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*Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures,
and Other Latina Longings*
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Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings

Juana María Rodríguez



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been good to me, and still are. Once again, my own words have been made more worthy through the copyediting genius of Rosalie Morales Kearns; *gracias*. Special queer *cariño* for two extraordinary wordsmiths in my life and in my digital feed, Margaret Rhee and Marvin White; these poets remind me of the inexplicable things that words can do. A good student never forgets those who took the time to truly teach: Norma Alarcón, Deborah Britzman, Judith Butler, VèVè Clark, Barbara Christian, Johnetta Cole, Laura Head, Anne McClintock, and Gerald Vizenor continue to accompany me.

I have been around the block, up to the bar, under the sheets, and against the wall with a long list of lovers, partners, playmates, and friends who have all contributed to who I am today. The aroma of those embraces is pressed between these pages. Heartfelt carnal gratitude to Dawn, Deborah, Connie “Sky” Lopez Jackson, and Julian Cortez for memories that linger; to my courtly duo, Ian and Evan, for making fantasies flesh; to David Findlay for sharing generous gestures of pornographic possibilities, and to Nick Hennen in appreciation of virtual friendship. Some relationships of influence and care defy categories. Some, though fleeting, arrived right on time: love, light, and thanks to Greg Beckett, Mary Ann Davis, Grant Faulkner, Diane Felix, Ricky García, Carlos González, Xandra Ibarra, Claire Jeannete, Ana Lazo, Heather Mackey, Jairo Marín, Luella Penserga, Monifa Porter, María Guadalupe Peláez, Sarah Slaughter, Pat Tura, Adela Vázquez, and the writing crew on *Writing Every Day*. I still love spinning around the world in the arms of *mi querido* Rosío, who fills my life with wonder, corporeal delights, and the dream of new sexual futures.

Finally I wish to thank you, dear reader, for looking inside. This book is not for everyone, but maybe it holds something for you. It is my handcrafted offering, my hand raised in the crowd, my pebble in the sand. It is a provocation from the place of submission, small and unassuming. Try to forgive me any unintended offenses, omissions, and harms. Sometimes we miss important things, and often we fail to recognize what it is we need most. I trust that others will fill the gaps to move the space of imagination and possibility elsewhere. But if we are both very lucky, perhaps my humble attempts at making meaning out of mystery through the touch of language will erupt in unexpected forms to surprise us both.

Introduction

dédicace / dedication

An episode of language which accompanies any amorous gift, whether real or projected; and more generally, every gesture, whether actual or interior, by which the subject dedicates something to the loved being.

Strenuously I calculate whether this object will give you pleasure, whether it will disappoint, or whether, on the contrary, seeming too “important,” it will in and of itself betray the delirium—or the snare in which I am caught. The amorous gift is a solemn one; swept away by the devouring metonymy which governs the life of the imagination, I transfer myself inside it altogether.

—Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*

This book is an amorous gesture, a dedication to another kind of sexual future. It is an episode of language that reaches for the possibility that something else awaits us. This gesture is a kind of touching, a way of sensing what might flow between us. It is sexual in the queerest of ways, meant to inspire intense feeling rather than reproduction; it is multisensory, asynchronic, polysemous, perverse, and full of promise. The “we” in this text is itself a rhetorical gesture of future possibilities, an invitation to sit together in the emotion-laden spaces of meaning making and mystery. Rather than define itself through the exclusion of its others, this “we” is continually coming together and coming undone, a precarious bond that performs its own disarticulation of desire and discontent. In this book, a world surrounds us. Other loves and lovers linger at the edges of our encounter. In memory, we feel the tender traces

of their fingers on our skin where lashes, ugly stares, and all manner of horror have also left their bruising marks. When we are touched, tiny corporeal gestures of recognition ripple through our nerves; we become charged with vitality. Thinking about queerness through gesture animates how bodies move in the world, and how we assign meaning in ways that are always already infused with cultural modes of knowing. The gestures that I take up in this book are about the social and the sexual: the social as that force of connection and communion that binds us to friends and strangers, and the sexual as that tangled enactment of psychic encounters that promise ecstasy and abjection. But just as “queer” can function as a noun or as a verb, “gesture” can signal both those defined movements that we make with our bodies and to which we assign meaning, and an action that extends beyond itself, that reaches, suggests, motions; an action that signals its desire to act, perhaps to touch. Gestures emphasize the mobile spaces of interpretation between actions and meaning. Gestures hang and fall; they register the kinetic effort of communication. Even when done in private, gestures are always relational; they form connections between different parts of our bodies; they cite other gestures; they extend the reach of the self into the space between us; they bring into being the possibility of a “we.”

As Latin@s and as queers, we are often represented, if not identified, by our seemingly over-the-top gestures, our bodies betraying—or gleefully luxuriating in—our intentions to exceed the norms of proper corporeal containment.¹ Our bodies dispatch sweeping flourishes or hold back wilted wrists. We swish too much and speak too loudly. The scents we exude disturb the numbing monotony of straight middle-class whiteness. We point with our lips, flirt with our eyes, and shimmy our shoulders to mark our delight. Our racialized excess is already read as queer, outside norms of what is useful or productive. (Is that much color, spice, pattern, noise ever truly necessary?) Forever tacky, the viscosity of our excess grates across the surfaces we touch. As sissies, butches, and spectacles of high-femme fabulousness, we produce gendered performances of overt desire that rouse discomfort. Our gestures mark the paucity of others’ commitment to make sexuality seen, to make gender a spectacle of deliberate design. These amplified corporeal rhythms of our moving bodies signal—through the glut of expression—our surplus sexuality. Certainly, we can adopt other gestures to signal

our performance of serious academic of color, chic transnational subject, or sexually uninterested androgyne, and sometimes we are even read the ways we wish to be seen, without further explication. When we are not understood, when previous attachments that mark us as savage and foul adhere to our skin despite our best intentions, when we are called upon to testify against ourselves about that for which we have no language, we can know that it is due to someone else’s failure of imagination, their inability to read the moving marks of our gestures.

