Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings

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Introduction

dédiace / 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. 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: Gesttiario 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. Turist you don’t even need to know Spanish to communicate in Argentina” (Indji). 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. 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.

Gestures can be literal—actual movements of the body—or figurai
tive, 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 figurai
tive 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 dimin
ish 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 significa
tion. 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. 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. 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 ameliorate 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
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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. 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." 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 *Homo*, 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). 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 hori-
zons. A politics of refusal has a long history in feminist of color scholar-
ship, and should not be equated with the rejection of futurity, much
less sociality. In “Conjuring 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. 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 sacrified 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). 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 disabiling 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 feminizing 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. 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. 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). 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—inevitably, 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. 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. enríaquez-enríaquez’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
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. 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 “sadomasochism of everyday black life” (119). In his luminous text Extravagant Abjection, Darien 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 circulatory 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 2. 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
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 psychologically 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
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 cri-
tiques and analyses of quotidian and extravagant articulations of sexu-
ality, of kinship, of neoliberal activist practices; of dance and sex; of law,
theater, and pornography. But they also try to offer a glimpse of politi-
cal courage and imagination, queer gestures that push for something
beyond the knowable and the rational. This text is itself a queer ges-
ture, 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.
How does submission come to define *latina-ness*? We who have been repeatedly colonized and violated, who have been tricked and traded, who have given ourselves over to the allure of erasure through assimilation or who have repeatedly lived up to the stereotypes thrust upon us, who—regardless of how we carry the histories of our subjugation—have had to live with the shame of it all. Slavery and servitude, rape and torture permeate the sexual archives of the Americas, a legacy of violence that did not begin with European conquest, and does not end with migration. Through the flesh of our bodies, where the corporeal legacies of serial colonialism, enslavement, migration, and exile copulate, we are invited to create our selective mythologies of racial origins, producing ancestral narratives to suit our ethnic investments, even as the twisted tangles in our hair or the memories in our tongues reveal other stories we prefer not to tell. In the Americas, even the colonizers carry shameful histories of defeat and conquest, histories of poverty and prison that get washed clean in transatlantic migrations. These anxieties of history require that the official discourses of diverse states remain invested in producing and policing their national origins, which perpetually include the fiction of race. The challenge in these racial narratives is generally the same: to account for our position in the social hierarchy, and for most of us who live outside the most elite echelons of privilege, that means encountering shame. We create stories to account for the shame.
of being the master’s faithful servant, the overseer’s daughter, the indige-
nous translator, the daughter sold into servitude, prostitution, marriage. 
There are larger-than-life myths of women who wielded their sexual-
ity as a means of survival, and there are countless other stories of those 
whose only power was silence, shit, and tears. These are the narratives of 
sexual dominance and submission that we carry in our gestures.

While new histories abound that recount the details—lurid and gro-
tesque—of these everyday violations, I am more interested in the trace 
that remains, the shadow of shame and submission that looms behind us 
when we are on our knees. Like Frances Negrón-Muntaner, I believe that 
“studying shame as a socially constituted affect is part of valorizing sub-
altern groups and recovering that which shame tends to inhibit—interest 
in the world and enjoyment” (xvii). This connection between shame 
and the inhibition of pleasure has particular resonance for racialized 
women for whom victimization functions as an ontological condition. 
How does our proximity to multiple violences make our very willing-
ness to access diverse pleasures illegible or irrational? Under these (im) 
possibilities of eroticized meaning making, racialized women’s claims 
to sexualized pleasure function as a refusal of shame. Sinvergüenza. But 
rather than an attempt to redeem or erase our experiences of violence 
and violation, I want to register the possibility of recovering pleasure in 
the shame of abjection, a sexual pleasure that engages the sexual submis-
sion demanded of racialized subjects. Furthermore, following Darieick 
Scott, I want to think about racially gendered abjection as an opportu-
nity for erotic pleasure and as a “resource for the political present” 
(Extravagant 6). Understanding that sexual practices and positions are 
ever always already subversive or transparent correlates to individual-
ized histories of oppression, this chapter considers how personal sexual 
pleasures, written through domination, submission, or otherwise, are 
endlessly intertwined with collective histories and genealogies. Echo-
ing the premise of Darieick Scott in Extravagant Abjection, this chapter 
asks, “what is the potential for useful political, personal, psychological 
resource in racialization-through-abjection as historical legacy, as ances-
tral experience? How do we work with that legacy now, how do we use 
it to fit our own exigencies” (6)? And how might abjection exist as “a 
resource for the political present” for a wide range of raced and gen-
dered subjects (6)? While an investigation of abjection is foundational
to our understandings of collective forms of racialization, abjection also becomes the site through which the particularities of our material embodiments exert their most powerful influence, and exert it in a way that returns us to an encounter with our sensing bodies.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva describes the process of abjection as a shattering of the distinction between the self and the other. Abjection necessitates a casting aside of that which threatens the boundaries of the self. But this horror, which for Kristeva is exemplified by the corpse, is visceral. It is not merely the knowledge of death, but is instead predicated on a sensory encounter with death, an embodied experience. “[A]s in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live” (3). Like Kristeva, Scott situates abjection as that which produces the subject through an expulsion of what it is not, but he then goes on to link racialization—through-abjection to something he marks as power. “This power (which is also a way of speaking of freedom) is found at the point of the apparent erasure of ego-protections, at the point at which the constellation of tropes that we call identity, body, race, nation seem to reveal themselves as utterly penetrated and compromised, without defensible boundary” (9). Both Scott and Kathryn Bond Stockton in her work *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer”* find in the African American homosexual man an exemplary representational form for interrogating what Scott terms abjection and what Stockton terms debasement. Both authors connect this condition, and the shame that it affords, to what Stockton calls “an invaluable if also painful form of sociality” or a “social holding” (*Beautiful* 26–27). The figure of the black male rape victim figures centrally in both texts, but Scott also suggests that there are perhaps less extravagant forms that might likewise serve to reveal “abjection’s pervasive presence all along the continuum of the human world” (*Extravagant* 266).

My own work is significantly indebted to Scott and Stockton, but since I situate Latina femininity rather than African American masculinity at the center of this project, considerations of shame, abjection, pleasure, and power inevitably tumble into different sorts of (mis)alignment. Nevertheless, I want to press along this continuum Scott enables to explore both extravagant and seemingly unexceptional depictions of abjection’s deployment. For most Latin@s, racialization is itself part of
the ambiguity that is constitutive of the hierarchies of abjection: mestiza is not-india, mulata is not-black, Afro-Latina is not African American, Hispanic is almost-white. The persistent racism of colonial logics becomes embodied through these gradations of human value predicated by skin, hair, hips, feet, lips, voice; our social worth betrayed by the very corporeal forms that carry our spirits. Because Latin@s continually teeter on the edges of fragile racial logics, articulations that mutate and transform across borders of history and geography, Latino racial identification is continually placed into crisis, felt in the stare of the Other, in the hails that aims to fix one in what Fanon describes as a “historico-racial schema” (111). Latin@s are everywhere implicated in the racial narratives of subjection that Scott and Stockton narrate, as the descendants of slaves and of slave masters, as the conquered and as the conquerors. For many Latin@s these overlapping relationships to racialized colonial power live in intimate proximity; seen at the edges of family photos, whispered as ancestral lore. Where once we might have been seen as the criollo elite or the ascending mestizo middle class in our countries of origin, in the United States we become the racialized immigrant Other to Anglo-American whiteness; if once we had been mulato in relation to someone else’s blackness, now Africa sticks to us like tar. Others might be invested in the refusal of European ancestry; however, that does little to diminish relationships to forms of colonial whiteness that are rarely encountered directly in decolonial discourses organized around “people of color.” And those who seek solace in direct uninterrupted Spanish lineage must at some point reconcile themselves to eight hundred years of Moorish occupation of the Iberian Peninsula. Our hybridity as a product of colonial violence runs deep. These are the complicated, painful histories Latino identity politics often wish to ignore. These are the ambiguities of race that latinidad must work to contain and police, or conversely take up in coiled articulations of their polymorphous perversity. Of this dangerous uncertainty that ambiguity presents, Kristeva states, “abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger” (9). It is this racial ambiguity that wraps around latinidad, the terror of uncertain racial signs that complicates facile forms of identification or refusal. For Latin@s, abjection is therefore intricately related to racial hierarchies of
power that mark our colonial relationships, a process of being interpel-
lated by racial schemas that is reenacted at each new national frontier. 
The very act of being racialized, of having to ubicarnos (locate ourselves), 
within these histories of conquest and submission enacts our shame.\(^2\) 
Returning to Scott, what might it mean to use these legacies of racialized 
colonial abjection now, “to fit our own exigencies,” to deploy shame in 
the service of pleasure (Extravagant 6)?

To consider the gendering of Latina subjects adds another set of com-
pliations and interpretive intricacies. Like other feminine subjects, the 
Latina who in consenting to her own subjugation might find satisfaction 
in particular forms of abjection, represents the unimaginable category of 
racialized female masochist, daring to perform that which has already 
come to define her. This always already imagined masochism confirms 
the way the unequal distribution of power in heterosexual romance is 
 normalized: women are “naturally” assumed to languish and take plea-
sure in their suffering over male dominance and cruelty. This binding 
together of feminine gender and masochistic pleasure creates—but also 
limits—opportunities for queer appropriations of these sexual positions. 
Writing about the impossibility this binary presents for (white) lesbians, 
Lynda Hart states, “Their options are to take up the position of passive 
‘normal femininity,’ or to reverse the position and appropriate masculine 
subjectivity and its desires” (Between 90). But the queer femme of color’s 
adoption of “passive” is anything but normal femininity—normal femin-
inity being always already predicated on whiteness—instead, it asserts 
a fetishistic attachment to racialized gender, a sexual identification that 
is attached to a particular gendered performance in which the ways gen-
der is racialized exert unnatural, perhaps even magical, power.\(^3\)

To think gender, or more precisely racialized gender, as fetish takes 
us back to the etymological origins of fetish, to the Portuguese feitiço, 
a word that relates to the Spanish hechizo, a magical spell that exudes a 
power that exceeds any sense of the material. To read racialized gender 
as fetish is to understand how it is “made by art, artificial, skillfully con-
trived” and to desire it anyway (OED). As Robyn Weigman put it in her 
essay “The Desire for Gender,”

1 want simply to say yes. Yes to gender. Yes to gender as a social sys-
tem, as a division of labor, as a structure of inequality; as a mode of dis/
identification; as an occasion for sex; yes to gender as a habit of thought, as a terrain of recognition; as a source of shame, as a practice of pleasure, as a language of being; yes in short to gender as a means to describe, inhabit, embody, critique, violate, and resist. (228)

When we have already said yes to a desire for gender, what might it mean to say yes to a desire for race, race as an occasion for sex, as a habit of thought, as a language of being in ways that fully recognize the structures of inequality that make it such a portable vehicle of eroticized power relations? Echoing contemporary legal discourse, what might it mean to reject the liberal demands of color-blindness in our most intimate encounters, and insist on a more color-conscious consideration of sexual relations? If we understand racial fetish as instantiating magical powers to race, what might it mean for racialized queers to assume those magical powers and to direct them otherwise? To use that magic in the service of sexual projects that, rather than ignore or minimize the seductive allure of race, elect to linger in the erotic possibilities race affords, fantastic possibilities that exist beyond the now? Lingering in the possibilities of race, beyond binaries that situate whiteness as the only relevant referent of power, requires us to explore our viscous attachments to racial logics, racialized bodies, and racialized ways of moving in the world. In this chapter, the eroticization of race, rather than function as that which a liberal-minded queerness is intended to erase, becomes an opportunity for sexual exploration and enjoyment.

Saying yes to gender, yes to the ways gendered articulations of race function as fetishistic attachment for ourselves and others, entails refusing to pretend that we can exist outside its regulatory power, and insisting instead on confronting the pleasures and harms that it instantiates. Of course, the social system of gender and division of labor that Weigman references are rooted in the disciplinary regimes of heteronormativity that are themselves predicated on whiteness. And it is this oppressive heteronormativity that queer studies has come to position itself against. But if we can understand how normative tropes of gender and race might have seductive magical powers, even for racialized queers, then it becomes quite plausible to see how that same allure might be affixed onto gestures of heteronormativity. In her essay, Weigman questions
gender's relationship to heteronormativity, and begins with the seemingly obvious answer that "gender was both the effect and the tool of heteronormativity." But she then goes on to complicate that answer by asking, "how were norms made, circulated, lived, desired, transformed, and resisted? Not just: how were we fucked by gender, but also: was it possible to fuck without fucking with gender?" (218). Furthermore, in a deft theoretical move that Foucault would relish, Weigman goes on to state that queer theory, in "making every aspect of normativity pathological[,] was to participate in the logic of normalization itself" (228). In saying yes to gender, yes to our racial attachments, and in creating a space in which we can say yes to the perverse allure of heteronormativity, we can step away from a pathologizing discourse, even as we refuse to step away from the lived impact these discourses exert on social bodies.

