work on abjection in rhetorical studies has in common is its preoccupation with upset of order. Regardless of the type of subject in question (whether a monster, a woman, a junkie, or a piece of meat), the field’s focus on abjection typically entails discussing the dissolution that subjects and symbols experiences through abjection.

**Jouissance and the Death Drive**

*Jouissance*, an experience of enjoyment, is always caught up in a drive of some sort. This section on *jouissance* necessarily entails a discussion of such drives, paying special attention to the death drive being the drive to the end of meaning.76 It is the death drive that pulls a subject into the margins, the death drive that has the potential to undermine the Symbolic in that it “holds the place of what meaning misses.”77 The death drive hurtles toward lack. Subjects who recognize the Symbolic’s inherent inability to
encompass all parts of the world attempt to find what is in excess of the Symbolic, to be whole in a way that prefigures entry into the Symbolic. Jouissance is the feeling (of desire and dread) a subject receives when pursuing the end of the death drive. Scholars describe jouissance itself in several ways: as part of subject experience, part of subject formation, and finally as an aspect of experience/formation that is specifically queer.

Experience

Throughout Powers, Kristeva engages with jouissance as it is tied to abjection. As Kristeva writes, “the Other no longer has a grip on the three apices of the triangle where subjective homogeneity resides; and so, it jettisons the object into an abominable real, inaccessible except through jouissance.” That which is unstable, outside, and thus abject, can only be accessed through jouissance. Kristeva, however, does not explicitly describe what jouissance is, although she uses the term in reference to a fascinated sort of horror. Seeing jouissance as a process related to abjection Kristeva maintains, “One thus understands why so many victims are its fascinated victims.” Kristeva also ties jouissance to desire or “want.” In this case, jouissance is the desire for the end of the Symbolic order, the lack. This idea of lack holds the place of a space of meaninglessness beyond what the Symbolic order can apprehend. Ultimately this desire cannot be fulfilled. The purpose of the death drive, then, is its process. The object of desire (the negative) is not the source of jouissance. Rather, the source is the repetitious circling of that object. Enjoyment can be continual because the subject inevitably fails to access the object. Importantly for this project, it is this very process that creates various ways of being.
Christian Lundberg describes *jouissance* as a subject’s investment into particular practices that may be disturbing. He writes,

Jouissance names the process of producing a subject, and the set of habits, investments, and relations that orient a subject towards its world. Enjoyment represents both a subject’s ‘useless’ repetition of its habits of subjectivity, and the subject’s ritual organization of its affective investments and the means of organizing these practices…On this reading, enjoyment is distinct from pleasure: as opposed to the experience of delectation, enjoyment signals both an affectively charged state and a ritually repeated habit or compulsion that may as often be received as annoying or unpleasant.82

*Jouissance* can thus be read as an aspect of drive – repetition of practices to attain an end that cannot be attained. Instead of an end, practitioners of this brand of *jouissance* receive a feeling, an excess of pleasure,83 an unsettling enjoyment. Lundberg’s conception of *jouissance*, for which he draws heavily from both Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, applies to those actions that “may as often be received as annoying or unpleasant.”84 Taken a step further, past feelings of annoyance and unpleasantness, a subject experiencing abjection may continue to practice habits resulting in abjection because they experience some sort of enjoyment. In Lundberg’s reading of *The Passion of the Christ*, evangelical audiences feel “revulsion, guilt, or visceral bodily sickness upon viewing the violence”85 watching the film. Despite the (potentially) abject character of the audience’s experiences, however, the audience still enjoyed their experience, and subsequently lauded it. Jouissance, thus, could be a way of understanding a subject’s relationship with abjection.

Responding to Lundberg, Joshua Gunn makes similar use of *jouissance* when considering *The Passion*. Gunn explains *jouissance* as “an indescribable
compulsion toward painful pleasure or pleasurable pain.” According to Gunn conception, these feelings of pleasure and pain physically manifest within the body. Recently in the field of communication studies, more scholars (including Gunn) have produced work investigating the sensations audiences experience when consuming texts. In contrast to Lundberg’s “passion” this approach grounds jouissance in the body and physical feelings rather than foregrounding any interpretation of a text.

Finally, Roland Barthes relates an experience of “bliss” (I see bliss as jouissance under a different name) felt when reading particular texts. Although Barthes claims that readers feel bliss when they encounter specific texts, bliss is not a result of what can be apprehended in the words of the text. Barthes argues that “Bliss is unspeakable” meaning that feelings of bliss are beyond apprehension within the Symbolic order Barthes uses Lacan to posit bliss as that which exceeds the text, but is still felt. Moreover, Barthes describes texts of bliss alongside the concept of negativity. The text of bliss is “the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts…, unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.” A text that inspires jouissance, then, is one that upsets the Symbolic’s ability to transmit stable meaning. Through negativity, bliss denaturalizes centric ideology immanent in the Symbolic order. This unsettling, however, is not destructive. Such destruction is not the object of desire within texts of bliss. Bliss revolves around “the site of loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation,” the spaces where
meaning is fluid and inassimilable, but not completely. Texts of bliss invest in searching for this negative space between the Symbolic and the Real rather than on destroying the Symbolic in its entirety. Thus, subject can only be caught up in bliss when they reach past spaces of meaning.

Subjectivity

As subjects experience jouissance in certain ways, feelings of enjoyment also affect subject formation. For Kristeva, abjection and its jouissance are part of every subject. Kristeva writes,

Our eyes can remain open provided we recognize ourselves as always already altered by the symbolic – by language. Provided we hear in language…the gouged-out eye, the wound, the basic incompleteness that conditions the indefinite quest of signifying concatenations. That amounts to joying in the truth of self-division (abjection/sacred).\textsuperscript{92}

In order to understand the self, Kristeva posits that “we” must admit that parts of ourselves are abject, that parts are incomplete and outside of apprehension. Language affects subjects, the Symbolic order affects the process of those subjects’ abjection. The Symbolic order delineates meaning into that which can be said and that which constitutes the ultimate the abject, the unnamable. In reaching for that abject space of negativity, “the gouged-out eye,” subjects experience a certain enjoyment. This enjoyment changes a subjects relation to the Symbolic and thus their subjectivity.

