
Juana María Rodríguez (2014)

Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings

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Sexual futures is an invitation to feel, to be with, to follow, to touch. Reader be aware: this is a book about touching! The starting assumption is that we should read this book taking time and space as still not queer yet. The author starts from the point that a queer gesture insists and persists, enlacing political demands with sexual practices. Queer theory could only have emerged through the politicization of sexuality, but Juana María Rodríguez goes further by emphasizing the molecular character of that political agency of sexual practices: what happens when bodies touch each other in a mambo dance, in a porn film, in a demonstration of love and care, or even when they refuse to touch because of homophobic fear of the other. Her account shows how this fear can be intriguingly related with nationalist demands. As Rodríguez states in the introduction, the book “is also about the wide range of affects that bodily practices can induce, including pain, boredom, abjection, and delight” (17).

Rodríguez has been queering the field of Latino Studies since her 2003 book *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*. Comparing the two books, the reader can see in *Sexual Futures, Queer*

Gestures, and Other Latina Longings a more involved narrative, a more confessional style. My favorite chapter of *Queer Latinidad* was “Welcome to The Global Stage: Confessions of a Latina Cyber Slut”. In *Sexual Futures*, all chapters have that confessional taste, a way of producing theory that cannot neglect the fact that we all have bodies which are involved in and shaped by politics of gender, sexuality, and race. The argument of the book is developed by the sharp consideration of ‘close female’ (I use this term to not be essentialist by using male and female as markers) Latina bodies, but not in a restrictive fashion. The author challenges the divide between Queer Studies and Latino Studies in US/Latin American Studies through her outstanding scholarship in both fields (the queer discussion of Puerto Rican politics in the second chapter of *Sexual Futures* is one of the best examples of this). It is upsetting how Queer Studies, as well as Trans-Feminism and Disability Studies, are absent in many Latin American Studies departments, a fact that is often silenced, or superficially dismissed as a “US/North American” fad. *Sexual Futures* operates a change on that perspective. The author uses a very rich and plural theoretical background from Cultural

Studies to Philosophy, from Performance Theory to Cinema Theory. References to Sara Ahmed or the philosopher Giorgio Agamben are stressed in the book, which make evident the connections of sexuality with politics. It is not a book in which a theory is applied to a field. Juana María Rodríguez dialogues with her theoretical interlocutors at the same time that she touches the field of politics, of performance, of pornography.

The book is divided into an introduction, four chapters, and an afterglow. Unlike other books in which the acknowledgments are disconnected from the rest of the text, a beautiful detail of *Sexual Futures* is how the acknowledgments belong to the book as an affective clue, allowing the reader to experience the author as a living person. Some aspects could be highlighted to a reader familiar with queer theory. The first chapter starts with the question “Who’s Your Daddy?” touching upon “our most intimate bonds” (29). The reader familiar with queer theory might expect a strong critique of patriarchal structures, heteronormativity, and assimilationist politics—and that critique is there to a certain extent. However, Rodríguez problematizes kinship as a way that excludes other forms of affiliation among queers, while at the same time showing that parental bonds are eroticized and reimagined in BDSM practices, shedding light on the “contradictory functions of law, discipline and regulation” (66). For instance, when considering Folsom BDSM festival, she discusses how the intimate domain of desire and the domain of social structures are connected in a complicated relationship that needs to be problematized.

The second chapter, “Sodomy, Sovereignty and Other Utopian Longings”, follows this path, relating the micro universe of desire and sexual practices to the macro domain of politics. This chapter presents one of the most refined discussions on queer and national politics, taking Puerto Rican politics as an exemplary case to think about this connection. The sexualization of politics is produced when sovereignty and sodomy encounter each other as penetrating politics: all imaginations of the state as powerful and virile bear as counterpart an act of subrogation, imagined as the power to penetrate others. Sodomy imaginations of political power are present in many expressions analyzed by the author. By following Rodríguez’s argument, the reader can question the validity of such a kind of sovereignty, one that harvests sexual imagination and utopia, while ignoring mutual pleasure and interdependence.

In the third chapter, we are immersed in the queer gestures of dance. Clearly, in a book on sexual futures and gestures the universe of dance and the nightlife of clubs could not be ignored. The presence of queer people in many nightlife and performance scenes creates a sense of community. By moving their bodies to the sound of songs ranging from Mambo tunes to “I will survive”, queer people occupy public spaces. Their bodies communicate, exchanging gestures of pleasure, satisfaction, and self-recognition: These bodies make each other feel (mighty real), to paraphrase Sylvester as quoted by Rodríguez. The titles to the sections of this third chapter are all based on names of songs.

The sensibility that Rodríguez exercises throughout her book is perhaps most important in the last chapter, which touches upon a point rarely treated: politically incorrect sexual fantasies. Looking for the “latina-ness” in this domain, the author deals with the triggering contents of performances and pornography, which have the effect of amplifying encoded elements of sexual fantasies that bear the abject as a source of pleasure. This erotic reenactment of power relations could serve to deal with these practices by trying to understand what is at stake without pathologizing or condemning them. As Rodríguez stresses, these fantasies are not subversive by themselves, but they might give us a clue to comprehend ourselves and the sexual imagination that inhabits our souls through abjection.

Maybe here a critical remark could be opportune. The last chapter still leaves a deeper discussion on pornography and politics untouched. It would be necessary to extend this discussion on porn performances and politics to a field in which other agents also play a role: not only actors and performers, but all the porn scenarios, scenarios of everyday life that the author shows are invested with sexual fantasies by the enterprise of a porn industry that enables this. In addition to that, the discussion on border politics could be improved if more emphasis were given not only to the bodies, but to the border itself as an erotic landscape. Notwithstanding, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* has the particular advantage of offering a Latina perspective on queer theory.