Rather than existing as the constitutive other to queerness, in this chapter the discipline of heteronormativity gets deployed as a site of pleasurable potential, a fetishistic attachment we refuse to abandon. For many queer subjects, heterosexuality and the repertoire of gestures that mark its norms become sites where the pleasures of sexual domination and submission find their most expressive manifestations. Heterosexuality is where many of us came from, in ways that are about our families of origin and often about our own histories of pansexual practices. It is deeply familiar in ways that might remind us of why we no longer play in that sandbox, but also queer, excessive, and campy in its own unique ways. Usually heterosexuality is just mundane and complicated in ways that are all too similar to our own queer lives, but that is rarely how it impresses itself on our imaginations or on our politics. In this chapter, heteronormativity establishes itself hidden within the quotidian contours of queer abjection. Even from a temporal distance, heterosexuality continues to push against our erotic lives by providing the familiarity of the images and scenes that have produced us as sexual subjects and continue to touch us, even if now (perhaps always) our attachments to them seem more perverse. So, in this final chapter, let us return to ruminate in these corridors of racialized heterosexuality, not as the norm against which queer is measured, but as the narrative scripts that cause "appearance itself to appear" (Agamben, Means 95).
The Porn Archive

In order to consider how race and sexuality, pleasure and abjection might function as overt displays of erotic power, let us consider the porn archive. In his introduction to the anthology *Porn Archives*, Tim Dean articulates the archival function of pornography as a repertoire of culture, one of many cultural artifacts that reveal society’s investments, proclivities, fears, and secret ambitions. But he also affirms that “porn is itself an archive—of sex, of fantasy, of desire, of bodies and their actions, and of pleasure” (“Introduction” 13). I have spent many hours in the porn archive. As a sexually curious teenager, I read *Penthouse Forum, Cosmopolitan*, and *Playboy* as study guides for my own sexual exploration. I watched Nancy Friday, the author of the 1974 book *My Secret Garden*, on the daytime talk show *Phil Donahue* (syndicated 1967–1996), immediately bought the book, and devoured fantasies that included stories about family dogs, lecherous priests, incest, and an entire chapter devoted to “Big Black Men” (186–90). I watched feature-length pornographic movies at the drive-in and, as X-rated films started to become more mainstream, in movie theaters. I ventured into gay bars and heterosexual strip joints. In order to access sexual toys and explicit reading material, I frequented “adult bookstores,” all before I graduated high school. Law determines not just who is legally entitled to have sex through age of consent laws, but who has access to sexual knowledge through a wide range of interlocking regulations that impact everything from nudity in films to controls over sexually explicit websites. As often happens when law’s primary justification is to prohibit so as to control, the disciplining function of law designed to establish the boundary between adult perversion and childhood innocence failed. But pornography in all its manifestations was not the only source of my sexual knowledge. Like most young people of that era, I grew up watching television, mainstream movies, and an endless stream of commercials. Like my mother and grandmother, who listened to serialized dramas on Spanish-language radio, I was a fan of soap operas, including serialized dramas like *Dark Shadows* (ABC, 1966–1971), *One Life to Live* (ABC, 1968–2012), and *General Hospital* (ABC, 1963–present). Like many fans of *General Hospital*, I remember vividly the day Luke raped Laura at the campus disco, a scene set against the psychedelic lights
and disco soundtrack of Herb Albert’s Rise. (Was disco to blame?) Luke and Laura later went on to have a storybook romance. Two years later they celebrated their love with a gala wedding that remains the highest-rated soap opera episode in U.S. daytime television history ("17 Great"). These stories of blonde-on-blonde rape-becoming-romance also have a special place in the porn archive.

The texts analyzed in this chapter present queer excerpts from that archive, even as they index different articulations of racialized heterosexuality. It seems worth noting that most definitions of pornography have less to do with specific sexual acts and more to do with what pornography is generally defined against: art. Pornography is “intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic feelings,” while works of art are intended “to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power” (OED). Art is not supposed to turn you on, and pornography is not intended to elicit emotion or aesthetic feeling. The pieces I consider in this chapter shuttle between what is defined as art and what is defined as porn. But like most binaries, the space between pornography and art is porous and permeable. I begin with contemporary queer burlesque performance, then move to mainstream subscription porn, and finally to a consideration of one artist’s rendering of sex, power, pleasure, and abjection combining these two visual forms. Each of the texts I examine has the potential to ignite emotional power or to stimulate erotic feeling; each interpretive rendering is intended to create opportunities for diverse publics to be seduced or repulsed.

My interest in the intersections of sexuality and race adds an additional dimension to works I examine. For women of color, finding yourself in the porn archive very often involves encountering spectacular images of hyperbolic racialized abjection or projecting your own countenance onto the ecstatic white faces of femininity. In the first two examples I consider, we see images of racial objectification and exoticism that, while confirming all of the negative imagery that surrounds racialized sexuality, create an opportunity to stare into the face of racialized sexual abjection. In the final section, rather than the spectacle of race, the unmarked category of whiteness comes into focus, and the feelings that erasure, anonymity, and racial ambiguity generate are taken off the screen and placed onto the racialized female spectator. In this final text, rather than racially defined bodies, it is the unmarked
category of idealized white femininity, including the whiteness that hovers near latinidad, that instantiates the process of abjection and pleasure. In the course of this chapter, we traverse the field from spectacular forms of racially gendered violation to the relatively invisible, and therefore more insidious, forms of quotidian subjugation lurking within normative heterosexual romance. Here gesture functions as the code through which the narrative scripts of representation are deciphered, the corporeal traces through which race, gender, sexuality, and their shifting screens of significance are revealed.

I'm Your Puppet

In the 2007 show “I'm Your Puppet,” presented in Seattle as part of Kaleidoscope: National People of Color Cabaret, La Chica Boom, the stage name of the Chicana burlesque performance artist Xandra Ibarra, performatively enacted an extravagant scene of state domination and racialized submission: sexual violation at the U.S.-Mexico border. This scene of violation and submission to the state returns us to Schmeiser's formulation that sexual practices such as sadomasochism function in parallel to our relationship to the state, the über-top to whom we are all required to consent. But in Ibarra's performance it is neither a scene of actual capitulation to the state at the border nor a sexual scene enacted by willing partners like the ones Schmeiser considers. Instead, as a staged theatrical piece, it involves an additional dimension that complicates considerations of power, submission, anxiety, and pleasure: it is performed live for an audience. This is state domination and racialized submission as burlesque.

The performance opens with a U.S. Border Patrol agent, played by the Chippewa performer Sheu Sheu leHaure, using a pair of oversized binoculars to search through the audience as the Dragnet theme song plays. The music then shifts to the oldies classic “I'm Your Puppet” as Ibarra enters the stage as a campy version of a Mexican marionette and quickly pulls out a small American flag, ready to wave it in order to gain access to the other side. Ibarra is thus revealed as a puppet of both the U.S. state and discursive regimes that demand the willing subservience (and gratitude) of migrant bodies. The border agent yanks the flag off its tiny handle, and in an overt gesture of resigned submission, Ibarra
kneels to polish his shoes. As she bends over, the agent responds with his own blatant gesture of sexual dominance and authorial discipline: he slaps her ass. Both actors face the audience at this point, and while leHauré's posture and expression beam with martial authority, a gesture of assured and unquestioned dominance, Ibarra's face, pouty and beautiful, evinces the pain of feminine capitulation to masculinized state control. As the performance proceeds, the agent removes Ibarra's clothes piece by piece, violating the burlesque expectation of feminine agency that conditions the traditional striptease. The audience at this point is at a loss, not knowing whether to cheer at her increasing exposure, or boo at the staged violation. Each time our Mexican marionette is relieved of an item of clothing, the audience quivers in anxious anticipation. Each time she attempts to cross the threshold of the doorframe that serves as the border she is stopped, until, almost nude, she is finally able to cross to the other side. Once across the threshold, she is nevertheless detained and led offstage by the agent, suggesting that even acquiescence to sexual violence does not ensure unrestrained entry, and leaving the audience to wonder what further violations await her offstage.

Of course, official narratives of homeland security that authorize the detention, interrogation, corporeal scrutiny, and violation of subjects as they cross from Baja California to Alta California write this scene as a necessary function of national security, not as a sexualized exercise of authorial power. Seen on stage, however, the very premise of the confrontation comes to be understood as one that requires a coerced submission to the sadism of the state. The social position of these two characters is accomplished theatrically through wardrobe and gesture, and draws implicitly on an assumed familiarity with encounters with state agents. This familiarity allows Ibarra to rely on theatrically exaggerated gestures of dominance and submission, rather than on dialogue, to establish the narrative premise of the piece. The gestures themselves are immediately recognizable corporeal statements that perform understood relations of power: Ibarra kneels, shoulders slumped and eyes cast down, as leHauré pushes her chest out, hands on hips, her own eyes shielded behind dark glasses as she stares brazenly at the audience.

In the absence of narrative dialogue, the aural comes to assume heightened function in producing a space of understanding, and the
two different songs in the skit serve as audio motifs for each actor. Although the song is over fifty years old, the four menacing notes that constitute the opening musical phrase of the *Dragnet* theme song function quite effectively as the soundtrack for a police state. Citing *Dragnet*, a 1950s police drama set in Los Angeles, also connects contemporary border politics historically and geographically to other sites of state violence. The song “I’m Your Puppet” similarly harkens back to a previous era that continues to have cultural resonance: Chican@s’ long association with oldies classics. The chorus of the song, which repeats the title, affirms the premise of the theatrical piece, drawing connections between submission to the state and submission to a lover. It is precisely the ways that these familiar elements get redeployed in this new queer of color burlesque context that provide the unexpected theatrical encounter.

While her light skin, gender ambiguity, and the place of the theater work to construct leHauere as the embodiment of a masculine white
state, her identity as a Native American butch and the context of a burlesque show organized around people of color also correctly mirror the pervasive presence of people of color, butches, and women as border agents. Thus, the scene is doubly marked as a brown-on-brown, butch-on-femme interface of erotic power. What the audience sees is a reenactment of racialized heteronormativity, an overt violation by white masculinist state power, but the audience is also confronted with the remix of this iconic scene: two women of color, one decidedly femme and one unambiguously butch, acting out a scene of masculine domination and feminine submission. In writing about the theatricality of desire, Lynda Hart notes how meaning is constructed in the space between the actors and the audience: “No matter how one arranges the architecture of the theater, there is always a space in between—a gap, a space of fantasy that cannot be filled with content, where the play must take place” (*Between* 9). It is this opening of fantasy, this doubling of meaning, that provides the moment of anxiety and titillation, forcing the audience members to come to terms with their own sexualized position in this economy of erotic power. In *Performing Mexicanidad*, Laura Gutiérrez argues for the importance of a critical practice of “dis-comfort” in performance studies, one that recognizes the simultaneous “spaces of desire and fear” (19). Presented with this display of actors, narrative, and dis-comforting emotions, the audience is invited to remix these elements to arrive at its own understanding of power relations.

For Ibarra, the context of a performance space that would consist primarily of people of color was absolutely necessary for her to attempt the piece publicly (Ibarra). As an actor, performing and directing her own violation, Ibarra controls the scene, staging an additional stratum of power for her audience to ponder. As a burlesque artist, Ibarra is an attentive dominatrix, and the implied consent of what she terms a “knowing audience” becomes one of the many layers of control she negotiates within her performances, even as she delights in pushing audiences into treacherous affective territories that challenge their own understanding of visual dis-comfort. Yet she recounts that the audience reaction, including the outpouring of racialized pain and repulsion, has made her hesitant to stage the piece again. Repulsion and outrage, however, were not the only reactions she noted. Other Latina audience members also confessed the explosive erotic power of the piece,
including their desires to reenact the scene privately as either border agent or Mexican doll. For these audience members, this theatrical scene of racialized violation at the hands of a state authority had become the germ (or the staged representation) of intimate sexual fantasy. This is the type of sexual fantasy that we dare not confess, the type of sexual fantasy that marks us as improper sexual subjects of feminist politics. As racialized queers, we are not supposed to be aroused by scenes of state subjugation, let alone reenact them. When we find perverse pleasure in these moments of submission or domination, we expose our own erotic attachments to power, to other scenes and stages that jumble together desire and disgust.