Slavoj Žižek and Barbara Biesecker also make arguments about jouissance and subject formation. Reading a poster from Alien, Žižek posits: “the I itself constitutes itself by way of rejection of the Thing, by way of assuming a distance towards the substance of enjoyment… the pure ‘I think’ takes place only when the subject endures the confrontation with the senseless stain of jouissance.”\textsuperscript{93} Subject formation takes place when the subject confronts jouissance. The subject can only confront jouissance if the
subject experiences the enjoyment. The rational (“I think”) subject attempts to bound itself by distancing itself from jouissance, so a subject who falls into enjoyment must (at least partially) fragment.

In a different text, Žižek ties enjoyment (as jouissance) to an excess of feeling that creates a certain subject. Žižek writes “surplus enjoyment has the same paradoxical power to convert things (pleasure objects) into their opposite, to render disgusting what is usually considered a most pleasant, “normal” sexual experience, to render inexplicably attractive what is usually considered a loathsome act.”94 Too much enjoyment, then, has the power to render the unwanted instead as the object of want, or render normative objects disgusting. Subjects desires, and the subjectivity, are thus changed in this process.

Finally, Biesecker argues that jouissance could potentially create a radical rhetorical agent. Biesecker credits “the eventful emergence of this singularly disposed political agent to the sublimation of drive(s) and the disruptive jouissance that is its effect.”95 Biesecker argues, as do others, that in redirecting the destructive mechanisms in the drive(s), the excessive jouissance can be harnessed to form a new subjectivity, subjectivity not held back by the law (both in terms of the symbolic and in terms of societal norms).96 Biesecker says, “this [new political] subject’s radical rhetorical agency is precisely in its appearance as unaccountable.”97 It is only the illegible subject that can access the type of agency. A subject access illegibility through jouissance and the drive(s). Biesecker goes so far as to claim the subject can find fulfillment in the death drive (even though the drive can never achieve its end) through what she terms “object-voice.”98 The object-voice is not speech. Rather the object-voice is nonsense, a void, a lack which produces a subject “who is perceived by himself or herself as wholly
inconsistent or out of sync with the rules of making sense.” Thus jouissance produces a subject with its own voice (or the voice produces a subject) that cannot be completely apprehended within the Symbolic order. This subject is not legible. It is my claim that the queer subject is the best understanding of Biesecker’s radical agent.

**Queerness**

Lee Edelman serves as my point of entry for discussing queerness in conjunction with the abject. Edelman reads jouissance alongside the death to consider the potential the queer subjects have to undo the Symbolic order tied to social reproductionism. Of the death drive, Edelman says “As the constancy of a pressure both alien and internal to the logic of the Symbolic, the inarticulable surplus that dismantles the subject from within, the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability.”¹⁰⁰ For Edelman, queer is not really a subjectivity at all. Rather queer is the ultimate negativity to which the death drive call subjects. Those who might call themselves queer are subjects who first admit that this surplus exists and then attempt to unsettle the Symbolic in an effort to reach that negativity.

Edelman summarizes the purpose of existing as a queer subject in this paragraph:

This, I suggest, is the ethical burden to which queerness must accede in a social order intent on misrecognizing its own investment in morbidity, fetishization, and repetition: to inhabit the place of meaninglessness associated with the sinthome; to figure an unregenerate, and unregenerating, sexuality whose singular insistence on jouissance, rejecting every constraint imposed by sentimental futurism, exposes aesthetic culture – the culture of forms and their reproduction, the culture of Imaginary lures – as always already a “culture of death” intent on abjecting the force of a death drive that shatters the tomb we call life.¹⁰¹

This passage is complex, but there are several aspects that are important for this project.

The first is Edelman’s understanding of jouissance. Like aforementioned authors
Edelman identifies *jouissance* as an enjoyable process linked to drives. In the case of the queer subject, *jouissance* manifests through the death drive specifically. *Jouissance* also produces subjects; As subjects chase “enjoyment” their actions (re)produce certain ways of being.\(^{102}\) For Edelman, however, *jouissance* acts as an access point to the Real, or rather a pathway to meaninglessness.\(^{103}\) *Jouissance* is the excess that pushes subjects beyond the Symbolic realm into a space of ambiguity. In the above passage, Edelman argues that queer subjects reject norms of reproduction (i.e. sex=children) when they chose to participate in the particular *jouissance* that accompanies the death drive.

Edelman posits the queer as figuring immortality beyond that of passing on genes to children – the immortality of the death drive. The death drive attempts to thrust into the place beyond the Symbolic, a place that can never die because it can never be attained, or as Edelman puts it meaninglessness which is “the substance of *jouissance* itself.”\(^{104}\) When he speaks of the death drive’s immortality, Edelman explains that he desires an end to the Symbolic and the “illusory status of meaning” – not just and end of reproduction but an end of the forms that allow for reproduction in the first place.\(^{105}\)

Edelman does not believe in affirming stable identity or in the “Imaginary lures” that promise a whole subject. Rather, Edelman demonstrates that the subject will always be fragmented. There are no closed borders between the subject and the Other.\(^{106}\) He names non-queer culture a “culture of death” and notes that the life “we” know is a tomb.\(^{107}\) Perhaps, because there is immortality outside *jouissance*, Edelman means to say that the only way to live is by recognizing what happens beyond the false surety of the Symbolic order. Intent on reproducing itself the current culture would like to oust the death drive from its midst. Edelman and similar authors in the queer tradition insist that
queerness pursues the death drive, then, if only to assure culture of its own frailties and failings. Thus, Edelman explains the death drive as intimately attached to jouissance and posits the radical character of both.

Others intersect jouissance and queerness in different ways. For instance, in his reading of The Mudge Boy, Jeff Bush contends that queerness does not have to relate to sexuality, which would complicate Edelman’s argument about the relationship between queerness and anti-reproduction. Bush posits that in the world of the film (a post-queer dystopia), both homosexuals and heterosexuals experience the gaze, which indeterminately leads to a feeling of jouissance that Bush identifies as “pleasure found in suffering.” What is important about queerness is not its sexual prescriptions, but rather the way it transgresses and disturbs order, allowing characters in the film to use language that can “sneak through the gap between the Real and the Symbolic, between what is unacceptable and what is acceptable, between what can and cannot be linguistic.” Edelman’s queerness could also be posited as that which denies any type of reproduction, sexual or not. Given the above understandings of jouissance and the death drive, I contend that the queer subject has a distinct experience and subjectivity when considering abjection. Reading Homocore gives me a glimpse of this queer abjection.