Linguists have been studying gestures for years as a component of language, one that is coded by culturally demarcated insights into bodies and movement. As early as 1832, the Italian Andrea de Jorio published *Gesture in Naples and Gesture in Classical Antiquity*, intended as a guide for interpreting the corporeal expressions of the human figures depicted in classical Western art. In the introduction de Jorio asks, “[I]s there anything more readily observable, more common and elementary than the gesturing of man?” (3). Indeed, while gestures are everywhere observable, their meanings are often less easily decipherable, especially across spans of history and geography. As with all practices of interpretation, it is context that shapes and limits understanding. If linguistic signs such as words are “but prompts to the evocation of a meaning,” then gestures exponentially expand the variables that make communication (im)possible (Parrill and Sweetser 217). And while everyone gestures, certain populations are more often associated with expressive gesticulation and corporeal contact than others. In 1966 the intercultural communication scholar Sidney Jourard conducted a now-famous study counting the number of times couples in different national locations touched each other as they sat in cafés across the globe. He concluded that Puerto Ricans, who touched each other 180 times in the span of one hour, were the touchiest people on the planet (Jourard). In consideration of another Latin American locality, *Sin Palabras: Gestiario Argentino / Speechless: A Dictionary of Argentine Gestures* offers one hundred precise definitions and accompanying photographs for a wide range of gestures. A caption on the back of the book humorously reads, “Mr. Tourist you don’t even need to know Spanish to communicate in Argentina” (Indij). Some of the gestures included in this bilingual tome are unique to Argentina or more specific to the southern cone, others readily understood throughout the Americas. *Sin Palabras*

contains entries for gestures that reference money, temperament, dictatorships, and card games, and, of course, the many sexual gestures that we deploy to signal disgust, desire, and the precise sexual acts we wish to reference. To the trained eye, *latinidad*, that ambiguous ethnic category that eludes binary racial registers, can be visually captured not in skin tone or phenotype, but in the reading of gesture. Gestures are not just nonverbal enunciations of verbal language, however.³ Sometimes the point of gesture is that it can register what cannot or should not be expressed in words. And sometimes it signals what one wishes to keep out of sound's reach.⁴

Gestures can be literal—actual movements of the body—or figurative, gestures that reach out to manipulate how energy and matter flow in the world. In this text, gesture serves metaphorically to register the actions of the body politic, those activist interventions that push, jam, open, block, and twist social forces in the material world. But it is also used to name specific corporeal articulations of fingers, thighs, and tongues, the movement of the living body and her parts; the ephemera of affect that leaves no trace. Gestures are where the literal and the figurative copulate. The reach of the hand forward to touch the face of the Other is also a process of extending the limits of one's spirit to diminish the space between bodies. Likewise, the political gestures we undertake—shouting back in defiance, marching in protest, even the passing of a digital petition from one person to another—enact the process of forging collectives. Gestures can be so small or quotidian as to escape notice. They can be large, definitive, and demanding. They are inflected by the scent and sense of cultures marked by time, yet they also traverse borders and resist temporal categorization. The chapters presented here enact their own range of motion as they are produced through them; they drift between movements bold and banal; they strain against the disciplinary forces of the state and the private agreements formed through our most intimate encounters. They dance and flirt and fuck. Metaphoric and material, gestures remain indeterminate, open to having their meanings transformed through other gestures and speech acts that follow in their wake or precede them onto the stages of signification. Thus, gestures form part of the ongoing impossible and necessary work of transmitting meaning, a deeply social process that reaches for connection.

In *Means without End*, Giorgio Agamben takes up the trope of gesture to consider the role of political action in everyday life. Agamben links gesture to mediality: the abyss between the production and reception of meaning that expresses the “communication of a communicability,” the “being-in-language of human beings” (*Means* 57–58). Agamben is concerned less with the question of whether or not the meaning of gesture (or language) arrives than with the process of relationality that communication instantiates. For Agamben, “means without end” is a way to imagine a politics independent of a defined and knowable political goal; instead, “means without ends” affirms a relationality that compels ethical action: “if producing is a means in view of an end and praxis is an end without means, the gesture then breaks with the false alternative between ends and means” (57). This stream of gestures occasions the possibility of thinking about discourse as constituting a corporeal practice; it suggests an embodied form of political action that signals a futurity, even if it refuses its arrival. In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz follows an analogous path, tracing gesture through Agamben into the political dimensions of queer utopias. Muñoz links gesture to ideas of critique, stating that “queer utopia is a modality of critique that speaks to quotidian gestures as laden with potentiality” (91). As a mode of critique, gesture emphasizes how a cascade of everyday actions is capable of altering political life. As a way of articulating political action, gesture highlights intentions, process, and practice over objectives and certainty. While Muñoz's utopian gestures emphasize their “being in, towards, and for futurity,” I want to register the ways histories of movement can become ossified in our gestures (*Cruising* 91). If it is true that gestures signal the potentialities of our body, they also make public the imprint of our past. Gestures reveal the inscription of social and cultural laws, transforming our individual movements into an archive of received social behaviors and norms that reveal how memory and feeling are enacted and transformed through bodily practices.⁵ As we produce these affective and deeply political forms of corporeality, we are likewise subjugated through the relations of power that they also expose.

This interplay between performance and law, between embodied gestures of expression and iterative structures of power, forms the methodological foundation for *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other*

Latina Longings. As social actors, we find that our corporeal movements are intelligible only in relation to accepted modes of behavior dictated by our surroundings, but we each bring the particularities of our bodies, experiences, moods, and desires to these everyday performances. The performance studies scholar Carrie Noland delineates this tension and the twin analytical modes of interpreting gestures that law and performance engender. The first mode situates gestures as “signifiers for meaning generated by the mechanics and conditions of signification itself” (“Introduction” xii). This understanding emphasizes the way in which gesture—like law, and indeed like gender and race—is regulatory, citational, and iterative, always dependent on previous codes of signification in order to generate and discipline meaning.⁶ But Noland also points to “the ways in which the body’s singularity—its gender, race, size, scope of the movement, and so on—necessarily inflects the generalizing momentum of the signifying process, bringing into play embodied, performance-specific, and therefore noniterable instantiations of meaning-making forms of movement” (xii). Thus, gesture functions as a socially legible and highly codified form of kinetic communication, and as a cultural practice that is differentially manifested through particular forms of embodiment. These contradictory understandings of gestures, as adherence to law and convention on the one hand and as differentiated corporeal deployments of subjectivity on the other, trouble understandings of law and social norms as always already oppressive and staid, while pointing to the ways performative acts that appear as individually motivated acquire meaning through social forms of codification and iteration. But Noland goes further to suggest the way gesturing might counter social demands for gendered or racialized normativity. She argues that “gesturing may very well remain a resource for resistance to homogenization, a way to place pressure on the routines demanded by technical and technological standardization” (x).⁷ Read this way, the colorful extravagances of latinidad and the flaming gestures of queer fabulousness are ways to counteract demands for corporeal conformity, to refuse to alter our bodies and our movements for the sake of the social comfort others take in their invented forms of appropriateness. But like other enunciations of language, gestures are never transparent. Instead, they invariably risk producing an absence of understood intention, and an excess of ascribed significance.