That the piece elicited these multiple and contradictory responses in the audience is the point. The performance studies scholar Jill Dolan defines her work in the theater as “us[ing] performance to incite people to profound responses that shake their consciousness of themselves in the world” (456), a dramatic process she links to “experiences of utopia” (455). The context of the theater allows us to encounter the viscosity of our emotions and reflect on the personal affective archives from which they are formed, in relative safety. But the theater also serves to expose that safety as part of the performance, making apparent the material divide between the theatricality of the stage and the physical reality of the state-patrolled border, between legality on this side of the border (and the stage) and illegality on that side. Ibarra’s burlesque performance binds together the disciplinary power of the state with the unabashed eroticism of striptease in ways that draw upon and disturb our political and erotic forms of identification and desire. Returning to Schmeiser, this scene also serves to expose the submission to law that is demanded of us by the state, and allows us to performatively usurp the space of authority for racialized female subjects. Schmeiser asserts that

practices that play erotically on structures of dominance and submission and their institutional incarnations (e.g., master and slave; police officer and criminal suspect; teacher and student) pose a challenge to law’s monopolistic relationship to punishment. . . . S/M reflects back on law in hyperbolic, eroticized terms the conditions of subjection and coercion that law’s operations rationalize and disguise. (29)
Even as it serves to expose the sadistic domination of the state, acknowledging the erotic in these unruly social relations of submission and domination also supposes a risk, prompting questions about how something so politically perverse and objectionable might acquire erotic potential in the first place.

While Ibarra's performance attempts to make queer meaning out of the scenes that etch their ways into our psychic imaginaries, that slither into our most shameful fantasies, it cannot account for the source of those attachments in the various publics it touches. Those attachments, what Sara Ahmed terms "stickiness," experienced as disgust, titillation, or both, gain meaning only through iteration, a harkening back to familiar narrative conventions and codes. Stickiness, according to Ahmed, "involves a form of relationality, or 'withness,' in which the elements that are 'with' get bound together" (Cultural 91). Yet she warns against ascribing definitive attributes and causes, adding, "What makes something sticky in the first place is difficult to determine precisely because stickiness involves such a chain of effects" (Cultural 91). As racialized female subjects, we are continually exposed to sticky attachments that mark us as simultaneously sexually vulnerable and undeniably perverse. We carry the traces of those others who have touched us in ways that return us to Ahmed's "chain of effects." This "chain of effects" Ahmed references invariably takes us to the spaces of abjection that representation attempts to cite, critique, deploy, or reenvision. In this piece, Ibarra triggers these attachments to the racialized erotics of dissymmetrical power relations in her audiences, as she simultaneously exposes these sanctioned gestures of the state as the nonconsensual sexualized sadism of border security.

BorderBangers

Perhaps I have presented a persuasive argument for how Ibarra's burlesque restaging of state domination intended for a queer racialized public might offer up something potentially productive, theater that might force us to contend with our unruly attachments to the erotics of state power. But what happens when we turn to another moment of staged representation, with a wholly different intended audience? What happens when the remix is produced by others of dubious intentions?
Let us consider traditional heterosexual pornography that explicitly traffics in these same racialized erotics of Latina submission, where eroticizing the sexual domination of Latina migrants is explicit and unapologetic. BorderBangers.com—“Where hot Latinas fuck or get deported!”—is a pornographic subscription website structured around the narrative trope of Latina sexual submission as condition for entry into the United States. According to the text on the website,

Looks like this side of the country is overflowing with las imigrants ilegales! Good thing a lot of them are sexy and willing to do anything to stay out of the border, so our team catches the foxiest and horniest Latina girls to be fucked on camera. These sluts can’t say no to our cocks, and some of them even want to get screwed a second time! Catch all our spicy Latina booty movies below! (Borderbangers.com)

All the recognizable markers of racialized Latina sexuality and submissiveness are present—we get the requisite reference to spiciness, and Latina submissiveness is confirmed when we learn that they are “willing to do anything.” In this text, we also get the repeated use of the word “catch” to reference being “caught” crossing the border and being “caught” on camera. Both allude to the surveillance of Latin@ bodies, a political surveillance and a pornographic surveillance that are performed using the same technology of capture, video. The inclusion of Spanish, which is common on the website and in the videos, assumes that the audience has a rudimentary understanding of the language. Even when it is misspelled or misused, Spanish serves to mark these as “authentic” representations of Latina identity. The opening line provides the rationale: “this side of the country is overflowing with las imigrants ilegales.” The slippage in language is telling: country and border work metonymically to stand in for one another. The language, however, is less than precise. These women are “willing to do anything to stay out of the border,” marking the border itself, rather than deportation across the border, as the site of anxiety. Curiously, although the implied assumption is that the border being referenced is the U.S.-Mexico border, the ethnic marker used most often on the site is the more generic “Latina.” And while “Mexican” frequently functions as the default unmarked category for these racialized women, occasionally
other national designations appear: one woman is threatened with being sent back to El Salvador, and another is presented as a Colombian drug smuggler.

In the available videos we get the expected clichéd encounters: hotel maids, domestic servants, backroom kitchen staff, and gardeners, confirming Laura Kipnis’s observation that “the world of pornography is mythological and hyperbolic, peopled by characters” (163). These characters conform to a racial imaginary in which Latinas are regulated to servitude. Unlike the image of the slave who is forced to serve a single master, Latina servitude in these scenarios provides for the economic needs of the entire nation, a constant yet invisible “overflowing” presence that lurks in every corner of the national service sector. What is interesting is that unlike Ibarra’s performance, where submission does not result in release, in these videos the women, after having paid the price of their coerced sexual labor, are all allowed to stay in the country. Although the premise in these scenarios is one of coercion, the characters generally display very little resistance to these sexual violations; their resistance is not part of the erotic appeal. Instead, what they frequently perform is perversely framed as gratitude, an eager willingness to submit sexually that is mirrored in their gratitude at being allowed to submit to their place in the labor hierarchy: “willing to do anything to stay out of the border.” In one scene, the actress, cum still dripping on her face, smiles cheerily into the camera and says, “I love America.”7 So, despite the problem of “this side of the country [that] is overflowing with las inmigrantes ilegales,” the producers are content to let these women stay, as long as their sexual submission—and their submission as part of the economic underclass—is affirmed.

Pornography, like other forms of cultural production, emerges in a social context wherein preexisting narratives circulate around available forms of representation, forms that must be legible in order to acquire social meaning. The National Prison Project of the ACLU, using only the documents available to it through the Freedom of Information Act, found over two hundred reported cases of sexual abuse in immigration detention facilities between 2007 and 2011.8 These represent only the tiniest fraction of what survives in the archive to support the fiction that the state is doing the work of regulating itself. There is a commanding power in these personal narratives of abuse predicated on the
silence of a subaltern subject who cannot speak, object, or resist, but does. The sexual abuse in these accounts is not pornography, but such violence is often equated with it. Writing about the ways state violence was conflated with and blamed on pornography in the Abu Ghraib horror, Anne McClintock states most emphatically, “Conflicting torture with porn banalized the torture” (62). In *Techniques of Pleasure*, Margot Weiss makes a similar point in describing what happens when the discourse of sadomasochism gets deployed to account for state violations that become read as “the depraved practices of individuals, rather than institutionalized military practice”; this deployment “pathologizes BDSM practitioners, and it works to shield US military operations” (223). The sexual abuse at detention centers and at other disciplinary institutions of the state is not consensual, it is not the staged representation of violence and violation, it is not pornography, it is not fantasy, it is the real disciplinary power of the state acting on the flesh of unwilling human bodies. When these other representational forms become equated with real accounts of coerced sexual abuse, we minimize the material carnal impact of the real violations of the state and its actors.

This is not to say that pornography is absent its own harms. In several important essays, the porn historian Mireille Miller-Young investigates the material conditions that inform the place of women of color in the “racialized economy of desire” that is pornography. Miller-Young stresses that in the adult film industry, as in other employment sectors, African American women and other women of color are marginalized and devalued workers who face systemic discrimination on multiple fronts, even as the industry has presented a range of differently rewarded avenues for economic solvency. Nevertheless, she also demonstrates how pornography has produced an indispensable archive of racialized sexual culture: “the pornography industry has been both a venue for the production of sexual culture and for the mobilization of sexual labor” (“Hip-Hop” 266). Miller-Young’s scholarship forcefully argues for the ways “that black illicit erotic workers, while victimized by multiple axes of discrimination and harm, also employ an outlaw sexuality to achieve mobility, erotic autonomy, and self-care” (“Putting Hypersexuality” 231). In other words, the Latinas in BorderBangers are actresses who are themselves part of a racialized labor hierarchy in the adult entertainment industry, where blonde femininity still commands
the highest price. That they are devalued workers in the pornography industry, portraying devalued workers in the service industry, only mirrors the way Latina labor is devalued across all sectors of the economy. Vilifying pornography because it represents these inequities only detracts attention from other forms of racially gendered labor. Drawing upon Kristeva’s formulation of abjection, McClintock makes clear how pornography functions within the cultural imaginary:

porn is our normal monster, the monster we know how to hate. Porn is the sexual abject, “something rejected from which one does not part.” As our normal monster, porn serves as a screen onto which are projected a host of gender anxieties (about violence against women, gender subversion, women’s sexual agency, non-procreative sexuality, among them) that can then be condemned without exploring the deeper sources of gender violence. (62)

Exploring the “deeper sources” of racial and gender inequity implicates all of us. Whether or not we are consumers of pornography, as consumers in a global marketplace, we participate in larger economic processes that are dependent on hierarchies of racialized class that are always gendered. But some of us are consumers of pornography, including heterosexual pornography and pornography organized around the exoticization of race. And just as some racialized female performers engaged in sexually explicit employment have found creative ways to take productive pleasure in their work, as consumers of porn, many of us have also found pleasure in these images of hyperracialized sexuality.

It should be noted that the sex in most of the videos in Border-Bangers is actually quite ordinary penis-in-vagina intercourse in the usual pornographic repertoire of sexual positions and locations. The sex is generally confined to one female with one male partner, a steady display of blow jobs, and the standard money shots. There are no massive orgies, no depictions of extreme physical violence, no anal penetration, no bondage, no double penetration, and curiously, no girl-on-girl action. In essence, the sexual particularities of these videos affirm Tim Dean’s observation that “Whatever form it takes, pornography is never just one thing” (“Introduction” 20). Rather than extreme or spectacular sexual acts, the market appeal of BorderBangers lies
squarely within the racially eroticized display of power that the U.S.-Mexico border represents. Linda Williams’s tracing of the word “obscenity,” the word most often deployed in juridical definitions of pornography, proves helpful here, and echoes McClintock’s framing of porn as the sexual abject. Williams notes that the etymological roots of “obscenity” emphasize that which should be kept out of public view, off the scene. In response, she coins the term “on/scenity: the gesture by which a culture brings on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, and pleasures that have heretofore been designated ob-scene and kept literally off-scene” (3). If BorderBangers is obscene, it is because the overt display of the collusion between state and economic power that it showcases is deemed too indecent for public consumption. If we see these racially gendered pornographic images as obscene, we also need to see the stratified placement of Latinas in the racially gendered service economy as obscene. And if we can imagine the Latina migrant service worker using her exploitation in a global marketplace to satisfy her own desires for mobility, economic solvency, and self-care even as she battles against the conditions that authorize her oppression, then we might begin to grasp the possibilities of gratification in these actresses’ participation in BorderBangers, including the representation of their own abjection.