**Method**

My method comes directly out of Lundberg’s “Enjoying God’s Death.” Lundberg employs psychoanalysis to study the Symbolic within rhetorical studies. He does so in response to Gunn positioning rhetoric primarily within Lacan’s imaginary. In Lundberg’s words there is “the possibility of a Lacanian path in rhetorical studies that
figures the primacy of the Symbolic as a quintessentially rhetorical order.”

Rearticulating Gunn’s conception of Real/Symbolic/Imaginary, Lundberg goes on to say,

Another reading of Lacan’s Real is possible; namely that the Real does not reside in the Symbolic order, but instead is produced by a gap in the Symbolic order. On this interpretation, the Real is simply unsymbolizable excess that although generated by a failure of the Symbolic, does not reside in the Symbolic. This interpretation of the Real figures it more squarely as a specific lack of the Symbolic.

And then,

Signifiers are constituted by their difference, and subjects come into being in negotiating their entry into this realm of difference…the subject is simultaneously produced and disfigured by its unavoidable insertion into the space of the Symbolic.

For Lundberg, if subjects come into being, construct their desires and come to speak all through the Symbolic, rhetorical studies should study the Symbolic (and the gap between what the Symbolic can apprehend and that which it cannot). As a result, Lundberg creates a specific method for reading texts through this theoretical point of access. Using Lacan’s “theory of enjoyment and is treatments of metaphor and metonymy as rhetorical forms” Lundberg “details the circulation of tropes” surrounding Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ. Lundberg understands trope in the Lacanian sense as “an economy of exchange and articulation generative of all signs and their meanings” and “understands all signification as tropological.” Through this method, a rhetorical critic examines how tropes interact with each other in order to grasp what these tropes are doing. Lundberg continues to argue for understanding ‘reality’ through an economy of trope when he writes:

a conception of the materiality of rhetoric as an economy of trope and enjoyment that exerts durable historically situated effects by placing the subject, which is always a product of discourse, in an (im)mediated…
relation to both the body and ‘materiality,’ specifically by ‘enjoying a body.’

Lacan’s theory of Real/Symbolic/Imaginary contributes to understanding the formation of subjects and publics through discourse, a task with which rhetorical studies is often concerned. Moreover, Lundberg’s focus on tropes is generative of a specific rhetorical method for reading texts. With a method that focuses on tropological economy, I can gain an understanding of what happens when contributors use tropes in ways that unsettle the Symbolic. As trope is generative of meaning, tracing specific tropes in a text allows me to draw conclusions about a group of subjects from text.

In the next chapter, I read Homocore through an economy of trope. I pay special attention to four potential points where abjection, jouissance, and the death drive might manifest: anti-normativity, marginality, bodily and feeling. I track the exchange between the commitment to deny normative recognition, marginal spaces, visceral experiences and responses of enjoyment in order to grasp how these three psychoanalytic concepts might reveal themselves within the pages of Homocore.
Chapter Three: Paging Through Homocore

While each issue of Homocore is different, the issues have similar layouts. The issues range from 28 pages to 64 pages. The cover of each Homocore displays a single photograph with the title HOMOCORE at the top. Inside the front cover displays information about the makers of Homocore and how to access the zine. The first page is entitled “Rude Noises from the Editor/Censor” wherein Jennings explains the purpose of Homocore. The next section of each Homocore, “Letters for You,” contains typed letters sent to Homocore before publishing. After the “Letters” section, the content in each issue varies widely. Aside from long-form articles that continue from one issue to the next, Homocore also includes interviews, poetry, short stories, newspaper clippings, ads, photographs, collages, drawings, comics and reviews. Although each zine contains visual content, I attend more closely to written text, which comprises most of each issue.

A reading all of these fragments could be well over 100 pages. For the purposes of this project, however, I concentrate on four major tropes I identify throughout the issues: anti-normativity, marginality, bodily fluid, and feeling. These tropes are neither precise nor stable. Texts contain multiple tropes or say something that confounds these tropes all-together. I suggest that the circulation of these tropes within Homocore evinces abjection, jouissance, and the death drive (sometimes simultaneously). In the next two sections, I first read passages that preface abjection in particular and then turn to passages where I encounter strong manifestations of jouissance and the death drive.

Disturbing Places: Abjection in Homocore

Within Homocore, contributors express various aspects of Kristeva’s abjection. As these contributors recount horror, impurity, and femininity within their texts they
create spaces where meaning is uncertain. These categories appear in the circulation of tropes I mentioned above, especially anti-normativity, marginality and bodily fluid.

Many *Homocore* contributors define themselves as outsiders, in effect placing themselves in the margins. Through these texts, *Homocore* contributors abject themselves. To define an outside, however, the contributors must first define an inside or in terms that I have used previously, a “center.” Without the center, these writers would not be able to posit their own abjection. In perhaps the most succinct definition of what the center represents, letter writer David Perkins notes: “It is good to know that I am not the only queer who doesn’t identify with the macho white bourgeois ideal of the mainstream ‘gay’ movement. I’m a ‘queer’ queer and I’m becoming more and more excited about the possibilities that lie therein.”  

Referencing the term “ideal” implies abstract values the mainstream gay movement aspires to engender, those of being “macho,” “white,” and “bourgeois.” By positing himself as a “queer” queer, using queer in quotes to emphasize his queer subjectivity, Perkins separates himself from this mainstream gay movement. He places himself on the edge of culture. In effect, Perkins abjects himself. Moreover, while Perkins says there are “possibilities” in being a “queer” queer he mentions no such thing for those who are mainstream gay. Perkins wants to exist outside of the mainstream ideal in order to access those possibilities, although the exact nature of the possibilities remains unknown. Put differently, Perkins occupies the abject and in doing so can look beyond mainstream ideals.

In the same letter, Perkins also offers a narrative of the horror abjection produces. By performing within the margins of gender (performing the feminine) Perkins says he causes others to feel fear. He writes,
I am a man wearing a dress. This seems to threaten some people to the depths of their souls. One time recently I was wearing a dress … and a guy started screaming, “No man, no, you can’t do that, you can’t do that that is really sick.” He was freaking out. I just kept walking, albeit at a more rapid pace. I couldn’t believe the degree of disturbance I created in his psyche.