This absence and excess carry a temporal displacement, where the production of meaning shifts from the moment of a gesture’s execution to the moment of its reception. This temporal projection of gesture is made evident in one of the several *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) definitions that trace the word from the French *gest*, to imply a “move or course of action undertaken as an expression of feeling or as a formality; especially a demonstration of friendly feeling, usually with the purpose of eliciting a favorable response from another.” Here the force of “feeling” or “formality” that compels the gesture echoes the twin impulses of embodied action and social law that I emphasize throughout this book. But there is also a hoped-for “favorable response” that can be granted only by another, securing gesture within the larger chain of sociality. In his essay “Embracing Transition, Dancing in the Folds of Time,” Julian Carter traces the etymological origins of the word “gesture” to a future participle of the Latin verb *gerere* (to carry or to bear):

Gesture is an anticipatory performance of our physical bearing. If we listen to the futural temporality embedded in the word’s root, we can hear not only intentionality in relation to actions as we undertake them, but also a triple meaning of the word “to bear,” which means to comport one’s body in a particular way, to carry something, and to endure. To gesture, then, is to embody one’s intention, and may entail assuming a certain open-ended responsibility for what one carries. (131)

As a gesture that attempts to transmit meaning, my text bears its own weight of responsibility, even as it functions as a demonstration of “friendly feeling.” This amorous gift you hold in your hands contains my own queer Latina longings. It is offered in friendship, where friendship is a way of life.⁸

(Re)Thinking Sex

Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings postulates a theory of queer gesture that works in the interstices between sexual desires and political demands, between discipline and fantasy, between utopian longings and everyday failures. Queer gestures are those that highlight the everyday labor of political, social, and sexual energies

that mark our collective will to survive this day, or to at least make the effort. This book makes a case for a methodology and pedagogy that do more than merely critique, but instead reach toward various forms of engaged action, even when these are flawed, imprecise and corruptible.⁹ Therefore, queer gestures include the endless sequence of partial moves, interrupted starts, and disheartening breakdowns that occur when we dare to move beyond the possible. In his text *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*, the legal scholar and trans activist Dean Spade makes a bold claim for what he terms “a critical trans politics” that serves as a model for my own activist interventions. He locates this politics “in a shared imagination of a world without imprisonment, colonialism, immigration enforcement, sexual violence, or wealth disparity. It is sustained by social movement infrastructure that is democratic, non-hierarchical, and centered in healing” (16). Despite, or perhaps because of, these seemingly utopian longings, Spade is also committed to “intervening in the law and policy venues that most directly impact the survival of trans people as part of a broader trans politics whose demands are not limited to formal legal equality” (32). Following the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Spade emphasizes locating the multiple forms of harm that impact the life chances of people, and being committed to providing legal and extralegal remedies that alleviate harm, increase access to available resources, and respond to the underlying conditions that perpetuate harm (Gilmore; Spade, “Keynote”). Rather than step away from law and policy because they are too corrupt or ineffective, Spade’s work models a kind of activist scholarship that is about critique, engaged collective action, *and* imagining ourselves and our worlds otherwise. My own project similarly attempts to stake out a place for critical engagement with sex in queer theory, in social justice activism, and in utopian longings for other sexual futures.

But why does sex matter? And why does sex matter now, in this historical period decades after the “sex wars” of the 1980s and while surrounded by a myriad of economic, military, and political upheavals? We know the scene. Violence is implicated everywhere in our lives: the United States is engaged in an endless series of endless wars; vitriolic racist discourse proliferates under the guise of national debate; African Americans, Latin@s, Native Americans, and poor people are deported

into jails and across the borders of civil society; the economy is in ruins; and any sense of the future is tied discursively to a moment of current sacrifice, a perpetual spiral that spins us back to a present moment of further repression, discipline, and control. Meanwhile, the mainstream LGBT community is enmeshed in expensive political machinations to secure the rights of same-sex marriage through media campaigns that sanitize our lives in order to make us palatable as subjects worthy of the rights of citizenship, even as it fails to recognize the multiple vectors of violence and injustice that also constitute our lives as queer subjects. The life chances of so many poor people, children, queers, people of color, elders, people with disabilities, undocumented immigrants, and those who make the streets their home become more precarious every day. Hope has become an exhausted cliché, and living becomes a conscious act that we must labor to willfully choose. This is our “situated contemporaneous horizon of meanings and intentions,” the overarching political ambiance in which we enact the queer gestures that constitute our sexual lives (Alarcón 137).

In 1984 Gayle Rubin wrote that “it is precisely at times such as these, when we live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about sexuality” (3–4). That the political landscape seems eerily similar to what it was when Rubin penned her now canonical essay “Thinking Sex” should not surprise.¹⁰ Then, as now, there are those for whom “sexuality may seem to be an unimportant topic, a frivolous diversion from the more critical problems of poverty, war, disease, racism, famine, or nuclear annihilation” (Rubin 3). Sex is always amenable to diverse political uses in trying times, always something about which to get “dangerously crazy,” or something too frivolous to merit critical engagement. Today the political Right deploys a rhetoric of perverse sexuality to silence, censure, and criminalize sexualized and racialized subjects, and the mainstream gay and lesbian movement responds by disavowing these same subjects and projecting an image of hypernormative domesticity worthy of political respect and validation. Queer theory intervenes into this politicized space of meaning to ask us to consider the role of queer social bonds, community futures, and the relevance of sex at this precise historical moment, a moment when the demands of neoliberalism emphasize individual exchange absent an analysis of differentiated social relationships

to power.¹¹ So what might it mean to think about sex right now, when so much violence, injustice, and cruelty surround our lives?

Critical writing by queers has long articulated the dangers inherent in abandoning an engagement with radical sexual politics in the service of assimilationist projects of respectability. In these neoliberal times, queers—particularly those who benefit from the privileges of whiteness, able-bodied hegemonic masculinity, urban cosmopolitanism, and wealth—are hailed daily by political movements that promise full inclusion as citizens of the nation for the price of sexual censure and decency. Like queers, women of color have acutely suffered the tyranny of supposedly progressive collectivities that demand sacrificing pleasure in the service of a communal respectability and the common good. Even as some have symbolically occupied the image of national heroines or beneficiaries of these same repressive tactics, invariably this need to “represent” is used to betray the sexual agency and pleasure of certain classes of racialized female subjects while elevating others to the status of worthy role models for the nation. Women of color and others have been hailed by these discourses of liberation through sexual sacrifice, disciplined through public shame and censure, and subjected to the power of pathology and criminalization. On a more intimate level, racially gendered female subjects also know about the forces of sexual discipline that surround us through our participation in the social spaces of family and community. In a myriad of ways, we have been instructed that in order to enter the fold of collectivity, be it familial or revolutionary, we must first be liberated of our sexual deviance and our politically incorrect desires.