In a consideration of BorderBangers, it is the question of consumption and the possibilities of pleasure in abjection that profoundly trouble the project of (re)signification. As we have seen with Ibarra’s performance, where we have queer actors of color performing for a “knowing audience,” the scholarly exercise of recognizing “the potential for useful political, personal, psychological resource in racialization-through-abjection” is wholly dependent on the particularities of each context (Scott, Extravagant 6). In his critique, and then reconsideration, of the racialized eroticism of Robert Mapplethorpe’s Black Book, Kobena Mercer’s discussion of audience proves particularly instructive. In the second essay, Mercer reframes his earlier critique to question how “different audiences and readers produce different and conflicting readings of the same cultural text” (102). Here, while allowing a certain connection to Mapplethorpe through their shared gayness, Mercer also seems to suggest that as a gay black man, he has a privileged access to a more complicated and nuanced reading of the racialized fetishism on display.
More germane to the point, however, is Mercer’s confession of his own ambiguously constructed pleasure:

Once I acknowledge my own location in the image reservoir as a gay subject—a desiring subject not only in terms of sharing a desire to look, but in terms of an identical object-choice already there in my own fantasies and wishes—then the articulation of meanings about eroticism, race and homosexuality becomes a lot more complicated. Indeed, I am forced to confront the rather unwelcome fact that as a spectator I actually occupy the very position in the fantasy of mastery previously ascribed to the centred position of the white male subject! (104)

What might trouble access to pleasure—in relation to Mapplethorpe or in relation to BorderBangers—is the thought of someone else’s pleasure, an imagined “white male subject” who is less enlightened, less critically conscious, more literal in his desires for Latina subjugation. Sharing pornographic preferences is indeed a strange sort of sociality. This is not to say that different viewers don’t have differentially situated access to forms of reading. But rather than thinking about who has the privileged mindset required to access racialized pornography, it might be more productive to consider the ways that consuming sexual images has the potential to shift our own states of understanding in ways that are difficult to account for and control. Through the pornographic encounter, our own erotic attachments are remixed, recalibrated through the available sources of identification and desire. Furthermore, we should not forget that this scene of shared eroticism that Mercer describes is structured through a shared gay masculinity that has access to a public sex culture (albeit one structured around racialized objectification), a public sex culture that is generally denied to most women. What does it mean for a woman, a queer woman, a queer woman of color, to take pleasure in pornography, including racially charged heterosexual porn? What might it mean for her to share this viewing pleasure with the men, presumably heterosexual white men, who constitute its intended audience? How might pornography, and the sexual fantasies it might generate, come to function as another sort of public sexual culture that is available to diverse audiences? And how might the dynamics of sexual pleasure be altered through this differently situated access to viewing?
Go, Diego! Go!

Just as in Ibarra’s piece, where we see a Native American in the role of border agent, in several of the videos available at BorderBangers.com, Latino masculinity functions in complicated ways that point to the ambiguity of national belonging and racial identification. Consider Officer Diego Santos, a protagonist in several of these videos. He seems a curious, if wholly plausible, representative of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. As a small, visibly Latino man with dark hair and eyes, lush tightly curled eyelashes, full pouting lips, and a skin tone that is darker than that of many of “las imigrantes ilegales” he encounters, his racialized presence complicates easy confluences of state power and whiteness. His racialized masculinity also enables another level of erotic possibilities for disparate publics. His name, Diego, calls to mind the Nick Jr. animated television show for children, Go, Diego! Go! That Diego, the intrepid nine-year-old explorer, likewise sports a vest and a badge indicating that he is on a mission to track, capture, and return his prey to the wild.

Officer Diego Santos of BorderBangers carries out his duties with equal determination, and like Diego of cartoon fame, he is also fully bilingual. Here, the use of Spanish complicates readings of the border and its pornographic depiction. Like a vast number of undocumented residents who have spent the majority of their lives in the United States, many of the actresses in these videos speak fluent, often unaccented, English. Nevertheless, in these videos, Spanish authenticates these actresses as Latinas in ways that color or phenotype alone doesn’t quite accomplish. It also establishes a sonic point of erotic contact for diverse audiences, including Latin@s who get to not only see but also hear themselves represented in the sexual archive.

Shot in mockumentary style, in one scene Officer Diego is pursuing a suspect named Tina Juarez. The opening shot is filmed on location and begins in an overgrown, garbage-strewn back lot in an unnamed Latino neighborhood. In his initial address to the audience and the camera, Diego comments that “as you can hear, there are a couple of helicopters flying overhead, so this place is pretty hot.” Here the intrusion of ambient sound serves to code the location, particularly for those who might be familiar with the ever-present sound of police helicopters
in Los Angeles, as one of militarized surveillance. The word “hot” makes obvious the connection between the heightened energy of militarized police action and the heat of steamy sexual possibilities. In a scene that seems unplanned and unscripted, our indomitable Latino border agent encounters an older Latino man entering his car, and asks in fluent Spanish whether the man has any knowledge of Tina Juarez. This is a polite and informal exchange, where the older man regretfully denies any knowledge of the suspect and then introduces himself before asking, “¿Y usted, como se llama?” The actor in the cheap khaki uniform responds, “Diego, Oficial Diego.” Before they depart, the body of the unseen cinematographer enters the scene through his voice as both men offer a friendly “gracias” as the scene ends. Like the helicopters buzzing overhead, the racially marked bodies that occupy this empty lot serve to accentuate the veracity of the scene, even as they act as a reminder of the urban realities of undocumented immigrant lives that the film attempts to reference. From the parking lot, Officer Diego enters a back door leading to a storage space, where he finally confronts Tina Juarez. Now the cinematographer seems to disappear from the
scene entirely, and we are supposed to imagine that this is a private violation, as Diego asks Tina—again in Spanish—whether they are alone. The scene that follows takes place almost exclusively in Spanish. Translation into English, when it occurs, functions in an odd manner: Officer Diego speaks to his unwilling victim in Spanish, which we would assume she understands, and then occasionally translates the same line into English. In one exchange, as Tina is frisked with her arms overhead and legs spread, she whimpers kittenishly, “¿Por qué?” (Why?), to which he answers, “Porque yo soy el oficial, yo soy él que mando. I’m the one that says why, I’m the one that asks questions.” The English line that follows the Spanish, which would be wholly unnecessary were it not for a monolingual English-language audience, is not a direct translation but an approximation that performs the authority his character embodies. Lest there be any confusion about the sexual prerogative of this brown Latino man, his statement “yo soy el official, yo soy él que mando” (I am the official, I am the one who commands) leaves no doubt that he is acting under the authority of the state. And it is this authority that Tina is made to kneel in front of in a gesture of submission that calls to mind Ibarra’s Mexican marionette. Unlike Ibarra’s performance piece, however, which functions only through gesture and costuming, here dialogue provides the erotic spark. In fact, in this scene it could be said that the dialogue, rather than the rather routine sexual acts they perform, is what marks this scene as explicitly pornographic. While Officer Santos may be said to occupy the position of the top in this scene through his association with the state, visually, it is very often Diego’s brown, hairless body that is presented for our viewing pleasure, making him the bottom to our scopic desires.14

As in most commercial pornography, in BorderBangers there is very little attempt to make the scenes seem realistic. The officers’ uniforms seem shabby and makeshift, and the women occasionally look into the camera or otherwise veer out of character. All the female actresses are expertly waxed (as are the male actors); several of the women have tattoos and piercings; and most sport newly polished French-tip nails—difficult to maintain if one is a maid or works in a kitchen. Denim miniskirts, frilly panties or thongs, and sneakers seem to be the most frequently featured outfit for these actresses. There is an almost campy
feel to how racial stereotypes and the iconography of the border are portrayed. In one scene, shot initially from the passenger seat of a black pickup truck, a young woman dressed only in a miniskirt and skimpy white t-shirt is “chased” down a dusty road, although what we actually see is her jogging leisurely for ten seconds before she is “apprehended” by a burly Anglo agent. In another scene, the actress is literally fucked against a hastily pinned-up American flag. In several of the scenes the women describe the penises they encounter as “muy muy grande,” deploying a level of Spanish that would be familiar to anyone who has ever seen a Taco Bell ad.

In “Notes on Camp,” Sontag delineates a whole series of what she deems the most prominent features of camp: “a degree of artifice, of stylization, . . . an attitude with respect to content [that is] disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical” (277). But she goes further to link camp to an aesthetic that has multiple registers of meaning:
Camp sensibility is one that is alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken. But this is not the familiar split-level construction of a literal meaning, on the one hand, and a symbolic meaning, on the other. It is the difference, rather, between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice. (281)

A ten-second chase scene, a sloppily mounted American flag, the “I love America” dialogue, and the ever-present “muy muy grande” penises all serve to expose the artifice of the pornography’s production, even as they force an encounter with prior registers of meaning. The slippage between the double registers of the “thing as meaning something” and “the thing as pure artifice” seems to bear an uncanny relationship to Kristeva’s claim that “abjection is above all ambiguity” (9). Both camp and abjection reveal their attachments to that which they refuse, even as they expose the dangerous slippage between the subject and what threatens it. It is precisely a camp aesthetic that serves to make these scenes more palatable to diverse publics by attempting to create a greater distance between the “thing” and the “artifice.” But the slippage and ambiguity that mark both camp and abjection remain.

Even as the features of camp mark these scenes as hyperbolic representations of racialized sexuality that have the potential to undercut the symbolic state violence being depicted, the erotic potency of these videos also suggests something else at play. Part of what is exposed are the ambiguous attachments upon which both camp and abjection depend. In her eclectic list of the “canon of Camp,” which includes “Tiffany lamps, Scopitone films [and] the Cuban pop singer la Lupe,” Sontag includes “stag movies seen without lust” (277–78). Through interpellation, the canon of Sontag’s list produces and excludes an imagined audience. For example, La Lupe, for those who have been pierced by her voice and image, was and is much more than just a camp caricature of ghetto Latina hysteria. As José Quiroga declares in his lyrical homage to this Queen of Latin Soul, “the essentialist gesture implied by camp turns into a performance of something else altogether” (162). In a similar move, I argue that something more than camp is glimpsed in these over-the-top sexual scenarios. The presence of lust does not preclude a camp reading; rarely is porn viewed only as an earnest portrayal
of sexual passion. And even in the most hyperbolic and exaggerated pornographic displays, there are moments that resemble, and for some viewers might inspire, something akin to erotic delight. After all, the intent of pornography is to ripple through our nerve endings, to get us wet and hard. Sometimes it is a sound, a phrase, a single gesture that ignites fantasy; but for another viewer that same word or gesture can grate excruciatingly against the grain to spark repulsion, asco. If we can understand that there are different scopic stakes for differently situated viewers, we also have to recognize that resignification is not limitless or without its own boundaries of the imaginable. While at times, as racially abject gendered subjects we may find erotic pathways in and out of the violent systems of signification that have preceded us, we often have to grapple, sometimes painfully, with the viscosity of regulatory systems that scrape against possibilities of pleasure.

Let’s consider one final scene from BorderBangers where we might begin to see the fissures in the borders of both camp and this scene of spectacular racially gendered abjection. Once again, we have Officer Diego Santos in his tacky khaki uniform, stopping an unsuspecting subject performing a menial domestic task in her denim miniskirt and shiny white sneakers. The encounter begins with the usual ultimatum to his young feminine Latina detainee: “You can go back to your country . . . or you can stay here and we can have a little fun.” In this opening dialogue, delivered entirely in English, his use of the term “your country” works to set him apart from this Latina, who, like himself, is fluent in both languages. As the scene proceeds, the use of both Spanish and English signal different affective registers, while the actress’s cheeky attitude registers a playfully defiant response that begins to pry open alternate readings of the scene.

WOMAN: You know, you didn’t have to give me all the words to say that you want to fuck.

OFFICER DIEGO: I want to fuck.

WOMAN: Well then, you just have to ask. (Looks him over and pinches his cheek.) Estás muy guapo, papi. [You’re very handsome, daddy.]

OFFICER DIEGO: Tú también. [You too.]

WOMAN: Sí, pero don’t scare me like that! (Playfully slaps him.)

OFFICER DIEGO: Perdón, preciosa. [Sorry, precious.]
At this point, they begin to kiss passionately as they undress each other. In the sex scenes that follow he frequently asks her whether she likes it, to which she enthusiastically responds, “Me encanta” (I love it). Later he says, again in Spanish, “No te quiero mandar para atrás, quiero que te quedes aquí” (I don’t want to send you back, I want you to stay here). These brown-on-brown bilingual sexual scenarios do more than just add racialized difference to the role of border agent; they also transform the mood in unexpected ways. Here we have a border agent ruefully apologizing for scaring his captive, who has just slapped him: “Perdón, preciosa.” His desirous declaration “I want you to stay” comes close to replicating the kind of line a lover might utter: a gesture of yearning for a sustained intimacy. In essence, there are two levels of meaning for different viewers, depending on their access to Spanish. The lines in Spanish, rather than signaling violence or coercion, evoke a kind of tenderness, an intimacy that is expressed in a shared language. Later in the scene, as she is performing fellatio, he returns to a more expected line of dialogue in English, although now in a soft,
almost hushed tone. “You sure you want to stay in this country? Huh? You’ll do whatever it takes?” To which she responds in a likewise supple and gentle voice, “Lo que sea” (Whatever it takes). The dulcet quality of her response, in Spanish, transforms this scene of state violation and racially gendered abduction into one of shared tenderness and intimacy, through submission to romantic desire. In fantasy, this scene of state violation can become something else: passion, intimacy, romance, even love. Were it not for the sexual content, the narrative plot—a forbidden romance between a border agent and the woman he must track down and deport—seems to be taken from the narrative archive of mainstream telenovelas. Having violated her vulnerability, will our charming but corrupt bad boy, Officer Diego, be able to rescue the maiden from the clutches of state power that he has been entrusted to defend? Herein lies the real danger: believing the more sanitized fictions of dominance and submission tucked into the seductive hollows of romantic love. This is the Luke and Laura Latino remix, the camp of telenovelas that likewise instantiates a world of normative heterosexual fantasy.