The short length of the first sentence makes Perkin’s description of himself emphatic. He performs femininely despite being a man and in doing so he creates uncertainty surrounding his gender. The hyperbolic language in the second sentence “depths of their souls” stresses the amount of fear (or threat) people feel upon seeing Perkins. He implies that his destabilization of gender results in extremely unsettling feelings because stable gender is so ingrained in those he encounters. When considering a specific interaction, Perkins notes that the Symbolic order fails a man who screams at him. Not only can the man not assimilate Perkins into typical constructions of gender, he cannot fully explain the cause of his fear. For this reason, Perkins represents the abject. The man never explains what Perkins “can’t” do. He merely references sickness as the reason Perkins “can’t.” At the end of the passage, Perkins returns to the man’s internal state with the term “psyche.” Perkins writes that his presence caused a change in the man’s psychological condition. Perkins is the subject in the last sentence; created (disturbance) is the verb; “his psyche” is the object. Perkins did not just affect the man’s psyche, he disturbed or upset it. In performing the abject feminine, Perkins not only unsettles gender Symbols but also manifests the power of horror.

Turning to Homocore’s discussion of bodies and (bodily) fluids as a manifestation of abjection, I concentrate on a passage with multiple mentions of both. In Homocore #2, contributor Kevin Fitzsimmons shares a poem about an interaction between the speaker and a 15-year-old male (to read the entire poem, see appendix A):
Fitzsimmons’ poem destabilizes borders and thus proffers the bodies as abject. The entire poem is about a meeting of these two bodies, and a mixing of their fluids. Throughout the poem, Fitzsimmons mentions body parts 22 times. Fitzsimmons also names several fluids in his poem including spit, bacon grease and cum. The speaker moves from outside points of contact, like a hand touching a knee, to more internal points of contact like a tongue inside an ear, or a tongue on a neck and finally the speaker’s tongue entering the other figure’s mouth. This inside/outside speech results in confusion about what, exactly, belongs on the inside or the outside of each body. Bodies, then, become unbounded objects. As unbounded objects, these bodies are abject.

As all fluids represent that which is part of the body but is also separate from it, bodily fluids are particularly abject. The speaker goes on to mentions the first two bodily fluids of the poem with the phrases “cum in my mouth” and “spat it into the #3/breakfast special” in the same line. Both of these phrases indicate fluids crossing a boundary from one body into another space. Moreover, these fluids are actively ejected (or ejaculated) from their bodies of origin. This process of ejection relates to a process of abjection.

In the last four lines of the poem, the speaker mentions less concrete fluids. These fluids do not correspond to material fluids and thus have a more unsettling nature. As the speaker puts a knife to the fifteen-year-old’s throat, he says “drain you of life/ fill you with lust.” Using figurative language, the speaker proposes both life and lust as fluids. Readers cannot completely apprehend these fluids that do not have material referents. As
one fluid, “life,” leaves the fifteen-year-old’s body another fluid, “lust,” fills that same body. The speaker creates a higher degree of uncertainty as he never concretely references actual fluids. While Fitzsimmons highlights bodily fluid in this poem, he also engages with the margins between body and not-body those fluids represent. In this way, Fitzsimmons’ poem suggests abjection.

In the last issue, editor Tom Jennings pens a long editorial about disturbing order simply by being a “fag” in the punk scene. He relates a specific narrative about performing his own queerness:

Well push comes to shove then a kiss, and Deke, Jonathan, me, Eden, are making out PLAINLY on the stage, fucking with everyone’s head (and body). I was certain I was going to be punched, but I think we did it as such an assault that no one knew what to do. It just wouldn’t register. 

Jennings and his friends perform a homosexual act on stage. The importance of the act, however, is not in the act itself. Rather, Jennings and his friends’ act of kissing represents their investment in disrupting the Symbolic. The crowd finds no meaning in the act. In fact, it is the lack of meaning that affects how the crowd behaves. The crowd does not react in the way Jennings expects because cannot assimilate the kiss into their Symbolic order. In this place where meaning fails to transmit, Jennings and his friends use that failure to create subjects who act in a certain way.

Overall, these examples demonstrate abjection’s manifestation through tropes of anti-normativity, marginality, bodily fluid, and feeling. While some of the passages have more clear examples of certain tropes than others, I maintain that it is the circulation of tropes which creates an instability of meaning. The trope of feeling, however, emerges more so when reading Homocore alongside jouissance and the death drive which I do in the next section.
Feeling Alive: Enjoyment Alongside the Death Drive

In *Homocore*, both *jouissance* and the death drive manifest in a potential excess. Contributors describe something beyond what they can apprehend – a possibility, but a possibility that they cannot entirely represent. The death drive calls contributors to reach for that which is unknown. For the most part, contributors attach certain feelings to this journey into the remainder, feelings which I label *jouissance*.

For instance, contributor Dan Schubert relates his experience of being the only queer punk in his college town. Using *jouissance*, I argue that Schubert enters the space of uncertainty *Homocore* inspires in order to feel alive. To this end, Schubert writes,

“I’m alone in Champaign/Urbana…maybe if I can shift my orientation to being part of a larger community (in my own anti-social, fucked up way) I can wake up parts of my brain that’ve been dragging me through semi-lobotomized zombiehood here.”

Schubert’s solution for his loneliness involves transition into a queer/punk community. This shift does not entail typical entry into community which would involve some aspect of pro-social or socially acceptable behavior. Although this “fucked up” process portends unpleasantness in that it is not quite right, Schubert invests in it. It is my claim that this investment constitutes *jouissance*. Upon entering this community, Schubert can increase his own psychological function or “wake up parts of [his] brain.” Schubert’s phrasing implies that parts of his mind are dormant. “Semi-lobotomized” and “zombiehood” connote a state of being-in-death. His brain might be dormant or dead; it cannot fully feel. Schubert’s reality pre-orientation-shift relates to Edelman’s “culture of death.”

Schubert calls for a new way of life to combat this feeling of death that accompanies living within the normative structure of his college town just as Edelman calls for the queer subject to inhabit space outside of the social order. Ultimately, Schubert requires a
new community that will “wake him up”: the community he finds in Homocore. Queer ways of being thus offer a new potentiality of living beyond mainstream culture.