If we understand these political movements and collective agendas as a kind of enforced sociality in the service of community respectability, it seems understandable why some scholars see queer as that which must always stand outside any formulation of collectivity. In *Homos*, Leo Bersani famously remarks on “a potentially revolutionary inaptitude—perhaps inherent in gay desire—for sociality as it is known” (76). And while Bersani leaves open the possibility of potentially reconstituting sociality through a “curative collapsing of social difference” (177), this desired erasure of difference as the only available means of touching sociality comes dangerously close to advocating a color-blind, gender-blind, difference-blind future. For while Bersani “prefers the possibilities of the future to the determinations of the past” (Bersani and Phillips viii), he locates

his accounts of sexual exchange in a “universal relatedness grounded in the absence of relations, in the felicitous erasure of people as persons” (Bersani and Phillips 38).¹² In contrast, José Esteban Muñoz counters the antisocial impetus with a queer articulation of utopia that is always on the horizon and decidedly committed to futurity and “an understanding of queerness as collectivity” (“Thinking Beyond” 825). Muñoz connects sociality to futurity, where sociality becomes the means and the condition for the possibility of collective futures. Futurity has never been given to queers of color, children of color, and other marginalized communities that live under the violence of state and social erasure, a violence whose daily injustices exceed the register of a politics organized solely around sexuality, even as they are enmeshed within a logic of sexuality that is always already racialized through an imagined ideal citizen-subject.

The utopian desire Muñoz articulates activates a politics of refusal as a productive gesture that aims to conjure the potential of new horizons. A politics of refusal has a long history in feminist of color scholarship, and should not be equated with the rejection of futurity, much less sociality. In “Conjugating Subjects,” Norma Alarcón takes up Audre Lorde and Chela Sandoval’s notion of difference/differential in relation to Derrida, and notes that “each invokes dissimilarly located circuits of signification codified by the context of the site of emergence, which nevertheless does not obviate their agreement on the ‘not yet,’ which points toward a future” (129). Through an insistence on critique that nevertheless points to a “not yet” of possibilities, refusal remains an operative mode of analysis that demands rather than forecloses futurity.

In his analysis of a tradition of feminist refusal in *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith Halberstam “chart[s] the genealogy of an antisocial, anti-Oedipal, antihumanist, and counter-intuitive feminism that arises out of queer, postcolonial, and black feminisms and that thinks in terms of the negation of the subject rather than her formation, the disruption of lineage rather than its continuation, the undoing of self rather than its activation” (125–26). Halberstam offers trenchant critiques of “prescriptive Western theories of agency and power” in order to connect a politics of refusal with forms of passivity, antisociality, and masochism (126). He proposes that

this feminism, a feminism grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence, and silence, offers spaces and modes of unknowing, failing and

forgetting as part of an alternative feminist project, a shadow feminism which has nestled in more positivist accounts and unraveled their logics from within. This shadow feminism speaks in the language of self-destruction, masochism, an anti-social femininity. (*Failure* 124)

While the types of negation, refusal, masochism, and failure that Halberstam points to are indeed part of the everyday forms of social survival that I also wish to signal, I would argue that refusal, destruction, failure, masochism, and negativity are not the absence of sociality; instead, they signal the active critical work of engagement and critique that is always already relational.

While these debates on sociality and futurity are queerly fascinating and well-worn theoretical ground in queer studies, the part of this debate that interests me most is the ways in which sex has been deployed to construct these academic postures. Halberstam takes a predictably negative view on the subject and “invite[s] us to unthink sex as that alluring narrative of connection and liberation and think it anew as the site of failure and unbecoming conduct” (*Failure* 145). However, sex can function as both a site of queer failure *and* a site of impassioned sociality. It is precisely because sex carries the risk of our undoing that the gesture of reaching out to touch another in the service of mutual pleasure, attempting to go beyond the “not-yet” of the present, becomes all the more potent. It is this duality that creates the vital potential of “failure and unbecoming conduct” that Halberstam is invested in fostering. As a site of intimate, intoxicating, funky, fleshy connection, sex has the potential to tear us apart even and especially when we are brought together.

For Bersani, antisociality is what is needed to keep sex viable and, dare I say, “hot” in queer life. Both Bersani and Muñoz consider an archive of anonymous male-to-male sexual encounters, but their conclusions are strikingly different. Rather than antisociality, Muñoz exposes the utopian possibilities of radical sexualized sociality through a reading of the public waterfront orgies that Samuel Delany describes and John Giorno’s sexual adventures in the public toilets of New York City (*Cruising* 35–55). These infamous—if also quotidian and mundane—public sexual encounters have been steady targets of state surveillance and control, yet even such attacks on expressions of sexuality

have been differentially executed.¹³ Yet, for the most part, these public sexual spaces are available only to men. Neither Halberstam, Bersani, nor Muñoz even attempts to imagine sexual possibilities and pleasures for racialized female subjects, a subject position that seems to be vacated of erotic possibilities.

Homosexual men, however, have not been the only targets of public sexual censure. And criminalization through sodomy laws and other public morality statutes has not been the only coercive measure of sexual discipline and domination employed by the state. Indeed, access to erotic pleasure and sexual determination has concentrated implications for a wide range of subjects, most especially women of color and people with disabilities. These populations have often been imagined outside the real and imagined spheres of radical queer sexual sociality. Yet, as evidenced in the archives of law, psychiatry, medicine, and anthropology, the nonreproductive sexual pleasures of these subjects have often borne the brunt of eugenics practices and institutionalization. The sexuality of physically and/or cognitively stigmatized subjects has been imagined as unthinkable, dangerous, or unseemly, while the sexuality of racialized women is permanently wedded to cultural logics that define sexuality as either solely reproductive—where pleasure is nonexistent and always already sacrificed in the service of family and nation—or wholly carnal, unrestrained, and treacherous. Racialized women, like people with disabilities and children, are assigned specific entrenched roles as perpetual victims or innately perverse that attempt to fix our status in order to erase the complexities of social and sexual power relations. The disability scholars Robert McRuer and Abby Wilkerson define this move to brand social position vis-à-vis sexual subjectivity as the “drama of perverts, victims, and protectors,” and see this drama as a necessary hallmark of neoliberal understandings of harms and remedies (8).¹⁴ But disability studies also points us to the underlying epistemologies that ground these common effects “because such ideologies are tied also to the ableist norm of perfect bodies and minds, which construes goodness in terms of health, constancy, energy, wholeness and strength at the expense of actual bodies that do not conform to these specifications” (McRuer and Wilkerson 8). Living in closer proximity to poverty, violence, and disease, the bodies of racialized female subjects are more vulnerable to forms of disabling harm, deemed less

worthy of modes of care, and thought outside formulations of physical or emotional goodness. And because so often racialized female subjects are filled with rage, terror, shame, and crushing sadness, we are often subjected to the same pathologizing lens used to stigmatize those who are marked as cognitively or psychologically different. The sexual practices and psychic lives of racialized feminine subjects, like those of people with disabilities, the imprisoned and enslaved, the foreign and the indigenous, the gender-queer and other bodies labeled deviant, have never been construed as good, healthy, or whole.