Into the White

Having looked at scenes of extravagant racialized abduction in order to consider past attachments and the potential for different sexual futures, let’s turn back to consider the quotidian, the ordinary, the ways racially gendered abduction hides in plain sight. We will begin this final section by considering a cloaked corner of the porn archive, images so stylish, pervasive, and seemingly innocuous that we barely pay attention to how they structure our erotic desires, how they construct us as racially abject sexual subjects: commercial advertising. Rather than look for signs of Latina sexuality projected onto stage and screen, let us situate the racialized female subject as spectator and filmmaker, as the one who confronts the porn archive and makes something else of it. The artist is Dinorah de Jesús Rodríguez, the bisexual Cuban-born, Miami-based filmmaker known for her work with found footage.¹⁵ She is my sister. The same sister with whom I danced in the last chapter, returns here in a gesture of kinky queer kinship. This biographical detail about the artist (and the author) seems relevant to disclose. If personal erotic archives are a result of memory, circumstance, culture,
language, gestures, experience, and context, then my sister and I share quite a bit.

Rodríguez, who in 1964 migrated to the United States at age seven, displays a repeated fascination with the commercial images of that era. In her short film Blondes, which she describes as “a graffití remake of the classic Clairol hair dye ad from the 1960’s,” Rodríguez scratches out the eyes and teeth of the alluring white blondes who promise American dreams of teenage assimilation. In her use of found footage as her primary material, we see evidence of the artist’s intervention, not only through the collage of editing but in how the scenes and the bodies have been altered—drawn over, scratched through, or layered on top of other images. In his essay “Found Footage Film as Discursive Metahistory,” Michael Zryd connects found footage filmmaking to the critical investigation of the images that have produced us as spectators. “Whether picking through the detritus of the mass mediascape or refinding (through image processing and optical printing) the new in the familiar, the found footage artist critically investigates the history behind the image, discursively embedded within its history of production, circulation, and consumption” (42). In her commercial remakes, Rodríguez connects the larger visual history of advertising images with her own experiences as a young immigrant Latina coming of age in the United States of the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than overt racialized sexual abjection, what we see in these clips is a visual world of normative white femininity, often contrasted with tiny snippets of ethnographic film that chronicle everyday images of black and brown women in the global south. For the artist, these salvaged film strips—faded, discarded, scarred, defaced, and decaying—echo the uneven social relations between different kinds of visual bodies and their relation to distinct cinematic forms. Making race evident through the display of spectacular whiteness, Rodríguez unearths the visual mediums through which our attachments to racialized feminine sexuality have been produced and circulated.

In her short film Sex Tabú, a remake of a commercial for Vaseline Intensive Care Bath Oil Beads, Rodríguez splices together a range of images and different kinds of film stock: a home movie of wealthy white children blowing bubbles dated to the 1920s; intertitles and cartoon images from Castle Films; ethnographic footage shot in Indonesia;
hand-painted leader film; and the original footage of the commercial. Each frame in the film, which runs two minutes and thirteen seconds, has been manipulated. As the film begins, we make out hand-scratched lettering declaring, "You are the product of a sex tabú." The brief moments of dialogue taken directly from the audio of the commercial are juxtaposed with a scratched and painted image of "Princess Luciana Pignatelli" holding her book, "The Beautiful People's Beauty Book." Later another honey-blond actress holds a box of bath beads with the words "Pro" and "Sex" scratched onto the surface, against her now-stained-pink countenance. Meanwhile the sound track jumbles the sales pitch for the bath beads with the humming sound of a projector, inaudible whispering, a voice-over run in reverse, and other sources of found sound.

The use of reverse motion or sound is a repeated trope in Rodríguez's films. In Sex Tabú, not only does the soundtrack begin to move in reverse, but as the film progresses we start to see the negative of the
visual images we have seen thus far. Where before we had seen the repeated cartoon image of a white prince and princess growing and shrinking, leaning forward and pulling away to kiss, now the prince and the princess are black, as the Castle film intertitle announces, “I’ll have my revenge!” Through cinematic artistry, Rodríguez enacts her visual revenge, not only exacting vengeance on the blondes who promised access to normative femininity through consumption, but on the premise of fairytale heterosexual romance predicated on whiteness. These scenes return us to the moments of racialization as abjection with which I began this chapter. For Latinas, it is precisely our variegated proximity to whiteness and its Others that instigates the abjection that racialization instills. Our tangled feelings of desire, identification, and contempt expose our perverse attachments to the normative white femininity all around us. The final image in the film is also telling: the young white child who had previously been cheerfully blowing bubbles now bursts into tears. It seems no one is happy about forced inculcation into social norms and conventions.

In her book *The Skin of the Film*, Laura Marks articulates a theory of what she terms “haptic visuality,” a visuality that is produced “through
an appeal to non-visual knowledge, embodied knowledge and experiences of the senses" (2). Marks links “haptic visuality” to “power-inflected spaces of diaspora, (post- or neo-) colonialism, and cultural apartheid” (1). Rodriguez’s films rely on these sensory cultural codes to chronicle the project of consumptive feminization. These multiple sensory cues serve to address certain audiences marked by generation, location, and media access, in the process revealing the artist’s own viewing history. In Sex Tabú, tabu/tabú references both the idea of the illicit or forbidden and the name of a perfume by Dana that was a particular favorite of Rodriguez as a teenager. Advertising for this fragrance repeats a legend that the fragrance Tabu was created by Jean Carles for the then-Spanish company Dana, with the instruction that he create a fragrance suitable for a puta (whore). The fragrance itself is pungent, excessively musky, and more than a bit overpowering, an apt olfactory reference for Latina hypersexuality. Rodriguez’s film title, Sex Tabú, combines the Spanish word tabú with the English word “sex,” in effect returning the product to its Spanish roots, and her own bilingual experience of sexual induction. Here Rodriguez elicits not just an aromatic connection to memory, she unearths the layers of sexual and cultural commodification lurking in advertising. And while the film Sex Tabú makes no overt visual or auditory reference to the perfume, the cultural and personal significance of the fragrance forms part of the embodied sensory attachments that the film produces and exploits.

XXX

Let’s end this tour of normative feminine sexuality by moving toward the blinking red neon sign that flashes “XXX.” We are now in the Diaspora Vibe Gallery in Miami’s design district for Rodriguez’s cinematic installation of the same name. The flashing neon sign is positioned over the doorway of a closet in the farthest corner of the room, where the door has been replaced by a thick red velvet curtain, suggesting a peep show. Just as the triple-X neon sign serves as an unmistakable marker of the pornographic, the peep show oozes sexual connotations. Even within the space of a theater or strip club, peep shows work to construct the illusion of private viewing practices in public places. Like their early predecessors, modern peep shows are less invested in narrative plot
than in the spectacle that images afford. In the more sanitized space of a
gallery, the viewing space brings the images into close physical proxim-
ity with a singular viewer, as a curtain encircles the spectator and the
image, creating the effect of a private practice of sexual spectatorship. A
sign is posted beside the entry advising the audience that the work con-
tains graphic sexuality and that viewer discretion is advised. We pull
back the curtain to face a screen, which is already displaying its wares.
As the curtain encloses us, we try to adjust to the darkness, the scent
left behind by the exhibit’s previous occupant, the stifling stickiness that
is the Miami heat. The walls are covered in brown paper, and there are
three sets of latex gloves tacked to the wall on your right. The three latex
gloves make material the “haptic visuality” that Marks describes. They
confirm that this is about getting dirty, about being contaminated with
bodily fluids—metaphoric and otherwise. Curiously, there are latex
gloves here, not condoms, suggesting that the sex here is about touching
the body of the Other with hands and fingers, rather than with a pen-
etrating penis. Gloves might suggest a female viewer, whose dirty desire
to touch—those on the film, and perhaps herself—can be coded as a
lesbian desire. Once the visitor is inside, a triptych of moving images
chronicle a collage of sexual gestures.

On three separate screens projected onto a single black-framed
background, snippets of scenes from commercials, television, cinema
classics, and vintage porn roll past. In his essay, Zryd distinguishes
between archival footage and its outtakes, including advertising, edu-
cational films, and industrial films. It is precisely this distinction that
Rodriguez is invested in unsettling in XXX. Instead, she presses the
official archives of cinema—those films deemed worthy of historical
preservation—against those that might be deemed more ephemeral:
advertising, B-movies, ethnographic films, home movies, and pornog-
raphy itself.18 Many of the images displayed are familiar in ways that
are hidden just behind language, familiar even when they are not. The
collection of cinematic moments that Rodriguez chronicles in XXX
reflects an artistic process that Marks describes as “holding on to arti-
facts of culture, including photographic and filmic images, in order to
coax the memories from them” (Skin 5). The film mixes iconic images—
such as the opening sequence of an early James Bond movie and a clip
from the 1920 silent classic The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari—with snippets
Figure 4.7. In Rodríguez’s Diaspora Vibe Gallery installation, a door with a velvet curtain is marked with a flashing neon sign reading “XXX.” Image courtesy of the artist.

from commercials—the Marlboro Man lighting a cigarette out on the plain, or a Clairol commercial that asks whether “blondes really do have more fun.” It interlaces fragments from 1930s–1950s stag films with 1950s–1970s pornography to create a visual plethora of sexual scenes that span all of these eras and visual genres. In juxtaposing images from Hollywood with the cinematic scraps of its excess, Rodríguez draws connections across these different registers of the porn archive, pointing to the “chain of effects” Ahmed describes as adhering to social bodies. In XXX the result is an investigation of the visual iconography that has hailed us as racialized sexual subjects.

Like the rhetorical tropes that Roland Barthes delineates in A Lover’s Discourse, where the scripts of desire are broken down into repeated figures of speech, what we see on the screen is a catalog of gesture, gestures layered with the traces of previous somatic
encounters. Here the iterative gestures of normative heterosexuality are performed and repeated in a myriad of ways. There is the heterosexual embrace, full of passion and promise; the woman held weeping, desperate and clinging, in an older man’s arms; the Latin lover planting kisses up the outstretched arm of the aloof blonde aristocrat; and the requisite silhouette of two lovers moving toward each other against the background of a melting orange sunset. Included in the collage of recycled movie scenes are several different snippets of vintage porn, in which women re-create over and again the reveal of the female form, as they open their blouses, spread their legs, and lift tight sweaters over their heads. Some of the repeated gestures are quite precise: hands cradle breasts and press them together; palms slide against milk-white thighs as legs and vulvas are spread open; twenty-something girlish heads with bobbed hair turn from side to side, eyes closed in silent expressions of sexual ecstasy. This is “haptic visuality,” cinema as affective sensory experience. Sometimes these women smile, strip, and pose in solitary connection with the viewer, and other times they stick out their tongues in showy displays as they perform fellatio, cunnilingus, or lesbian kisses. What this catalog of gestures exposes are the ways that normative racialized gender is continually being produced and perpetuated through kinetic iteration, a repetition that occurs not only on the level of discourse, but through corporeal citation. Rather than any single defining iconic image, what the film exposes are gestures that, when articulated out of context, are capable of making gender and sexuality seen, and also
sensed through nonvisual forms of knowledge production. Agamben argues that "what characterizes gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported" (*Means* 57). What are being "endured and supported" through these gestures of normative gendered sexuality are the very tropes that allow gender to communicate itself to us.

In the film, as in most popular culture, women's bodies are everywhere exhibited for our pleasure. In the center screen, we frequently encounter an image of a woman spreading her legs, giving us a "pussy shot." But frequently this vulva gushes scratched and hand-colored images of hearts, dollar signs, and flowers, the marks of the artist's intervention. Here, the installation's viewing apparatus, being enclosed in a closet, positions the spectator's face against this opening and closing of the vagina that appears about a foot away. As it works to create an unavoidable proximity to the sexual themes of the installation, it also creates an intimacy with the technology of the cinematic apparatus by revealing the fiction of motion that a frame-by-frame engagement of film exposes. As in other work by Rodríguez, the aesthetic underpinnings are formed through her engagement with the material possibilities of the medium, what she terms "the inextricable mechanical desires of the film itself: the technology, with its physical and electronic preferences, idiosyncrasies, limitations" (Rodríguez, email). But what we are facing in the installation XXX, however, is not actually film, but a digital imprint of film's trace, the inner workings of celluloid captured on the video screen. And very likely future viewers of Rodríguez's found footage films will

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*Figure 4.9. Scenes from Rodríguez's film XXX are projected on three screens. Image courtesy of the artist.*
be accessing them via a computer screen through Rodríguez’s website or on YouTube, once again transforming the viewing medium. Here the artist, the viewer, the critic, and the materiality of the visual mediums presented—installation, film, video, and digital—coexist as competing and copulating desiring subjects, each exerting their own form of interpretive power.