While Schubert describes the potential of jouissance, other Homocore contributors write of the jouissance they experience when they already inhabit a queer punk space. One anonymous letter writer separates Homocore readers from mainstream gay subjects in order to figure the particular radical potential queer punks have in their space on the edge of society. This contributor writes,

I discovered punk around the same time I discovered my own queerness so the two are forever intertwined providing days of endless euphoria and frustration…. Being an outcast among outcasts may be cool in my book, but there are times it sucks. Thankfully people reading HOMOCORE are (must be) generally smarter, more ambitious and creative than the disco masses. It’s important that we stick together (or at least get together and destroy reality for those who think that punk shouldn’t mix with gays and gays shouldn’t mix with the human race."

For this author, punk and queerness meld together in a way that causes “endless euphoria and frustration.” It is my claim that these feelings constitute an experience of jouissance. While the writer’s subject position allows for what Barthes might term “bliss” in the euphoria they refer to, they also encounter frustration that might be unpleasant. The writer also references the repetitious nature of jouissance when they use the term “endless” in conjunction with the description of their feelings. Next, the writer calls himself “an outcast among outcasts.” The distinction he draws between his own queerness and “boring homosexuals” imply that being queer and punk together places him on the outskirts of both mainstream society and certain gay cultures. Here, the writer ties feelings of jouissance to the process of abjection. He feels jouissance as someone who has been cast out of culture. Immediately following, the author more clearly delineates the differences between Homocore readers and the “disco masses.” Homocore
readers are “smarter, more ambitious and creative.” The readers have in excess (shown by the -er attached to smart and the “more”) what the other homosexuals only may have in small amounts. This excess, however, does not relate to any specific abilities. It exists but cannot be fully apprehended. Finally, the writers phrase “destroy reality” indicates the goal of subverting contemporary Symbolic understandings. This goal directly relates to the goal of the death drive. Paired with the excess Homocore readers embody, this desire to bring about the end of reality for those people who do not approve of mixing shows that Homocore manifests jouissance and the death drive simultaneously.

I end with a piece that I believe embodies abjection, jouissance, and the death drive as they appear in Homocore. At times, this passage represents spaces between femininity and masculinity (gender fluidity and gender mixing being a sub-theme), spaces of general instability, and spaces of both dread and elation. Here, Neal Wach recounts his lover, Desireé, dancing at a bar in Vermont,

He arched his back, then slowly looked up, and as he did so, carefully spread his arms outward, And it was then that I saw the wings of a phoenix unfold… a dark force, but the darkness of night, the night as it implies day, masculine as it implies the feminine, the purest strength, the truest power, beyond all limitation, beyond knowledge, and fear, and death. It was the spirit unchained, unfettered by ego and the world. It was love, but a greater love that I know, but a love possible and essential…I could want for nothing else again.\footnote{133}

Wach describes Desireé as a “he” that transforms into a “phoenix” who is also a “her.” As human becomes animal, he becomes her, and finally the person, Desireé, becomes a force. From the text it is impossible for the reader to know who, or what, exactly Desireé is. Desireé does not have a stable gender. In fact, Desireé moves from masculinity (which Kristeva ties to the Symbolic)\footnote{134} to femininity (which contains that “wily, uncontrollable power” to undo reality).\footnote{135} Wach describes the force that Desireé becomes using binaries.
that he comingles, for instance “masculine as it implies the feminine.” While masculine and feminine are usually separate, Wach links the two within the force. The passage manifests abjection within this mixing of gender; the force is impure in that it is always both masculine and feminine simultaneously rather than one power fighting to remove the other.\footnote{136} Moreover, the force Wach describes is excessive; It is “beyond,” “unchained,” “unfettered,” and “greater.” Not only is the force unlimited, it also cannot be totally apprehended in that it is “beyond knowledge” and therefore outside of the Symbolic. Wach represents the force as a power outside of this world. Eventually, Wach names the force “love” although a love that he cannot quite apprehend. This force figures that which is past figuring, that which the death drive seeks to inhabit: The Real.

\textit{Jouissance} accompanies the force in that “love” becomes the total object of Wach’s desire. He explicates his own investment in the force when he says, “I could want for nothing else again.” Wach will always, repetitiously, desire the force even though he can never completely obtain it. Moreover, he wants to be within the grasp of the force because it is “essential” to him. While reaching for something beyond death might be unsettling, Wach describes himself as completely caught in the force’s pull. Overall, this passage expresses different iterations of abjection, \textit{jouissance}, and the death drive as they manifest in \textit{Homocore}. As Wach outlines a space of constant change, he provides the reader with an uncertainty about what the text illustrates. While he describes a force, he also indicates that he will never be able to fully understand what that force is. This passage leaves the reader with an excess that they cannot assimilate into the Symbolic order. In its entirety, this passage connects to ideas of abjection, \textit{jouissance} and the death drive through the tropes of marginality and feeling.
The tropological economy I encounter within all of the Homocore texts I reference embodies both abjection and excess. In the next chapter, I come to conclusions about the manifestation of Kristeva’s abjection I see in Homocore. I also discuss the feeling of radical jouissance Homocore readers and writers pursue as the death drive calls them toward lack of meaning.
Chapter Four: No One Knows For Certain

My conclusion starts with the notion of the *jouissance* I encounter throughout *Homocore* as it is ultimately *jouissance* that engenders a specific queer subject. I maintain that *Homocore* contributors demonstrate the process of subject formation through disturbing the Symbolic order. In writing and reading *Homocore*, subjects experience *jouissance*, bliss. *Jouissance* alongside the death drive entices subjects to dissolve/interrupt the Symbolic order. While *Homocore* does not completely dissolve the Symbolic, it can still unsettle power relations that exist within the Symbolic. Ultimately, *Homocore* does not exist outside of the Symbolic – if it did, it would be completely incomprehensible. Rather, in repeatedly disturbing, interrupting and dissolving normative means of communication (communication that seeks to transmit stable meaning), *Homocore* becomes part of the drive to find something in excess of the Symbolic. The experience of *jouissance* implicit in these practices offers a path toward confronting the gap between the Real and the Symbolic. It is this purposeful confrontation that separates queer experiences of the Real from mainstream experiences. While normative interactions between the Real and the Symbolic attempt to close the gap between the two, queerness requires subjects to widen the gap. Queer *jouissance* emerges from this process of reaching for the lack the death drive portends.