The inability to recognize the alternative sexual cultures, intimacies, logics, and politics that exist outside the sight lines of cosmopolitan gay white male urban culture is never benign. Instead, this denial colludes with a neoliberal scripting of identity politics that animates political agendas based on individual grievances against the state, as it obfuscates regimes of visibility that leave some bodies, gestures, practices, and violations unremarked. Likewise, we know that the spaces of sexual exploration and expression so common in the narratives of urban gay male sexuality—sex clubs, bathhouses, public bathrooms, rest areas, and parks—are places that can prove deadly to female-bodied people, female-presenting people, and others perceived as physically vulnerable. While female and feminized sex workers routinely inhabit the spaces of the public to solicit or engage in sex, the criminalization of these sexual and economic practices serves to authorize the violence against street prostitutes and acts as a disciplinary deterrent to limit access to a sexualized public space for other women.¹⁵ For so many of us, we are not only threatened physically, we are often punished personally and politically for even stating a desire to participate in these alternative sexual formations that exist outside monogamy and domesticity.

These disparities in how our bodies are read as different kinds of desiring subjects has material as well as theoretical implications. In her essay “Consuming Lifestyle: Commodity Culture and Transformations in Gay Identity,” Ann Pellegrini teases out the relationship between commodity capitalism and homosexuality as “alternative lifestyle” to suggest that the neoliberal capitalist demands of wage labor and the imaginary of mass-media representation interpellate gay men and lesbians as different sorts of bodily commodities, and thus as different sorts of sexual subjects:

Whose is the face of perverse public sexuality? The alleged perversity of gay male sexuality means that it is always and only too public by far. But what of lesbian sexuality? Is it seen as any sexuality at all? And, where it is, sexuality for whom, pleasure for whom? We need to think at the intersections of sexuality and gender if we are to make sense of the paradoxical scene of lesbianism. (143)

What implications does this sexual economy of perversity have for queer studies, where the alleged sexual and gestural excesses of gay men are deemed to be what is nefarious, nonnormative, dangerous, and queer? Is scholarship on bisexual women, lesbians, dykes, and gender-queer female-bodied subjects a less valued academic commodity because it is considered somehow less transgressive, less sexy, less public, or less relevant? In his essay “Administering Sexuality,” Roderick Ferguson examines how forms of institutionalization seek to commodify difference in the academy and points to the ways capital incorporates the differences it wishes to overcome. In unpacking how administrative systems do their dirty work, his essay exposes the underlying distinctions upon which they are founded, concluding that “institutionalization is founded on divisions between legitimacy and illegitimacy, . . . [b]etween the promise of formality and the presumed ephemeral nature of informality” (167). When we situate Ferguson’s analysis alongside Pellegrini’s inquiry, we come to realize that if we wish to truly investigate the social and sexual gestures of queer racialized female yearnings, as scholars we need to open ourselves to the informal and illegitimate—not only because these gestures might exceed, slow, or even jam the institutionalizing mechanisms seeking to make them visible, palatable, or even pleasurable for others, but because otherwise we might miss what might be particular about certain forms of female embodied sexualities. Those of us dedicated to an engaged political and academic practice must not only recognize the illegitimate, we need to intervene in the formal institutions that define the terms under which legitimization is authorized.

This investment in critically interrogating the illegitimate and imaginatively rethinking the terms under which legitimization functions, returns us to the question of why sex matters. The answer is everywhere around us. In fact, sex is defined, regulated, and controlled everywhere that bodies touch the dirty surfaces of public policy and law. It is easy to

see how sex is embroiled in health care debates related to reproduction, sex reassignment, age of consent, and access to sexual information. But sex is also implicated in the workings of the prison-industrial complex, where the stripping away of social and sexual belonging is defined as a central feature of punishment, accomplished in part through prohibitions on consensual sexual relations in prison and restrictions on visits with lovers, family, and friends that might allow the comfort of an embrace, sexual or otherwise. Sex is a labor issue because those involved in the far-reaching tentacles of the sex industry—porn stars, escorts, strippers, street prostitutes—are often not afforded the most basic protections for the labor they perform, a labor that is in some cases criminalized only because it is remunerated. Sex is invoked in immigration debates, where only “legitimate” family members are even considered for reunification efforts, and immigrants who have multiple families or sexual partners are forced to define the value of their emotional connections based on heteronormative discourses predicated on monogamy and mono-nationalism. Moralizing attitudes about sex and sexuality infiltrate every aspect of our educational system. It is the shadow that looms behind the disciplining of gender roles in kindergarten classrooms; it is the impetus behind a virulent campaign of obfuscation about sexual health at every level of K–12 public education; it is the justified fear of every professor who explicitly engages questions of sexual practices in a classroom. Conservative efforts to limit, censor, define, criminalize, monitor, and stigmatize sexual expression and sexual relationships are codified in the very architecture of our public life, apparent in public bathrooms and city parks, in college dormitories and in senior living residences. When progressive forces refuse to take up issues of sex and its regulation to intervene in the institutional spaces where sex also lives, we perpetuate a neoliberal discourse that locates sex within the confines of a privileged domestic sphere. Instead, questions of sex and sexual expression need to be part of our political discussion on public education, militarization, international diplomacy, art and aesthetics, the distribution of resources, sovereignty claims, and urban planning, to name a few of the pressing social issues that have sexual implications. If queers and all of us invested in determining the moral content of our own sexual futures keep silent because we are ashamed of being seen as trivial, self-absorbed, or aberrant, we vacate

the space of public discourse on sex to others who will not hesitate to assign meaning to our most intimate psychic and corporeal practices. Dealing directly, at times explicitly, in sexual gestures imagined as perverse or dangerous, those that haunt LGBT politics of respectability, this text confronts the discursive demons that have kept discussions of sex outside radical formulations of public policy.

Sex is always more than personal. This book is not invested in examining sex as a private or individual practice, nor is it an attempt to construct sex or sexual desire as a natural drive that constructs us as human or normal. After all, that would only serve to reinforce sexual desire as another disciplining mechanism of social control, when in practice many of us lead rich full lives absent sex or sexual intentions. A lack of sexual arousal, however, does not extricate us from the political and social reach of sexual discourse, practices, and policies. In fact, claiming asexuality can serve to heighten social demands for normative expressions of sexuality.¹⁶ But asexuality doesn't function as a stable referent any more than sexuality does; neither term fully remains within its boundaries. Instead, I am interested in exploring the tensions between what is marked as sexual and nonsexual, and the apprehension that emerges in sexual discourse when we attempt to account for not only the pleasure but also the violence, injury, and anxiety that animate our sexual lives.