Once again, in this collage of found footage we see an absence of women of color from the official archives of sexual pleasure, love, and romance. There is only one black female in the film, and she seems delightfully uninterested in performing sexually for an audience. Although she appears to be topless, we never see her breasts. Instead, she jumps across the three different frames, dancing in a manner that simultaneously suggests both anthropological field footage and the 1960s dance craze “the jerk.” If there is a specific yearning to see the sexual performance of naked black femininity, it is a desire that the filmmaker denies. But even if this is the only overtly marked racialized image in the film, narratives of sexualized racialization are hiding everywhere. Gestures of racialization are glimpsed in the wild hair and savage gaze of the title character in Swamp Woman, the foreign intrigue of the swarthy Latin lover, and the nonchalance of a carefree brunette frolicking naked in nature. Race is also present in the perfectly coiffed restraint of a blonde beehive and the cheerful youth of bright white heterosexual courtship. But most of the images presented in XXX fall into neither category, casting instead a screen of ambiguous ethnic whiteness, a femininity taken out of historic and geographic context. Moreover, given the ways that excessive, shameless—indeed, pornographic—sexuality gets attached to racialized bodies, the numerous women in the film who dare to openly delight in exhibiting their sexuality could potentially be read as racialized subjects in productive, but also problematic, ways.

Just as queers routinely project themselves into the narratives of heterosexuality, this absence of defined racial cinematic objects allows the spectator of color to take up multiple roles in the dynamics of power that structure viewing practices. In Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media, Laura Marks looks to the power relations afforded by S/M to rework the supposed phallocentrism of the gaze, “to think of cinematic looking as one that permits pleasures of domination and
submission, as well as playing with identity” (76). In XXX Latinas emerge as possibilities for fantasies of desire, identification, and misidentification, rather than as particular characters. She could be the sultry and sinister brunette dressed in red satin, positioned against the wholesome blonde heroine; she could be the foreign woman of mystery who speaks with an accent and smokes cigarettes. Whiteness in all its visual ambiguity functions in these films as the unmarked category of idealized feminine sexuality that shimmers in the dark. Rather than attempt to locate herself against the spectacle of arresting racialization that we witnessed in the previous texts, here, the Latina viewer is invited to dwell in the anonymity and distance that cinematic ethnic ambiguity affords. She might read in the hair, eyes, skin tone, or gestures of the actresses presented a glimpse of her own racialized Latina body, or conversely indulge in taking in the phenotypic qualities she has been conditioned to envy and desire. Thought this way, the racialized feminine viewer can choose to align herself with the feminine objects on display and find joy in her submission to the probing gaze of the Other or position herself as a spectatorial top and greedily consume the visual erotic display offered. Yet, even as ambiguous whiteness might provide avenues of pleasure for some viewers, for others the spectacular alignment of whiteness, even ambiguous ethnic whiteness, with beauty, romance, and desire might only instantiate resentment and rage. Always the images function as complicated triggers for the attachments, identifications, and desires that must be reconciled with our own corporeal embodiments and erotic investments.

“Trust in Me”

Hand-scratched letters, washed in color, cryptically reveal the related titles of the three individual film reels that constitute XXX: “Is Sex Safe?” “Cyberputa,” and “How Come You Don’t Trust Me?”—this last phrase being a reference to the soundtrack that accompanies the film. And in the contained closet space of viewing, the effect of the aural is particularly penetrative. A half-beat before the musical accompaniment, a feminine voice—deep and silky-smooth—breaks in, Etta James singing “Trust in Me.” The steady swish of a snare drum and the staccato beats of a piano set the mood several stanzas before a chorus of
strings washes over the entire scene. Just as the naked body of the sole black dancing body remains offscreen, the unseen, racially tinged voice of Etta James exists outside the visual field, in the dark unseen place where the viewer also resides.

Trust in me in all you do
Have the faith I have in you
Love will see us through
If only you trust in me.

In the context of this installation, James’s request to “trust in me” functions as the hail of romantic love. The promise is that “love will see us through” if only we could trust its power. Love, however, requires absolute devotion, complete unwavering submission, perhaps not to any single individual lover, but to the promise of love itself. “Come on, daddy,” love seems to beg her listener, “trust in me and I’ll be worthy of you.” But the images in XXX suggest the many ways that love isn’t always worthy. In one scene, in mod psychedelic 1960s wear, a hipster in pencil-leg pants drags a young Sandra Dee by her blonde beehive. In another scene, Hollywood’s infamous “lost woman,” Joanne Woodward, is slapped in the face and falls on the floor, only to be rewound several minutes later as the same loop of film now moves backwards. In these moments, the allure of normative white femininity does not seem to offer protection from the drama of intimate violence. Quite the contrary, here violence serves, like the sunset, as part of the narrative backdrop against which sex, love, desire, and romantic despair are played, a necessary component (or consequence) of normative heterosexual passion. The dagger, the gunshot in the night of film noir, the image of the woman grabbed from behind as she struggles in vain to escape the clutches of the evil villain, catfights with dark-haired women pulling at each others’ thick manes all serve to reinforce the question “Is Sex Safe?” As the images move from one panel to the next across the three screens, the structure of the cinematic triptych visually performs the simultaneity of violence, desire, and romance that constitute the blurred boundaries of sexual signification. Once again, we see the erotics of domination and submission hidden in plain sight under the guise of love and romance.
Curiously, the title “Cyberputa,” a seemingly anachronistic reference to contemporary online sexual practices, actually works to create a connection between the virtual worlds of contemporary pornography such as BorderBangers and the ephemeral traces of the bodies caught on celluloid in XXX. In his essay “Digesture: Gesture and Inscription in Experimental Cinema,” Akira Lippit uses the term “digesture” to mark the existence of two bodies in cinema. “Despite the simultaneous presence of two bodies in cinema,” he concludes, “one in the physical world, the other on film, the body in film is also a lost body, in some fundamental way, there only as a trace. An irrecoverable sense of loss . . . is at the heart of filmic representation: Cinema is an apparatus that generates lost bodies” (114). While the visual qualities of Rodríguez's piece highlight the materiality of celluloid, which, like the human body, ages, suffers scars, and can be transformed by paint and makeup, her work also evokes the ephemeral trace that lingers once the body has disappeared. Indeed, it is difficult to see the banquet of youthful female sexuality in XXX and not think about how the buoyant bodies flickering on the screen have also aged, withered, and died. Film depicts the fragile materiality of sexual embodiment, the bodies and feelings that are no longer with us, even as we endure the impression of those lingering desires that live in fantasy. The suspended youth in front of our eyes reminds us that the same fate awaits our own corporeal vessels, that the strain of embodied living has its end.

Sexual Fantasies, the Remix

For those who feel threatened by the sexual opportunities available in public venues, the space of fantasy fueled by telenovelas, soap operas, books, television, film, and online viewing practices becomes a site for both private and shared sexual exploration. Nevertheless, even these more private encounters with the porn archive seep into and through the spaces of the public. Even as our fantasies might reveal an uneasy intimacy with erotic narratives organized around the coercive deployment of power, we must also recognize how fantasies of domestic bliss are likewise predicated on multiple forms of corrosive power—the exploitative labor of others that makes domesticity possible, the unequal power relations within the home, the normativizing privilege
that is denied those who refuse to participate in the valorization of coupledom, and the very forms of hegemonic romance that make rape appear as the genesis of marriage. Whether in the theater where Ibarra performs for her “knowing audience,” in the domestic spaces that online pornography calls home, or in the gallery where we are invited to encounter the archives of sex and romance, the fantasies these scenes generate reveal our complicated attachments to prior gendered narratives of racialized power that circulate all around us. These sexual fantasies work by animating a preexisting constellation of images, gestures, words, and memories unique to each person, to a particular moment, and to a specific set of circumstances. They reach back, even as they pull us forward, to remind us of gestures of shame and abjection; they bear witness to the extravagant and quotidian ways that our racially gendered embodiments have survived the hail of spic slut, grateful servant, puta, slave, wife.

These fantasies live in our image repertoire; over time (or in an instant), they start to form part of the narratives we take to bed or screen or club or altar. Fantasy exceeds the limits of the possible and the present, and very often even the desirable. In this way, fantasy reveals the lack of correspondence between what we might like to actually do with our bodies sexually and what we might be conjuring in our mind’s eye while we are actually doing it. In our sexual fantasies, we can occupy an imaginary time and space of our own creation, devise our own tactile, visual, and auditory codes, assign new queer meanings to gestures and utterances that have preceded our entrance onto the sexual stages we inhabit. In fantasy we can rewrite scripts of sexualized objectification, subjection, and racialized violence. We can name our bodies and their parts anything we want, in all the languages that we speak—thick brown cocks and tight little pussies are available to anyone who wants them, without need for state licensing agencies. In our fantasies and in our sexual play we can make familial shame sexy and state discipline erotic. In fantasy, being stopped at the border, strip-searched, and forced to kneel at the altar of militarized masculinity can seem just the right antidote after a long day butching it up in front of yet another academic committee that wants to make difference disappear. Despite our best intentions, however, resignification is not always possible. The world outside fantasy pushes back to assert its penetrating power on
our psychic lives, reminding us of the sticky substances that cling to our intimate sexual practices.

Some feminists and queers (but certainly not all or even most) may seem quite accustomed to speaking aloud erotic scenes that start with “No! No! Stop!” and end with sweet surrender, or playfully ask and answer calls of “Who’s your daddy?” And somewhere inside, we know that these seemingly innocent, lighthearted utterances are implicated in cultural narratives of rape and incest, narratives we have tried to domesticate and make benign through the language of intimate play. But the inclusion of racial tropes further complicates the jouissance of sexual fantasy. Even as we insist that “daddy play” does not condone, engender, or map easily onto the daily violations of actual accounts of coercive incestuous relations, playing with the Border Patrol can generate another sort of visceral repulsion in the face of the lived cruelties and abuses that also happen every day. For those who write in a world where being stopped, searched, detained, and violated for daring to occupy the public space as a nonwhite subject has become a legally authorized reality, the admission of such a sexual fantasy seems particularly dangerous. But the response to such an admission cannot be censure, reeducation, or discipline, which would only shift our outrage from the scenes of material corporeal violence—state violence and sexual abuse at the border, the racially gendered economic injustice that structures every sector of society, the everyday psychic harms caused by an onslaught of visual representation in which we must purchase our way into self-worth and love—onto those of us who dare to reach for slivers of pleasures in the toxic haze that surrounds us.

The disparate objects I have pressed together in this chapter have each performed their own remix of sexual power, politics, art, and pornography. And now you are invited to keep twisting the pieces, to reengineer the elements in order to arrive at different interpretive possibilities, to ask yourself about the fantasies and fears they have generated. As readers and writers, we might begin to consider other questions of one another. How do our gendered identifications and preferences, our racialized erotic attachments, our distance from the glow of fresh-faced youth or from the protocols of the U.S.-Mexico border inform our viewing (and reading) practices? Do we see ourselves in the Mexican marionette, in the border guard, or in the discomfort of the audience
taking in the show? How might we wish to position ourselves in relation to Officer Diego's boyish charms? Are we the ones posing for the camera in XXX, the ones invited to fondle the bounty of youthful offerings, or the hacker scratching into the frames of signification? What are our own limits of resignification and interpretation, and how have they been produced, stretched, or entrenched in the readings I have presented? Throughout this chapter I have asked, how do we begin to make sense of our politically incorrect erotic fantasies and the ways power itself becomes eroticized? I have tried to respond, not with explication, but with a self-reflective encounter that probes how our proximity to histories of violence and yearning, to those lost bodies that have left their viscous traces on our own erotic desires, have shaped us as sexual beings. The psychic stagings of power I have rehearsed here are not inherently subversive, and they never serve as remedies for injustice. But perhaps for racially gendered subjects they perform an encounter with the sexual abjection that defines us, and as a perverse act of revenge, they allow opportunities for unforeseen bursts of pleasures in a world in which our pleasure was never imagined.
And now we find ourselves at the end of the book, in the afterglow of our sexual encounter together. And like a lover ready to depart, I ask, Was I careful? Was I kind? Did I move you to find another sliver of yourself in my awkward attempts at haptic textuality? In these pages, I have tried to theorize the work of queer sociality through the erotic, to forge a bond between political projects of social transformation and the urgency of imaging other sexual futures. Using gesture as the verb that punctuates the ongoing, partial, and incomplete nature of our political work together, I have tried to accent divergent forms of action in disparate projects, taking up kinship recognition, anticolonial interventions, the local intimacies of dance floors and bedrooms, and the erotic circuits of visual production. I have pointed to how the disciplinary functions of laws and regulations can serve as avenues for creative self-expression, and how seemingly individual desires and gestures carry the traces of history and social conventions. In my effort to connect intimate corporeal movements to larger social dynamics, I have argued for the importance of sex, not as an individual thrill but as a social world-making practice with implications in popular discourse, law, public policy, cultural production, and interpersonal configurations of care. In their propensity to leave us disappointed, frustrated, and wanting more, sex and politics have been revealed as risk-filled encounters that splay open our most urgent desires even as they fill us with promises of
communion and transformation. Along the way, I have tried to model an inhabitation of the body as a resource for understanding the cultural gestures we have inherited, using gesture as another way to think about how the incarnate particularities of sexual desires, physical embodiments, diverse forms of racializations, and all manner of gender move in this world. These aspirations have all been elaborated around the complex constellation of corporeal alignment and cultural affiliation I have named Latina femme. And crawling along the jagged edges of the ephemeral and the illegitimate, perhaps you have also glimpsed something else, something we might call spirit, rustling unseen in a cool blue haze behind the black marks of text.