In this final chapter, I revisit Kristeva’s abject as it relates to *Homocore*. I move on to explain this project’s place in rhetorical studies and end by discussing the potential political implications of my project. Ultimately, I argue that the ways of communicating I find in *Homocore* can resist centric ideals from a place of abjection.
The Power of Horror

*Homocore* embodies parts of Kristeva’s abject through a tropological economy. The tropes of anti-normativity, marginality, bodily fluid, and feeling draw upon and depict multiple ways of unsettling the Symbolic order and thereby the center.

*Jouissance* manifests in this repetitious disruption. While Kristeva’s abject has been used as a framework through which to read texts in previous works, I read abjection as a process in which *Homocore* readers and contributors readily participate. Abjection does not just happen to these subjects. *Homocore* readers and writers seek about abject spaces in order to reach beyond (and thereby unsettle) the Symbolic order.

Above all, abjection is the process of creating a text as ambiguous. *Homocore* performs ambiguity using the Kristevan categories of horror, impurity, and femininity. Together, the tropes I identify place the text and the reader in places of uncertainty. In setting themselves against a norm, *Homocore* contributors show that they are willing to inhabit spaces where Symbolic meaning does not reach. While normative subjects would use language to repudiate the threat of misunderstanding, the texts do not try to stabilize meaning. For Kristeva, lack of meaning causes horror. The *Homocore* contributors who refuse to assimilate to mainstream culture (including mainstream gay and punk subcultures) do not define themselves as anything specific. Rather they simply explain themselves as excessive. They speak of the possibilities in being “queer,” possibilities beyond what can be symbolized (although some scholars would posit these possibilities as unacceptable objectives\(^{139}\)). Thus, these contributors fall into the realm of horror, but a horror they choose.
Furthermore, throughout the examples I give, the reader cannot be positive of what exactly the contributors mean. This uncertainty comes from depictions of impurity, or mixing up/together. When a Symbol cannot be grasped (or rationalized) as a singular/bounded object, it is automatically mixed. For instance, contributor Neal Wach describe his lover as a man, a woman, a phoenix and the reader cannot be sure which he means. Kevin Fitzsimmons upsets the order of the typical American diner, mixing cum with breakfast food in full view of fictitious voyeurs. The writers never bound the objects/feelings/bodies they describe. The texts’ impurity comes across through polysemy and mixing (up).

Finally, *Homocore* also embodies the lack Kristeva attaches to femininity by relating feminine performance as illegible. The feminine lack, the Symbolically inassimilable, emanates especially through narratives of inapprehensible gender, ineffable bodily fluids, and excessive feeling. When Jennings and his friends kiss on stage, for instance, “It just wouldn’t register.” Performing within the feminine is one way emulate the death drive. As the ultimate feminine is complete lack, performing in the feminine attempts to reach beyond the pale of the Symbolic order. Aside from producing a feeling of enjoyment, this attempt also unsettles the Symbolic in that it accesses something beyond legibility.

**Excessive Radicals**

Using Kristeva’s notion of the abject and Lacanian understandings of *jouissance*, I demonstrate that rhetoric does not have to be bound to studying what it can apprehend. Rhetoric, too, can study the *process* of apprehension and the spaces where meaning fails (in the case of *Homocore*, a space where meaning is *supposed to*
fail). Rhetoric should be concerned with boundaries, with the places where meaning becomes lack of meaning, becomes ambiguity. Reading Homocore, I encounter an excess that I cannot assimilate into understanding. Rhetoric should be concerned with the process of reaching for the excess that can never be touched, because that process produces certain ways of communicating and ways of being.

One of these ways of being stems from Biesecker’s theory of radical political agency and “object-voice.” It is my claim that Homocore offers a voice that undoes the voice of the “Master.” Throughout Homocore there are hints of subjectivity that gains a resistive nature by occupying the margins of society. Homocore contributors unsettle the Symbolic by being impure, excessively emotional, and ultimately confusing. Their text reaches for a space in excess of the Symbolic. While Homocore, with its queer and punk proclivities, might simply be so much “noise,” that noise can ultimately disrupt the “natural” order of the center because it cannot be assimilated into the Symbolic. In disturbing the Symbolic order, Homocore texts upset those power relations that rely on the stable meaning the order supposedly creates. While this disruption cannot promise any particular outcome, interrupting the Symbolic may discover new ways of being that are less subordinate to the power of the order.

In conclusion, I cannot with certainty say what the texts in Homocore do. Although I argue that these texts unsettle the Symbolic order, they do so by reaching for what is unassimilable into that order. As I write within the Symbolic order, I cannot represent the lack towards which the death drive pulls these queer subjects. Still, I maintain that the drive into Symbolic meaninglessness and the feeling of enjoyment therein feed a potentially radical way of being. What does it mean to be abject? In the
case of *Homocore*, abjection allows subjects to horrify. The “blurred outline” of these radical queer subjects offers a figure that makes the Symbolic order, and the culture that relies on its stability, tremble.
Appendix A

“Americana” by Kevin Fitzsimmons

come
sit on my lap
let me put my hand on your knee
let me feel your breath
sit on daddies lap
let me massage your muscular thigh
put my hand on your cock while my tongue inserts
its sluggish shape in your ear,
licking your neck in noisy kisses then finding its
way into your mouth, nibble on my red muscle with your baby
teeth while I unzip the zipper on your green workpants
and plunge my hand beneath your red checkered waist band
fruit of the looms – while you sit on the table I grab
a serrated edge steak knife (with a tacky imitation wood
handle) and relish the moment of fear in your eye as I
cut through the combed cotton – then blow you blindly on
the table ignoring the shocked expressions of red-
necks and jesus freaks in the restaurant – then after
you’ve cum in my mouth and I’ve spat it into the #3
breakfast special I roll you over and lubricate your
tight fifteen year old asshole with bacon grease asking
you your name while my fingers shoved into your asshole
then slowly, steadily I ride you ride like a horse
Ride ride ride –
Fuck you fuck you – feel the wrath of a thousand gods
the nail from christ’s right hand is now shoved up
your asshole, fireworks in your small intestine
I’m cumming in a small piece of Americana.
The knife is in your throat –
severed jugular
drain you of life
fill you with lust
Bibliography


Notes


10. Duncombe, 15.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 16.


16. Duncombe uses this phrase to describe queer zines in *Notes from the Underground* (77). Tom Jennings, the editor of *Homocore*, also uses this term when explaining the purpose of *Homocore (Homocore #2*, December 1988, 1).
17. du Plessis and Chapman, 45.