Just as the queer sex in this book is about various articulations of bodies and pleasures, the queer ways that sex is understood, experienced, and expressed outside identitarian claims to sexuality, it is also about the wide range of affects that bodily practices and sensations can induce, including pain, boredom, abjection, and delight. At times, my use of *affect*, *feeling*, and *emotion* becomes entangled in imprecise ways. Rather than elaborate a genealogy of these terms, an important effort that has been skillfully accomplished by a wide range of scholars to whom I am indebted, I am invested in deploying affect as a critical methodology that provides access to what Foucault terms “subjugated knowledges” (“Two Lectures” 81).¹⁷ Core to my project is Sianne Ngai's assertion that “feeling can be used to expand the project of criticism and theory” (8). Affect in this text is not about individual self-contained emotions, but rather how feelings function in the realm of the social. Here I am echoing Teresa Brennan's seemingly obvious claim that “the transmission of

affect means . . . that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies” (6). How we feel and act exceeds us. We are social—inextricably, undeniably, normatively and queerly, painfully and delightfully social.

The other Latina longings I reference in my title are as much about other Latin@s, and other racialized subjects, as they are about other kinds of political or social longings. Even as the scope of this book is limited to the political present of the United States and Puerto Rico, it is fully cognizant of the ways Latin@s are multiply interpellated as ill-defined racial subjects. Latin@s can be identified by themselves and others as black, white, Asian, Native American, or Other. We can be labeled rural and provincial or urban and ghetto. We can appear foreign or domestic. How we are seen, or even how we define ourselves, is never all of who we are. Interpellation signals the process of categorization that we must reconcile on a daily basis through our gestures, which is also to say through our politics. Latin@ is therefore always already formed through embodiment and context. Yet our proximity to these other racialized forms of identification inflects how we move in the world. These proximities create the conditions for social and sexual enactments that bring us closer to others touched by the African diaspora, to mixed-raced people everywhere, to the politics and passions of indigenous communities. Our colonial encounters with differently organized articulations of the Spanish state create conditions of communion between Peruvians and Chileans, but also with Filipinos, Cape Verdeans, and Basques. At times, our love of mangos or scotch bonnet peppers binds us to others as forcefully as our status as immigrant outsiders. Through our friendships and sexual encounters, we become fluent in other political and erotic modalities, other gestures that mark ways of caring for each other. So the “other” of my title also marks other ways of being Latina, other ways of longing, and other longings that remain outside language.

Queer Bonds

The sexual archive that informs this book attempts to capture sexual moments, both mundane and spectacular, that lay bare the messy carnality of our relationships with each other and with the political forces that surround us. In her installation piece *un/binding desires* (2011), the New York-based Colombian video artist mónica enríquez-enríquez

creates a display of queer of color sexuality that echoes the relationship between sexual and social articulations of power that I am interested in mining.¹⁸ In this piece, she contrasts sexual imaginary of a brown female body in intricate forms of eroticized bondage, with an audio soundtrack in Spanish and English that recounts the knotted strains of queer migration. The stories narrated and the bodies depicted in *un/binding desires* exceed notions of Latin@ or even migrant, and like the stories collected in my own text are formed instead by friendships, sexual desires, and political commitments. Among those represented in her installation are Sri Lankans, Japanese, Indians, and Mexicans; migrants and children of migrants; undocumented residents and beneficiaries of U.S. asylum; there is the mixed-raced child of an African American father and a white mother in Ohio and a second-generation Japanese transman. Despite differences in ethnic identification, legal status, and racial identity, each voiced narrative recounts the ways—terrifying, mundane, and sad—that their lives have been touched by migration. Read through the lens of gesture rather than identification, the recurring scenes of hands meticulously knotting thick white ropes accentuate the slow, elaborate process through which bonds—cultural, social, political, and sexual—are formed and attachments secured. The images are presented on two facing projection screens, so that viewers always have their backs to part of the visuals presented, and the voiced narration is disconnected from the collage of bodies that we see. Instead, audible stories hover over the images, tethering image to sound through a shared connection to racialized narratives of mobility and longing. enríquez-enríquez’s piece pays homage to the knotted relations between social, cultural, and sexual ties, including BDSM, that animate the lives of those touched by racialized migration. Sexualized bondage becomes the means to express the twisted strands of pleasure and pain formed through these attachments. Her piece is about fear, violence, and terror as well as pleasure, but like my own text is also about activating memory, friendship, and fantasy to bind intimate sexual gestures to larger sociopolitical movements through the sexual explorations of power, including forms of submission.

In her revealing ethnographic study, *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality*, Margot Weiss rightly points out that “a desire for unmarked sex—sex outside of politics— . . . relies on the



Figure I.1. A scene from *un/binding desires* (2011), by the New York-based Colombian video artist mónica enríquez-enríquez. Image courtesy of the artist.

universalization of whiteness” (199). Like Weiss, I want to “disrupt the idea that sexuality springs from a private, innate, sexual essence deep inside the body, and instead insist that desire is forged in the crucible of history, community, and nation” (219). While Weiss is primarily addressing the real-life sexual and social practices of specific BDSM communities, which are overwhelmingly white, I am attempting to forge meaning from a floating archive of the sexual fantasies, sexual practices, and sexualized performances of racialized queers, many of whom may actively play with eroticized forms of power but may not be aligned with larger BDSM communities of practice. In examining how these forms of racially gendered articulations of power, including abjection, inform our erotic lives, *Sexual Futures* stakes out a claim for the urgency of confronting alternative forms of racialized queer female sexuality such as sadomasochism, bondage, domination, submission, and daddy play as practices that inform a much wider range of sexual power relations, including domesticity, monogamy, and nonsexual intimacies.¹⁹ These spectacular forms of eroticized power relations do more than function as sites of individual queer play, they also illuminate

the racial and gendered dynamics that surround us, or what Christina Sharpe terms the “sodomasochism of everyday black life” (119). In his luminous text *Extravagant Abjection*, Darieck Scott echoes Sharpe and posits that “we are all traumatized by the distortions imposed on us by living race as reality, the at once frustratingly remote and painfully intimate trauma of historical determinations, the trauma that makes S/M how black-white relations *really appear*” (242). Throughout the book, it is this vexing relationship between the quotidian social relations that surround us and the ways these forces impact our erotic lives that arches across the pages of this text. Rather than proposing a decolonial project aimed at wiping away the taint of racialized abjection, I want to consider the possibility of seizing our sexual imaginations to activate abjection as a resource for a reclamation of erotic-self-determination and world-making.