This inhabitation of Latina femme aspires to conjure a pedagogy of vulnerability and access. It is a practice of opening for another, spreading wide in the service of fuller social relations of recognition and care, taking in the heartache and hope and being willing to carry the load. It is not about the explication of desire but about a willingness to sit with the enchantment and funk of our own contradictions. Trinh Minh-ha states it simply: “Life is not explicable when it is lived intensely, with magical freshness” (112). Situating an aging queer woman of color at the center of a theory of sexual politics necessitates taking the material and psychic vulnerability of our lives seriously. As racialized and feminized sexual subjects, we live in such close proximity to spectacular violence, quotidian violations, and a million minute forms of everyday harm that occupying the space of sexual imagination constitutes a particularly perilous emotional terrain. That we might consider our pleasure both important and possible constitutes a refusal of all that has been used to define us as damaged and unworthy, perverse and undesirable. Time and again in this text, I have returned to fantasy, as that impalpable possibility capable of holding all of the contradictions and hurt that crash together in the interface between the psychic and the social, the glitter that glints off the dirty surfaces of our lives. Fantasy has functioned as a way to make (non)sense of the social worlds that we occupy, a place to confront the racially gendered scripts that have been used to define us, and make something else of them. Perhaps you have been repulsed, unmoved, or simply bored by the sexual narratives I have recounted over the course of this book. No doubt, you have a wholly divergent repertoire of erotic associations that you draw upon to activate your
libidinal energies. But we cannot allow our own or others’ discomfort with the complicated counters of our psychic sexual lives to serve as an excuse for individual or community censorship. To deny our fantasies because they are too twisted, too painful, or too perverse, to erase their presence or censor their articulation in public life, constitutes a particular kind of insidious violence that threatens to undermine our ability to explore the contours of our psychic lives and the imaginary possibilities of the social worlds in which we exist. Let us instead acknowledge that sexual play, regardless of the race, gender, or embodiment of the participants, is formed in the circuits of power that revolve around pleasure, and in the meanings and attachments that adhere to bodies, cultural narratives, and corporeal gestures. Sex is always implicated in shifting (im)possibilities of consent and coercion. How we trigger these narratives, or ignore them, becomes part of what is recognized as having sexual and social meaning. How extravagant and quotidian forms of coercive power and sex have been bound together functions as the constitutive outside to sanitized fantasies of romantic sexual unions, becoming the dirty psychic debris that the politics of respectability demand that we expel. It is this intent to not cast aside these dirty desires, but instead stare them down that I have tried to activate throughout this book; a perverse longing to capture, rupture, traverse, disrupt, inhabit, or survive the powers of abjection.

For those of us marked as both shamelessly excessive and wholly deficient, understanding what has become our place in the world is a maddening, soul-crushing journey. And while we do well to shout back skillfully crafted retorts to artfully contest the confines used to discipline us, what might it mean to also embrace the irrational, those inchoate spaces where desire also spins its web? What if we allow ourselves to crumble into a fleshy funk of wet tears, to answer the hail of madness, to dwell in the spaces of unreason to which we have been assigned? Because so often we feel vulnerable, exposed as deviant and desireous, exiled into the spaces outside logic and rationality, we look to each other for what the disability activist Mia Mingus terms access intimacy, “that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets’ your access needs” and reaches out to “hold the weight, emotion, logistics, isolation, trauma, fear, anxiety and pain of access.” It is an intimacy that is born from the touch of recognition, the succor of
social bonds. Asking another to hold the weight of the emotions nestled in our gestures, returns us to something we might call the eros of friendship. The eros of friendship is that which lifts us from the puddle of spent tears to drag us out to the rally, to the sex club, to the dance floor, to the streets, it is the generous gesture that ignites possibilities for another day. In the interstices between the psychic space of sexual fantasy and the cruelty of the material world, the eros of friendship produces a shared encounter capable of holding the weighty contradictions of our affective burdens and corporeal needs. It is about sharing the sensuality of sustenance, the comfort of familiar couches, and the passions of each other’s political investments. It is about dreaming another vision together. Friendship enacts geographies of care that exceed the routes our own bodies may have traveled. Capable of lasting a lifetime or defined in a single moment, the corporeal intimacy of friendship blurs the lines used to separate the romantic, the sexual, and the social. Formed through gestures of mutual care—the embrace that releases tears—the eros of friendship exceeds the need for rationality or explication. Friendship makes us better than we are by calling on us to care for each other. Mel Chen crystallizes the question that hovers above friendship as a way of life: “Which bodies can bear the fiction of independence and of uninterruptability?” (274). And if we acknowledge this urgency of mutual lives, how might we begin to shape a gender-expansive, color-inflected, multiply embodied sexual politics that is not afraid to stare down the abjection of racialization, the erotics of kinship, the hierarchies of global cruelties, the intimate violence of romance, the relentless demands of gender, the pain-filled limitations of our corporeal shells, the arduous, never-ending labor demanded by social belonging? If we insist on a sexual politics that is grounded in the funk of our corporeal forms, our proximity to harm, and the resilience of our capacity for kinky pleasures, then it seems fitting to mark this book’s end with a return to the bonds of friendship, affection, and affiliation forged in the porn archive, in the hopes that together we might spark new sexual futures.

In the porn archive there are underpaid sex workers smiling for the camera, postmenopausal femmes on antidepressants, fierce transwomen academics on the endless adjunct track, polyamorous soccer moms scoring digits and cocaine on the playground, and melancholic
border boys weeping to Morrissey. There are homeless women who once had sparkling clean kitchens and now sleep cuddled with their cats. There are undocumented Mexican gardeners screwing Filipina nannies in their employers’ beds. There are prisoners flirting with their guards in the hope of another few minutes of sunshine. There are teenage immigrant girls with pink hair on hormone highs and aging Puerto Rican porn stars with sagging tattoos. There are thirty-something bisexual blondes with big tits, multiple sclerosis, and wheelchairs tricked out with sex toys; there are white-haired black butches jacking off in nursing homes where foreign workers sniff their sheets. Our sexual politics need to begin here, in the grip between public policies that touch the soiled surfaces of our lives and utopian longings that pull us toward other sexual futures. Despite our best intentions, we know that nothing will ever be enough to remedy the harms we also hold. So let us be tender with one another, let us foster a spirit of vulnerability that cultivates the willingness to risk imagining otherwise, that values the resilience needed to share the burden of our collective longings. This is the amorous gift, a gesture of friendship, a dedication of care that endures.
INTRODUCTION

1. In the highly gendered space of Spanish, the arroba or “at” sign is a way to mark where one is “at” in terms of gender, an intervention into the binaries of language evidenced in usage of a slash, as in Latinos/as. For a more detailed discussion of this term, see Rodríguez, Queer Latinidad (29). In this text I use “Latin@” or “Latin@s” to reference people and populations, and “Latino” or “Latina” as a modifying adjective.

2. This fascinating book indexes not just the cultural specificity and expressiveness of gesture, but of language itself. It includes entries for cábalas, corto mano, hastío, and fakirú.

3. I want to be careful to distinguish my use of the term “gesture” from the complex grammar, vocabulary, and syntax of nonverbal communication systems such as American Sign Language (ASL). ASL and other forms of sign language are much more precise, intentional, and standardized than what I am referring to as “gesture.” However, people who sign, like all other users of language, routinely augment the protocols of ASL through corporeal expressiveness, adding their own unique physical qualities and style.

4. See Anastasia's Kayiatos's delightfully rich essay about the deaf Theater of Mimesis and Gesture in Moscow, which mines the intersections of queer sexuality, Soviet socialism, silence, and gesture.

5. In The Archive and the Repertoire, Diana Taylor makes a distinction between the official archive and the ephemeral repertoire of cultural performances and practices. She goes further to stress the importance of the repertoire, particularly in a Latin American context. While my own work is indebted to her astute insights, my use of the term “archive” is more aligned with Ann Cvetkovich's use of the term as outlined in Archive of Feelings, where “archive” encompasses the illegitimate, the ephemeral, the remembered sense of the past. See also Derrida's Archive Fever, a meditation on Freud that encounters the archive both as material residue and as trace.

6. This insight is drawn from Judith Butler, who distinguishes her own thinking from Michel Foucault's in arguing that gender is not just subject to regulatory power; rather, “gender requires and institutes its own distinctive regulatory and disciplinary regime” (41).
7. An everyday implication of Noland's reference to technological standardization is Siri, the iPhone's virtual assistant. Siri seems completely unable to process accents, including the nonstandardized American accents of diverse native English speakers.

8. This is, of course, a reference to Foucault's essay "Friendship as a Way of Life."

9. As a teacher, I am particularly invested in teaching students to move beyond critique alone, understanding that it is much riskier to propose strategies, alternatives, and actions than simply to analyze or critique what has come before.


11. Several journals have chronicled these debates. For example, see "PMLA Forum Debates," PMLA 121.3 (2006); "Queer Temporalities," GLQ 13.2–3 (2007); and "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" Social Text 85–86 (2005). The question of the place of sex in contemporary articulations of queer theory was productively engaged in "After Sex? On Writing since Queer Theory," ed. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, special issue, South Atlantic Quarterly 106 (2007).

12. Although this essay takes issue with Bersani's articulation of sociality, in the service of more generative and generous queer bonds, it bears noting my indebtedness to his work. His seminal 1987 essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?" opened up the legitimacy and urgency of theorizing the dynamics of embodied sexual practices. The historical situatedness of that work, amidst the crisis and grief of the AIDS pandemic and the subsequent pressure within some elements of the gay community to conform to normative sexual models, seems particularly noteworthy, and places that piece within the political landscape of Rubin's 1984 essay "Thinking Sex." For an alternate and much more detailed reading of the possibilities of sociality offered by Bersani, see Tim Dean, "The Antisocial Homosexual." Dean, the most incisive reader of the larger trajectory of Bersani's work, argues that in Bersani, "self-shattering" is but a necessary precursor to the production of new forms of sociality.

13. Nayan Shah's research on "early-twentieth-century sodomy court cases in the western United States and Canada shows that sexual identity is not the determining factor in prosecuting sodomy, but, rather, differentials of class, age, and race shape the policing that leads to sodomy and public morals arrests" (277).

14. This echoes Cindy Patton's articulation of how care became institutionalized in AIDS work through a discourse of "victims, volunteers and experts" (3). For a more sustained theorization of how disability studies informs sex and sexuality,
and its intersections with other vectors of analysis, see the special double issue of GLQ 9.1-2 (2003), “Desiring Disability: Queer Theory Meets Disability Studies,” the introduction of which is cited above. In that essay, McRuer and Wilkerson also explore representations of men with diverse disabilities in Samuel Delany’s accounts of the queer public sexual cultures of New York. See also the special issue of NWSA Journal (14) 2002, “Feminist Disability Studies,” edited by Kim Hall, specifically Abby Wilkerson’s “Disability, Sex Radicalism, and Political Agency.” Robert McRuer’s cultural readings of disability in Crip Theory remain a vital intervention in queer studies. For a consideration of asexuality in disability narratives, see Eunjung Kim, “Asexuality in Disability Narratives.” For a discussion of the disability devotee community, see Aguilera, and for a humorous take on queer sexuality and disability, see Wallach’s Fuck the Disabled.