18. Ibid., 52.

19. Zines are an ephemeral medium, especially those created on the Internet. While archive projects have preserved some zines (especially the more popular titles), no archive could contain every zine produced. Additionally, some digital zines can only be found on websites that do not archive the zines themselves. If someone deletes the zine from the site, no public record exists unless the zine was printed. Zines, therefore, are an ephemeral media. Not every zine can be found.


22. Spencer, 154; Homocore is a good sample of the queer/punk community of the late 1980s and early 1990s, but perhaps not representative of today’s queer anti-assimilation communities in general. For the most part, Homocore contributors are white men, although these men may not have participated in traditional masculinity.

Homocore creator Tom Jennings specifically addressed the issue of gender in the queer punk community and in Homocore specifically: “You may have noticed that there aren’t too many women in this zine... Why is this? Take the letters column here for an example. Nearly all male. I actually got more letters from women than published – cuz the rest said ‘don’t publish this’, tipping the ratio even further. I think it’s a combination of things – once mostly male it doesn’t encourage more women to join in. Plain old low level sexism in me, wherever. Also I think this – that what we’re doing invokes a lot of socially-innate power things and that’s simply not attractive to everyone. There’s of course lots of leather dykes, but punk drag is generally ‘hard’ male type stuff... I wish there was more women’s involvement” (Homocore #5, December 1989, 1).

Homocore addresses race in a way that distances people of color from the queer punk community. Responding to a letter, Jennings writes “Racism is one of the worst things people do. I really cannot imagine what it is like to grow up black in this country. But don’t use that as an excuse to dismiss everything else. Bigotry is bigotry. Yeah ‘the world is homophobic and the world is racist’ like you say, but I for one won’t put up with it when I have a choice, (even a hard one) and if you do, that that’s your problem” (Homocore #3, February 1989, 6). Although Jennings constructs himself as an anti-racist, he also displays racism and homophobia as separate phenomena. This portrayal does not allow for queer/punk people of color.

23. Duncombe, 77; Spencer, 127.

25. Duncombe, 10.


27. Jennings, *Homocore* #1, 1.

28. Ibid.


30. Livermore, *Homocore* #1, 12.


32. Spencer, 145.


34. Jennings, *Homocore* #1, 3.


37. Ibid., 120.


39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. I did not directly cite Freud because Kristeva consistently complicates Freud’s ideas (as she does in the example about the Oedipus complex I reference preceding endnote 4). Kristeva and Lacan’s understandings of the Symbolic and the Imaginary are more pertinent to rhetorical criticism than Freud’s. These particular understandings preface meaning making rather than material bodies, and the physical symptoms these bodies emit upon which Freud was so focused (Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1965), 158-163). Since I read *Homocore* as a confluence of symbols, I believe that Lacan and Kristeva’s theories are more applicable to my
object. Moreover, Freud does not take up a theory of the abject. Kristeva uses Freud in order to theorize about abjection.

42. Kristeva, 2.

43. Ibid., 4.

44. Ibid., 9.

45. Ibid., 32.

46. Ibid., 32.

47. Ibid., 33.

48. Ibid., 34.

49. Ibid., 33.

50. Ibid., 41.

51. Ibid., 91.

52. Ibid.


54. Ibid., 13.

55. Ibid., 70.

56. Katherine Goodnow, Kristeva in Focus: From Theory to Film Analysis (New York: Berghan Books, 2010), 44.

57. Goodnow, Kristeva in Focus, 64.

58. Ibid., 371.


63. Kristeva, 75.

64. Lynn Houston, “Food Safety and the Abject: Mad Cow Disease and a Racist Rhetoric of Contamination in the Southwest,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107 (2008): 375.

65. Kristeva, 91.


67. Importantly, Gronnvoll and McCauliff do not see these abject women as powerful but rather stripped of their agency on top of their humanity: “They [the discourses surrounding female suicide bombers] leave little room for a view of women as fully functioning human beings both capable of acts of great courage and great violence fueled by ideological commitments which are no different from those that motivate men” (Gronnvoll and McCauliff, “Bodies that Shatter,” 352). Abjection is something that happens to female suicide bombers when they are constituted by Western discourse.


78. Language (the Law of the Father, the Symbolic) is the original tool of separation. Thus, humans might attempt to unsettle the Symbolic as they “both desire and dread the return to the engulfing place/state of completeness and contin(unity) that existed prior to Language” (Brian Ott, and Keeling, “Cinema and Choric Connection: Lost in Translations as Sensual Experience,” in *The Routledge Reader in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Brian Ott and Greg Dickinson, 580). The death drive is not about an physical death wish or death instinct, but rather this psychological impetus toward a potential wholeness (Ott and Keeling, “Cinema and Choric Connection,” 582). Paradoxically, language is required to describe this wholeness that is supposedly outside language. Whatever humans say they desire is at least in part caught in the Symbolic unless that desire is posited as unknowable lack (Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 37).


80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., 123.


83. Barthes, *The Pleasures of the Text*, 19. According to Barthes, the term “pleasure” is ambiguous because “French has no word that simultaneously covers pleasure (contentment) and bliss (rapture). Therefore, “pleasure” here (and without our being able to anticipate) sometimes extends to bliss, sometimes is opposed to it. … I need a general “pleasure” whenever I must refer to an excess of the text, to what in it exceeds any social function and any (structural) functioning; and on the other hand I need a particular “pleasure, “ a simply par of Pleasure as a whole, whenever I need to distinguish euphoria, fulfillment, comfort, from shock, disturbance, even loss, which are proper to ecstasy, to bliss.”