These forms of everyday historicized sexual trauma not only impact African American subjects, they also stain the contours of other racially gendered subjects, albeit in different ways. Latin@s in this text do not exist as isolated racialized ethnic communities; they are instead bonded through blood, sex, tears, and scholarly theorizations to other racialized bodies of abjection, bound together through relations of power filtered through colonialism, slavery, conquest, subjugation, migration, exile, and the insidious architectures of power that permeate heteropatriarchy across cultural sites. Unlike Scott or Sharpe, I consider not just literary representations of sexual practices, but also those sexual fantasies that hover at the edges of queer cultural production, those etched into memory and imagination, the fantasies and longings that reveal themselves through the ephemera of gesture. The S/M of sadomasochism also serves another function in this book, however, and that is to name what exists beyond the material or the knowable, as a means to name sexual magic, the spark of unleashed energy that can occur when we touch.

Each of the chapters in this book pieces together fragments of political moments; each is an imprecise attempt to capture ephemeral, material, and affective sexual significations that those moments leave behind. Drawing on queer of color critique, the arc of the book examines how forms of embodiment, including but also exceeding race and gender, inflect sexual pleasures and sexual practices and how these

might inform sexual politics. Queer of color critique, a term coined by Roderick Ferguson in his book *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, intervenes in the trap of discrete optics to theorize race and sexuality as mutually constitutive. As a scholarly posture, it moves toward a methodological practice—available to anyone, regardless of their individual subject position—that functions “as an epistemological intervention” (3). My own work foregrounds queer of color critique as a methodological practice that shuttles between the interpretive poles of law and performance, arguing that forms of agency continually mediate between these structures of legibility—the rigid confines of the law and its material implications and the imaginative potential of the performative and its psychic impact. But I am also interested in situating law outside its purely juridical context to consider it as a space of collective meaning making that has the potential to inform and transform the social constraints that bind performance. Rather than position law and performance as discrete or oppositional, this text reveals the circularity streams that flow between the tangible and the imaginary. It examines not only how projections of racialized sex erupt through various discursive and material mediums but also how the confluence of racial and gendered anxieties seeps into the gestures and utterances of kinship structures, dance floors, sexual fantasies, and activist practices. Ultimately, this book considers how sex has been deployed in contemporary political, cultural, and theoretical debates in queer communities in order to conjure radical sexual futures.

While queer of color critique and feminist of color interventions have insisted on scholarship that is attentive to the cultural particularities of marginalized racial and ethnic communities, very little of this scholarly literature deals directly with sexual practices, and that which does is overwhelmingly centered on gay male sexuality. And while a certain strand of queer theory remains attached to probing the function that sex serves in social and political formations, sustained investigations of race and gender are often absent in these texts. Or race, when considered, consists solely of black and white referents without attention to how racialized erotics operate within variously configured ethnic communities. Furthermore, most scholarly investigations into sexual practices or sexual communities are either ethnographic or psychoanalytic. In contrast, by incorporating disciplinary orientations that

traverse fields of performance studies, critical race theory, and cultural studies, I aim to consider the way the social and the psychic are tethered together.

Rather than marshal the well-worn triad of race, gender, and sexuality as knowable and coherent categories, this text is invested in making visible the ways these terms are activated on the level of the psychic and the corporeal. A term like “people of color” can at times risk erasing how distinct histories of colonialism, subjugation, slavery, immigration, and miscegenation map onto specific racialized populations in a given moment. Moreover, distinct racial forms very often attach themselves to sexualized scenes in ways that are multiply inflected by the particularities of individual bodies. Accent, skin color, phenotype, physical size, scent, teeth, hair, hands, hips, the very corporeal distribution of flesh, and the unique ways these attributes come together on a single body require an attention to the relevance of embodiment that exceeds any of the single terms we might use to address these bodily configurations. These complexities of embodiment do not render “race” meaningless; on the contrary, they amplify the nefarious ways that racial logics are instantiated.

By now, the very boundaries of “woman” have been productively undone by critiques that fracture the hegemony of a gender binary through transgender and intersex scholarship and activism but also through disarticulations that demand more subtle and nuanced readings that consider how corporeality animates the gestures of gendered forms. Yet despite the undoing of a category such as “woman,” that formation—as an undifferentiated, socially authorized, and juridically legitimated form of identification, and as an embodied and performatively articulated mode of being in the world—continues to exert a powerful political and affective shadow. Rather than embrace or disavow a relationship to “women” as a category of analysis, this book is formed around the shifting shadows that the feminine, the female, and the femme cast onto bodies and worlds. Similarly, queer as a political and social claim that aims to encompass lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals and communities very often colludes with forms of erasure that assume a knowable referent. In these political formations, transgender often appears as if it were a category of sexuality, rather than an identification, or misidentification, of gender. Bisexuality, that

invisible and invalidated identification that dares not speak its name, frequently functions as the unnamed sexual practice hiding within the label of queer. Despite its statistical significance, particularly for women, bisexuality—that is, varying degrees of sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction to both men and women, however those categories might be defined—often gets summarily dismissed as too politically risky or theoretically unmanageable.²⁰ What might it mean for a queer femme to claim sexual attachments to masculinities that traverse a range of queer, butch, and trans-male bodies as well as cis-male bodies that become queer through our erotic encounters? Heterosexuality, on the other hand, habitually gets assigned a monolithic status that denies the complexity of how people experience sexuality over the course of their lives, the kinds of nonnormative pleasures and sexual practices they might actively embrace, or queer ways of organizing their affective and romantic lives such as polyamory, nonmonogamy, or a refusal of romantic relationships. These distinctions and the various forms of erasure they impose continue to matter. Focusing on queer gestures of sexuality rather than categories of queer identification requires an attentiveness to these particularities in order to begin to see how the ephemeral, the imaginary, and the material bleed into each other.

Chapters 1 and 2 take up the figurative implications of queer gestures within the sphere of contemporary politics. Set against a political backdrop in which some LGBT activists are attempting to excise the sexual from the domestic in the service of meeting the demands of potential citizen-subjects, chapter 1 weighs the social and psychic implications of these strategies of assimilation. It considers how kinship and its metaphors inform our relationships of care by examining the bonds formed through transracial and transnational adoption, the ties that bind us to nation and the state, and those that we might forge with lovers in our most intimate acts of social exchange. Here we begin to see a wide range of gestures that reach out to enact change: neoliberal gestures that reach for social legibility and privilege; legal gestures aimed at ameliorating harm and transforming systems of exclusion; activist gestures that attempt to redefine the social meaning of kinship and increase access to public goods; and intimate gestures structured around daddy play that attempt to challenge social, sexual, and psychic forms of recognition and signification. From an analysis of how dependence,

interdependence, and forms of recognition operate in kinship formations in chapter 1, in chapter 2 I turn to a consideration of how recognition and (in)dependence function in the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States in order to link larger geopolitical relations of power to metaphors of intimate, feminized sexual submission. Through a close reading of how local Puerto Rican activists deploy diverse discursive strategies for advancing forms of self-determination, this chapter engages the scope of juridical and activist gestures to consider how utopian longings for sovereignty become enmeshed in competing forms of authorizing legitimacy. In both of these first two chapters, I consider how the political gestures of social activists push law beyond the boundaries of its own legibility, and how queer racialized subjects constantly arch toward something more than what law and rights can yield.