15. Not surprisingly, transwomen and women of color seem overrepresented in accounts of violence against street prostitutes. It is also important to note that many others who are defined outside cis-male norms have bravely entered, or stealthily crept into, the available male domains of public sexual exploration and have found pleasure there. And others have gone further to create alternative underground sexual spaces where our bodies are marked as legible subjects of sexual play.

16. The insights of Eunjung Kim, one of the few scholars to take up questions of asexuality, prove particularly instructive on this point. Kim follows Foucault’s shift from an analysis of “sex-desire” to a consideration of “bodies and pleasures” to “reinterpret asexuality not as pathological deviance, faulty perception, or a product of oppression but as a source of different lives, pleasures, knowledge, and embodiments” (484). I am personally indebted to the many conversations on the subject of asexuality that I have shared with Ianna Owen, a graduate student in African Diaspora Studies at University of California–Berkeley.

17. Scholars who have shaped my thinking and understanding of affect include Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Teresa Brennan, Ann Cvetkovich, David Eng, Elizabeth Freeman, Heather Love, José Esteban Muñoz, Sianne Ngai, Eve Sedgwick, and Rei Terada. These various authors, only some of whom are cited in this text, have examined the particularities of these terms in various ways. In Ugly Feelings, Ngai provides a concise literature review that traces debates about the distinctions between emotion and affect; in Feeling in Theory, Terada deploys a post-structuralist reading of philosophy as a scholarly trajectory to articulate her use of the term “emotion”; in Feeling Backward, Love considers the politics of affect; and in The Transmission of Affect, Brennan examines psychogenic phenomena to chart a quite different genealogy for the term “affect.” It is also important to note that women of color in the 1980s were also insisting on the theoretical relevance of engaging feeling and emotion. See, for example, the collection of essays in Audre Lorde’s Sister Outsider, or Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga’s courageous essay “What We’re Rollin around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism.”
18. See her blog, *marginadas*, for other examples of her work.

19. Weiss's important work *Techniques of Pleasure* challenges formulations that would mark BDSM as inherently transgressive by focusing on the material relations of power and consumption in a predominately white and middle-class BDSM community consisting mostly, but not exclusively, of participants who define themselves as heterosexual or pansexual. Weiss takes up questions of race quite centrally in her text, particularly in the last chapter, stressing the ways that real-world social formations inform the racial dynamics of the BDSM communities she studies. Her analysis includes a sustained and very smart discussion of the overwhelming whiteness of these communities. In contrast, I am interested less in how actual BDSM communities reflect material relations of power than in how the sexual practices associated with BDSM inform a much wider range of social and psychic relationships of power, particularly for women of color, including those who have no affiliation to larger public communities of practice. See also emerging ethnographic work on queer dyke BDSM communities by Corie J. Hammers. For theoretical investigations that specifically take up the intersection of feminine gender and dominance and submission, see Lynda Hart's *Between the Body and the Flesh*, and Karmen MacKendrick's *Counterpleasures*. For a more personal and wholly compelling consideration of how sexuality functions in these spaces, see Susan Stryker's lyrical piece, "Dungeon Intimacies." Gayle Rubin's piece "The Catacombs" remains a central touchstone on the history of S/M practices in San Francisco.

20. In one study, the demographer Gary Gates of the Williams Institute at UCLA places the number of people who identify as bisexuals as either equal to or slightly higher than those who identify as lesbian or gay. And for women, the numbers who identify as bisexual are considerably higher than those who identify as lesbian. His study generated considerable controversy: rather than using these statistics to have a more nuanced conversation about the significance of bisexuality, the mainstream media used these data to minimize the number of "gays" by ignoring bisexuals, and the LGBT press followed suit by ignoring the political implications of a previously undercounted, underrecognized, and underserved segment of the LGBT population. See Gates; see also BiNet USA for wide-ranging resources and news pertaining to bisexuality. I am indebted to Faith Cheltenham, vice-president of BiNet, for the many generative discussions on bisexuality she initiated and inspired.

**CHAPTER I: WHO'S YOUR DADDY?**

1. Queer Pride is part of a larger narrative that situates the Stonewall uprising and, by implication, U.S.-based public manifestations of resistance as the origin of global queer activism, refusing to recognize other forms of queer expression and resistance. The most incisive critique of visibility politics remains Manalansan's influential piece "In the Shadows of Stonewall." On visibility in relation to Pride parades outside the United States, see Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire*.
photography by Del LaGrace Volcano with commentary and interviews by Ulrika Dahl, see Dahl and Volcano, *Femmes of Power*. For an insightful scholarly treatment of the visual trope of the black femme in film, see Kara Keeling's book *The Witch's Flight*.

37. For an auto-ethnographic discussion of sexual play in the leather subculture of leatherdyke boys and their daddies, see C. Jacob Hale's "Leatherdyke Boys and Their Daddies: How to Have Sex without Women or Men." In this essay, Hale describes what can happen in moments of sexual misrecognition or performative miscommunication, and how these moments can interrupt or transform the sexual exchange: "[I]n fact, there were times when I blew it, when what I said or did was way off the boy mark; some times these were painful moments, other times they were pleasantly amusing, and some other times they shifted our interaction into one between two adult butches" (229). Hale describes these scenes as "a culture of two." However, the two of any scene bring with them their own understandings of gender and sexual performance that are steeped in specific ethnic, racial, historical, and cultural logics.

CHAPTER 4: LATINA SEXUAL FANTASIES, THE REMIX

1. For other racialized considerations of abjection, see Karen Shimakawa's *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*, in which she argues that "Asian Americanness functions as abject in relation to Americanness" (3).

While Latin@s might be said to function in similar ways discursively, the racial illegibility of Latin@ bodies, which can be read as black, white, Asian, Native American, or some combination thereof, presses more acutely along the tensions between discursive and embodied considerations of race and ethnicity.

2. In Spanish, the reflexive verb *ubicarse* signals this conscious act of reading a social context and situating oneself within it.

3. Like the female masochist, "woman" has been excluded from an analysis of fetish under the terms of Freudian psychoanalysis. In his 1927 essay "Fetishism," Freud links fetishism to male castration anxiety, thus making the possibility of a female fetishist unimaginable.

4. For a fascinating discussion of sexual knowledge, technology, and children, see Ellis Hanson, "The Child as Pornographer."

5. *Dragnet* ran first as a radio show starting in 1949, and had several incarnations in television and film in the 1950s and 1960s.


7. This line recalls the "America" scene and song from *West Side Story*, with the recurring line "I like to be in America." See Negrón-Muntaner's dynamic reading of this iconic play.

8. The ACLU’s website features several arresting, heart-wrenching oral histories of these courageous women (ACLU, "Sexual Abuse in Immigration Detention").
For academic accounts, see Eithne Luibhéid’s chapter, “Rape, Asylum, and the U.S. Border Patrol” in *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*.


10. Miller-Young’s work is particularly exciting because her astute theoretical insights are supported by significant historical context, including extensive interviews with a wide variety of African American porn stars past and present. On race and pornography, see Jennifer Nash’s thoughtful contribution, “Strange Bedfellows: Black Feminism and Antipornography Feminism.” In that essay, Nash cautions that “merely affirming pornography’s alleged racism neglects an examination of the ways that pornography mobilizes race in particular social moments, under particular technological conditions, to produce a historically contingent set of racialized meanings and profits” (53). See also Celine Parreñas Shimizu’s book *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* for a suggestive consideration of the representation of Asian American women in porn.

11. See specifically the autobiography of Vanessa del Rio, as told to Dian Hanson; del Rio is an Afro-Latina (Cuban and Puerto Rican) porn star extraordinaire who rose to become a pop-culture icon. In describing her early years in the industry dealing with sexualized stereotypes, del Rio recounts the way racial stereotypes influenced economic and professional opportunities: “They never cast me in lead roles in the beginning because the stories were, for lack of a better term, ‘white-based.’ I never looked like the wife next door. So I’d come in there ‘chicka chicka boom,’ the big red lips, the big hair, the long nails, and no matter how glamorous I looked I’d still be the maid or some smart-ass hooch mama” (194). But del Rio was also quite adept at manipulating her own image, deploying exactly the kind of “outlaw sexuality” that Miller-Young describes and finding considerable pleasure, and a certain level of profit, there. Of her female of color fans, she states, “In a world that’s white-run they appreciate seeing one woman of color really standing out and feeling it and being it and meaning it” (200). This hardcover glossy coffee-table pictorial, with accompanying DVD, is published by Taschen and is highly recommended.

12. The names here are worth commenting on. Officer Diego Santos could be said to be associated with San Diego, California, on the U.S. side of the border, and Tina Juarez tied more directly with the Mexican border town Ciudad Juarez, infamous for its femicides. Tina Juarez could also be acoustically associated with Tijuana.

13. Popular culture produced by Los Angeles communities of color often addresses or includes this sound. For example, Ice Cube’s song “Ghetto Bird” and the Hughes brothers’ film *Menace II Society* (1993) both reference the ways military/police helicopter noise permeates the aural landscape of Los Angeles neighborhoods associated with black and Latin@ communities. See Holland, *Raising the Dead*. 
14. Of course, the position of power and pleasure is related to my own scopic and
authorial desires to focus attention on Diego’s body, rather than repeat the more
common spectacle of naked racialized femininity.

15. Several of the films discussed in this chapter are available on Rodríguez’s web-

16. In one of several interviews, Rodríguez shared with me her knowledge of the
histories of the different types of films and film stock used in this piece. For
example, the home movie of the children was shot on Kodak Safety Film, thus
dating it to somewhere between 1910 and 1930. This was very early technology
for home movies, available only to the wealthiest classes. The name Safety Film
was a way to designate the fact that it was less combustible than its nitrate-based
predecessors, though still flammable. However, the film chemistry of that era
has caused the stock to shrink. That and uneven spacing of the sprocket holes
mean that the master reel can no longer be projected.

17. This claim appears on several websites advertising the perfume, and is repeated
in the blog Now Smell This in a review of the fragrance. The blogger describes
the perfume thus: “I don’t know what Tabu smelled like when it first came out,
but today Tabu smells to me like a viscous brew of maple syrup, patchouli, and
incense. It is an odor that is almost tangible, like walking through a thick-
napped velvet curtain” (Angela, “Dana Tabu”). The same author also references
this fragrance in another blog entry entitled “Perfume and Age.” In that blog
the author writes, “I love stories of 14-year olds wearing Tabu as they figure out
their womanhood” (Angela, “Perfume and Age”).

18. The material practices that Zryd describes in this essay, in which artists access
found footage “from private collections, commercial stock shot agencies,
junk stores, and garbage bins, or has literally been found in the street,” mir-
ror Rodríguez’s process exactly (41). Indeed, many of the film strips she used
to assemble this work were acquired in precisely this manner: by contacting
private collectors, through various eBay purchases, and by sorting through the
rubbish bins of historical film archives. Much of the film she uses consists of the
“campy” Scopitone reels that Sontag references. These tend to be extremely well
preserved and are thus highly prized by collectors.

19. Unlike Rodriguez’s other short films discussed in this chapter, this film is not
available on her website or on YouTube because of copyright restrictions related
to the soundtrack. However, when the piece is exhibited in a gallery, it is not
under the same copyright restrictions as it is when it appears screened as a film,
or as a film on a website. As part of an installation, the soundtrack is considered
ephemera, part of the experience of an encounter with art. Copyright issues
are different if the film is presented as a film in a theater. As part of a film, the
soundtrack is recognized as a lasting, immutable, and reproducible part of the
work, and is therefore protected differently.

20. I would be remiss if I did not at least mention the stunning popularity of the
Pulp BDSM trilogy by E. L. James that begins with Fifty Shades of Grey. This
erotic novel, which the New York Times dubbed “Mommy porn,” is structured around a virginal white woman who becomes the sexual servant of a handsome, athletic, white twenty-six-year-old self-made billionaire, who pilots his own helicopter, is a concert-level pianist, speaks fluent French, and donates money to feed the poor in Africa (Bosman). To date, these books have spent over twenty weeks at the top of the New York Times best seller lists.

THE AFTERRGLOW

1. Generous Gesture is the title of a film by the queer Toronto-based filmmaker and pornographer David C. Findlay. In this one-hour film, we see ten frames on the screen, each focused on a different ass. Over the course of the hour, Findlay massages these different derrieres of varying shades with copious amounts of coconut oil, his own shade of brown perceived as slightly different in each square of the film. Situated between the sexual and the social, this experience of “haptic visuality” encapsulates the generous gesture residing in the possibilities offered by the eros of friendship. See his website, dirtysurface.com.