85. Ibid.


89. Barthes, 55.

90. Ibid., 14.

91. Ibid., 7.

92. Ibid., 89.


101. Edelman, 47-48. Edelman understands the death drive specifically in conjunction with the “queer” way of being. Since I allege Homocore functions as a “queer” object, Edelman’s explanation of the death drive (rather than Freud’s or Lacan’s) can give greater insight into Homocore’s effect/ how Homocore plays a part in the death drive.
102. Ibid., 5.
103. Ibid., 48.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid.
111. There are arguments against using psychoanalysis academically, and in rhetorical studies specifically. I am especially sympathetic to feminist critiques that posit psychoanalysis as consistently subordinating to women. For instance, in Gender Trouble, Judith Butler first constitutes Kristeva’s psychoanalysis as a worthy complication of Lacan. Butler even allows that Kristeva’s re-articulating of semiotics could potentially bring about a feminine subversion of the lawful power of the masculine Symbolic (Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 102). Eventually, however, Butler concludes that any psychoanalytic project coming from Lacan is bound to reproduce the “paternal law it intends to displace” (Butler, Gender Trouble, 102) Many feminist scholars critique psychoanalysis, especially that stemming from Freud and Lacan, for similar reasons. Psychoanalysis, to those scholars, often creates, reproduces of justifies patriarchy, although some allow psychoanalysis some usefulness when it comes to feminist goals (Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); Mari Jo Buhle, Feminism and its Discontents; A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1998); Elizabeth Abel, “Race, Class, and Psychoanalysis?” in Conflicts in Feminism, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, (New York: Routledge, 1990)).
112. In “Refitting Fantasy: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity and Talking to the Dead,” Quarterly Journal of Speech 90 (2004), Joshua Gunn speaks to all of Lacan’s orders (Real, symbolic, imaginary) but grounds rhetoric principally in the Imaginary. Gunn traces the imaginary back to Lacan’s mirror stage. He posits the Imaginary as the “misrecognition” of the Self as the self a child sees in a reflective surface – that which is constructed from the outside but which is seen as true from the inside (Gunn, “Refitting Fantasy,” 9). Gunn positions rhetoric primarily within the imaginary because
the realm of the imaginary is the origin of human fantasy (Gunn, 9). Fantasy and desire cause humans to act, so investigating how the Imaginary is formed and how it is used to mobilize action falls under the purview of rhetorical studies. Lundberg grounds the mirror phase and the fantasy the phase creates into the difference between the Symbolic and the Real rather than the imaginary and the Real (Gunn, 497).


117. Ibid., 389.


119. Many (recent) rhetorical works using the theory of abjection have analyzed visuals productions (like films or television shows). I chose to focus on text because I believe this thesis can use abjection in a new (or less studied) way. There is precedent in the field for applying abject theory to text, and Kristeva does this in Powers of Horror when she closely reads several texts by Louis-Ferdinand Céline in chapters 6-10. Moreover, the vast majority of Homocore pages are made up of written text.


121. Kristeva, 32.

122. Perkins, Homocore #4, June 1989, 4-5.

123. Kristeva, 33.


125. Kristeva, 4.

126. Ibid., 32.

127. Ibid., 71.


134. Kristeva, 32.

135. Ibid. 32.

136. Ibid., 70.

137. Barthes, 5.


139. Judith Butler in particular does not want for possibilities beyond the symbolic. I find Butler’s position representative of others who do not see productivity outside of social order. Butler’s greatest critique of Kristeva cites that “this libidinal source of subversion cannot be maintained within the terms of culture, that its sustained presence within culture leads to psychosis and to the breakdown of cultural life itself” (Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 102). Kristeva’s potential destabilization of the symbolic, Butler says, would not be sustainable within an already established culture. Moreover, this subversion might even lead to the undoing of human life in culture, a process to which Butler seems averse.

While Butler only outright disagrees with Kristeva, she would most likely take issue with Edelman as well. Butler seems to desire a continuation of culture. At least, she goes so far as to counsel against a disillusion of cultural life. Edelman, in contrast, specifically supplies queerness as a force of negativity against culture. These authors’ divergence reduces to what exactly they want to subvert. Butler’s project in Gender Trouble is to suggest ways to subversively parody gender in service of a more radical feminist politic. Edelman (and Kristeva) propose undoing of the Symbolic order, ultimately driving toward meaninglessness. Edelman also submits that subjects are radical simply by acknowledging the incomplete nature of the Symbolic. Instead of waiting for the Child to fill the gap in the Symbolic these subjects recognize and lean into that gap, effectively interrupting cultural reproduction (Edelman, No Future, 10).

Although Butler uses Kristeva’s abject to explain subject formation of “I” against “Other,” she places more emphasis on the cultural order that compels this formation rather than the process of formation itself. Butler does not disagree with Kristeva’s claims about what abjection is (although she is dubious about a scholar’s
ability to reconstruct the process accurately) (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 171). Rather, Butler establishes that abjection is not *useful*. The question, Butler says, should be “From what strategic position in public discourse, and for what reasons, has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold?” not whether or not abjection is actually taking place (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 171).

Butler’s question becomes the main focus of her later work. In *Frames of War*, Butler examines precisely those discursive practices that posit that inner/outer binary. Some lives, Butler claims, are recognized within the interiority while some lives are forced out, and then no longer considered lives (Judith Butler, *Frames of War*, (London: Verso, 2009), 3). When lives are not apprehended as precarious the state can act violently towards those non-living bodies (Butler, *Frames of War*, 31). Butler’s argument hinges on apprehension, if not full recognition. Recognition requires cultural frames shifting to re-articulate certain populations as within the interiority although she understands that no amount of shifting will position every body “inside.” Butler, then, requires cultural reproduction via an apparatus of recognition (Butler, *Frames of War*, 24). To her, there is little possibility in searching for the outside. Not only does Butler’s position oppose Edelman’s above argument that posits lack of meaning as powerful subversion, her position also contests Biesecker’s notion of a radical political agent through *jouissance*.


141. Kristeva, 168.

142. There are previous instances of rhetoric being concerned not just with meaning making, but with the undoing of meaning. For instance, Derridean deconstruction has as its goal the taking apart of texts in order to see how they function, but not in the service of finding their greater meaning. Of deconstruction Jacques Derrida says, “The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things – texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need – do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, they they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy” (Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Caputo, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997, 31).


144. Barthes, 49.; Hebdige, 133.

145. Kristeva, 35.