The last two chapters shift the dominant registers of gesture from the figurative to the corporeal. Chapter 3 reflects on confluences between dance and sex, the horizontal and the vertical mambo, as urgent world-making projects for queers. Drawing on phenomenological articulations of the body and theories of queer performance, this chapter makes a case for the social significance of the erotic and the unseen forces of spiritual forms of communion. Written through a decidedly Latina femme frame of perception, it enacts the methodological significance of theorizing the discursive, the material, and the ephemeral together. In considering the processes of intimate social negotiations that occur between partners on the dance floor and between the sheets, I argue that submission to law, rather than functioning solely as an obstacle to self-actualization, can also engender mutually agreed-upon collective constructs that work to enable vital forms of individual and communal expression.

The final chapter returns us to the intricate and perverse world of fantasy and pleasure by examining a range of sexual performances on stage, in commercial pornography, and in creative visual practices that defy simplistic binary readings of marginality, submission, and racialization. Focusing on the racial and gendered abjection that has come to define Latinas as racialized feminine subjects, this chapter attempts to make sense of our most politically incorrect sexual fantasies. It asks, How do the bodies that we live in—saturated in their own tender and

brutal histories of touch—frame our sexual fantasies, limits, pleasures, and practices? How do we begin to make sense of willful sexual fantasies of violence and abjection that sometimes creep into our psychic and erotic imaginations, and the shame, delight, or confusion that these thoughts generate? And how do these fantasies, desires, fears, and trepidations feed from, and into, the political landscapes that surround us? In this chapter, as in others, I press upon Butler's "critical promise of fantasy" as a means to explore beyond the possible, to make an argument for the political force of fantasy in all its psychic complexity as a necessary site for sexual fantasies, political fantasies, and utopian fantasies of futurity, survival, and pleasure. Fantasy here functions not as an escape from the real-world materiality of living, breathing bodies, but as a way to conjure and inhabit an alternative world in which other forms of identification and social relations become imaginable.

Foregrounding fantasy throughout this text allows me to make queer racialized female sexuality if not visible, then imaginable, as a site of polymorphous perversity, a place of dangerous possibilities. For many subjects who see the sexual possibilities of anonymous sexual encounters described by Bersani and Muñoz as life-threatening, inaccessible, or simply uninteresting, fantasy becomes a way to inhabit the imagined elsewhere of a radical sexual sociality. Fantasy exists in the realm of the "informal and illegitimate," yet it offers a venue for exploration and pleasure that is available to anyone who dares. In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler captures this potentiality best when she states that "the critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home" (29). Taking the critical promise of fantasy seriously, however, requires another kind of meaning making that journeys beyond rationality. Very often, fantasy takes us to places filled with dread and indignity, to hidden corners of our psyche peopled by our own demons, fueled by the private terrors of collective horrors. Most of the sexual fantasies I index throughout this book are not joyous encounters with utopian possibilities; instead they are barbed, viscous confrontations brimming with social and psychic abjection and pain, even as they pry open spaces for joy and possibility. This is the

the critical promise of fantasy
- Butler

challenge, to stare down the demons, speak the perverse contradictions that live in our sexual imaginations, and continue breathing. On this point, Butler makes the stakes of such practices abundantly clear:

The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy—through censorship, degradation, or other means—is one strategy for providing the social death of persons. Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. (28–29)

(Fantasy, even in its most painful and dystopic forms, is thus inherently imbedded in queer understandings of sexual futures.)

The fantasies that interest me are not about the individual erotic desires of autonomous sexual subjects, but about how we respond psychically to collective histories of shame and abjection, how colonialism and heteronormativity soak into our erotic proclivities. But my fantasies are also about another kind of sexual future, where intercourse engages all manner of touching, where interdependence and mutual recognition constitute the daily labor of making lives livable for ourselves and each other, where articulating our most cherished desires is seen not as naïve, but as wholly necessary. The fantasies I index are both sexual and political, formed through the particularities of our psychic lives and through the contours of the various collective formations that shape our understanding of the world. Here, fantasy is released to form its own kind of gesture, a way of reaching into psychic life and forming a vision of the world and of ourselves that exceeds the present. Through its relation to imagination, fantasy urges us to suppose potentialities beyond and before the now, to step across the borders of the possible.

In her essay "On Refusing Explication," Deborah Britzman suggests a reading practice that might serve as generative entry into the queer logic of this text. It is a practice that values the affective potential of subjective encounters over intellectual certitude, a pedagogical practice that privileges the act of reading over the search for meaning, a political practice that supposes "an equality of intellect" (37). Britzman describes what she terms a "non-narrative narrativity," which "asks something of the reader: the reader must decide whether it is interesting to think

Britzman - the queer logic of the text

along, to think against it, whether it is in the detours rather than in the destination that a certain pleasure can be allowed, whether the reader and whether the writer can dispense with the need for explication. This may be the dynamic of friendship" (35). The pages that follow offer critiques and analyses of quotidian and extravagant articulations of sexuality, of kinship, of neoliberal activist practices; of dance and sex; of law, theater, and pornography. But they also try to offer a glimpse of political courage and imagination, queer gestures that push for something beyond the knowable and the rational. This text is itself a queer gesture, charged with doing and undoing, feeling and caring, committed to a sexual politics that emanates from a beating heart, a sexual politics that is also an amorous gift. *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* is my dedication to you, reader. In the spirit of this dynamic of friendship, I hope you will find it interesting to think along.

1

Who's Your Daddy?

Queer Kinship and Perverse Domesticity

In a text that focuses on sociality, futurity, politics, sex, and gesture, it seems fitting that I start with a consideration of kinship, the imagined site of our most intimate bonds. Our families of origin are repeatedly recounted as the place where the imprint of the disciplinary and expressive forces of sexuality, race, and gender assert their most vigorous intentions. Yet kinship bonds also transform across our life span, making and unmaking social worlds of meaning. While an analysis of kinship serves to highlight corporeal gestures, the intonations of our bodies that are inculcated through our innermost social networks, kinship also becomes a site where we see how the gestures of law and legibility are forcefully activated. Both forms of gesture—individual corporeal gestures and the collective political gestures of the body politic—register how the effects of the social are triggered. It is from our families that we first learn the social rules and significance that govern touch, eye contact, movement through space, and all other manner of seemingly mundane corporeal action. Before we come to spoken language, we learn to read gesture, arms reaching out to hold us or harm us. Through these reading practices we come to define what is familiar and familial and what must be relegated to the space of the strange and foreign, a distinction that becomes the basis of a politics that structures the limits of care. Kinship therefore functions as a switchpoint between the intimate and the social, the literal and the metaphoric articulations