

Book Review

Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings, by Juana María Rodríguez

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Juana María Rodríguez's second monograph *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* is itself an "amorous gesture," (1) welcoming the reader to co-imagine with her more emancipatory and queer forms of sociality, connection, and political activism. Placing queer gestures at the center of her analysis, Rodríguez interrogates the most intimate nooks and crannies of the body politic to flesh out new social bonds and political tactics and to shape law and public policy. In the introduction, Rodríguez braids together an impressive spectrum of theoretical frameworks to enunciate 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 political, social, and sexual energies that mark our collective will to survive to this day..." (7-8), operating through the hazy and unpredictable interplay of the absence of intelligibility and the excess of signification, between what is intended and what is projected onto those gestures. Shared kinesthetic modes of communication and social connection, queer gestures, according to Rodríguez, are animated by and situated within an invisible mesh of culture and embodied histories of iteration. Never fully legible or complete, queer gestures are always processual, continually reaching for other sexual futures to come. Rodríguez gathers queer gestures from the eclectic archives of discourse, visual culture, performance, and intimate acts. The first two chapters investigate the figurative implications of queer gestures, and the last two chapters attend to corporeal implications.

"Who's Your Daddy? *Queer Kinship and Perverse Domesticity*" concerns how LGBT activist organizations have erased the sexually "perverse" aspects of queer identity to obtain marriage equality and individual rights as citizen-subjects from the U.S.-state. Rodríguez argues that this disavowal of queerness concretizes most visibly in tropes of the sanctity of the family, parents' rights, and the protection of children. Rodríguez examines the juxtaposition between hegemonic representations of family and queer parenthood and the lived realities of queer kinship shaped by race and class. Indicting academic theory such as Lee Edelman's reproductive futurism alongside mainstream representations of queer parenting, including television series *The L Word* and *Modern Family*, and academic literature on transracial and transnational adoption, Rodríguez reveals how they erase difference and evoke "normative adulthood and state-sanctioned privileges" (40). Rodríguez consequently calls for gestures of recognition that register

diverse forms of affiliation and the multiple ways kinship is imbricated within larger social networks in tandem with “strategic legal gestures” enlarging “juridical formulations of kinship” (50). Rodríguez then foregrounds the importance of the psychic life of fantasy, exploring paternalistic gestures enacted by state-sanctioned adoptions, normative definitions of kinship, and various disciplinary norms. Figuring a politics of refusal, Rodríguez summons the queer gestures of BDSM that are delinked from normative legal discourses of recognition and the nation-state qua daddy complex to “enact polyamorous bonds of attachments and affiliations to other bodies, families, and cultures” (53). Daddy play, a role freighted with the symbolic gravity of whiteness, the nation-state, and economic and juridical power, therefore enables queers of color to participate in “the re-marking of social power” (58). Reconsidering the panoply of queer desire, Rodríguez additionally highlights how the sexual rights of queer youth have been pushed aside on LGBT organization’s straight and narrow path of respectability politics. Not only do age of consent laws impede “their right to engage in intergenerational sex” (64), but also denies them the agency to make medical decisions regarding their own bodies, such as abortions or sex-reassignment surgery. As privileged queers seek recognition from the state, Rodríguez reaffirms the urgency to re-examine putative notions of kinship, consent, and state power and consider the vitality of fantasy to our psychic lives to collectively imagine “shared social and sexual futures” (67).

“Sodomy, Sovereignty, and Other Utopian Longings” zeroes in on how queer activists in Puerto Rico have creatively refigured sovereignty as a queer gesture pursuant to achieving greater “sexual and national self-determination” (76). Building on the work of Foucault and Agamben and scholarship on indigenous conceptions of sovereignty, Rodríguez elaborates how demands for sovereignty could be reframed as a “culturally situated concept” (71) from below, by the colonized and subaltern for the purpose—and ongoing process of—procuring self-determination and autonomy. The author specifically inspects how “queer activist gestures navigate electoral politics, popular media, law, and street action in order to create new opportunities of interventions into the meanings of sodomy and sovereignty” (76). Drawing on the work of Ramón Grosfoguel, Frances Negrón-Muntaner, and Chloé Geora (1997), Rodríguez argues that queer activists and allies mobilized “*jaiba* politics” to redefine “the feminization of political maneuvering” (77) to repeal Puerto Rico’s sodomy laws and “fuck with” (95) the state, as it were. While colonization and subjugation have traditionally been cast in sexualized binary terms, *jaiba* politics resignifies these terms of engagement, rendering submission empowering. However, Rodríguez is quick to note that sovereignty—whether sexual or national—is not an end unto itself, unmoored from power. Claims to sovereignty comprise a larger repertoire of queer activist gestures that are partial, imperfect, and processual.

“Gesture in Mambo Time” reconsiders gestures of submission and dominance in dance and queer sex. Rodríguez asserts that studying dance and sex require alternative methodologies beyond the pale of ethnographic “observation and description,” and instead deploys “memory and imagination” (119) and the ephemeral as a queer femme Latina. Rodríguez emphasizes how butch and femme roles in Latinx dances are not about asserting or relinquishing power but mutual pleasure and belonging. Embodied, ritualized, and situational, these dances merge the secular and sacred, wherein the self is continually remade in relation to the collective. Rodríguez culls from fleeting archives of queer nightclubs in San Francisco to show how queer gestures of dance coalesce *Latinidad*, and how butch and femme roles are culturally constituted and informed by both individual and communal gestural memory. Excavating gestures, utterances, sounds, and acts housed within her own erotic archive, Rodríguez maintains that attachment to

butch and femme roles in queer sex, like dance, should not be understood as blind adherence to dominant gendered decorum. Nor should it be solely approached as disidentification, but also as autonomous and produced through the interplay of gestures animated by “contested spaces of culture, language, and ethnicity” (121), slippery sites of (re)signification and perverse pleasure. Rodríguez demonstrates how tribadism acts in conjunction with discourse to enable a “performative interpretation” that reimagines and transforms the body, demonstrating how “fantasy reconfigures the material laws of desire” (125). The gesture of sexual recognition catalyzes this transformation and troubles easy binaries between butch and femme, rendering queer subjects both vulnerable and empowered.

Finally, “Latina Sexual Fantasies, The Remix” teases out the taut relationships among Latina femininity, abjection and shame, and the politics and praxis of pleasure. Rodríguez tackles what queer theory has vehemently disavowed and “marks us as improper subjects of feminist politics” (152)—that is, heteronormativity. Following Robyn Wiegman, Rodríguez explores the gestures, roles, and fetishistic attachments of heteronormativity in relation to racialized gender, how a Latina femme and queers of color—subjectivities wrought from slavery, colonialism, and migration—might derive pleasure from heteronormativity, succumb to its “seductive magical powers” (144). A queer of color burlesque 2007 performance “I’m Your Puppet,” BorderBangers porn videos, and the found-footage art of bisexual Cuban-born filmmaker Dinorah Jesús de Rodríguez (the author’s sister) complexly compose Rodríguez’s archive from which she uncovers a “remix” of gestures that provocatively blurs art, porn, and politics, ranging from “spectacular forms of racially gendered violation to the relatively invisible, and therefore more insidious, forms of quotidian subjugation lurking within heteronormative romance” (148). While Rodríguez acknowledges how these cultural productions may obscure material, systemic violence and further cloak already racialized and gendered labor, she insists that these realities should not foreclose engaging with fetishistic attachments and the multitudinous gestural resignifications they insinuate. Moreover, for queers of color, politically incorrect fantasies provide a relatively secure way to reenact and reckon with sexual abjection, an imaginative role reversal furnishing an opportunity to perform a “perverse act of revenge” (182) through experiencing pleasure “in a world in which our pleasure was never imagined” (182).

After the 2014 publication of this book, the Supreme Court decided in *Obergefell v. Hodges* to recognize same-sex marriage in 2015, and nearly a year later, just a few weeks short of this landmark decision, a twenty-nine-year-old security guard committed one of the worst mass shooting in U.S. history in the queer, predominantly Latinx nightclub Pulse in Orlando, Florida, in which queers of color danced *en clave*, animated by what is “too personal and fleeting, too fantastic and mundane to be contained by documentation” (103). Now, at the end of 2016, the U.S. President-elect is poised to assume office, winning on one of the most divisive platforms in recent political history, promising to deport three million immigrants as he supports anti-LGBT legislation. Moreover, at the end of 2013, José Esteban Muñoz—a renowned theorist of queer performance, affect, and utopia, whose spirit pulsates through Rodríguez’s scholarly corpus—unexpectedly died. This catalogue of seemingly unconnected occurrences, however, is actually a queer constellation of intimately related events revealing why sex matters, its potential to profoundly dis/connect us as its gestures are inflected by forms of difference. Rodríguez’s touching monograph thus could not be more exigent, as it illuminates how the molecular gestures of the erotic are nexuses through which to reckon with historical legacies exerting brutal force on the present while negotiating state power and neoliberalism. As such, in “The Afterglow,”

Rodríguez asserts that the gestural loci of queer sex and fantasy, however mundane, shameful, or politically unsavory, are where “our sexual politics need to begin” (187).

Due to its wide interdisciplinary scope and focused attention on queer gestures, this monograph contributes to and intervenes within multiple overlapping disciplines and fields, including philosophy; political science; gender and sexuality studies; performance studies; Latinx and ethnic studies; literary, discourse, rhetoric, language, and communications studies. Rodríguez further nuances affect theory, particularly queer of color scholarship such as that of Sara Ahmed and José Esteban Muñoz. As well, the author enriches a well-established trajectory in Latina feminist theory of unabashedly interrogating the entanglement of sex and desire with the socio-political and unearthing and reimagining discourses of vergüenza informing racialized gender. Rodríguez charts new loci for analyzing sex, shame, and politics, illuminating interconnections as she glides between and among ostensibly disparate acts of queer gestures. Using her own erotic archive, the author further texturizes theories of performativity, showing how speech acts operate in conjunction with gestures of queer sex to incarnate meaning and queerly transform the body, or how the interpretation of linguistic gestures is colored by embodied histories. This theoretically astute and politically engaged and (queerly) timely book, in brief, will no doubt become a staple in graduate and upper division undergraduate courses. Some might find Rodríguez’s deployment of gesture frustratingly imprecise, for at different moments in the text gestures seem to work disparately from language as kinesthetic communication, and, at other times, appear to be purely linguistic. I argue, though, that this ambiguity is intentional and that this slippage is a queer gesture itself. The author’s lyrical and beckoning style composes a larger queer gestural repertoire that perpetually corrodes divisions between subject and object and assists in the co-creation of meaning and envisioning—and enacting of—other sexual futures.