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## In the Queerest of Ways: A Conversation on Sexuality, Desire, and Futurity

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## In the Queerest of Ways: A Conversation on Sexuality, Desire, and Futurity

An Interview with Juana María Rodríguez, *University of California Berkeley*  
by Lee Mandelo and Ivy Monroe, *University of Kentucky*

*Juana María Rodríguez is the author of two books, Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces (NYU Press, 2003) and Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings (NYU Press 2014) which won the Alan Bray Memorial Book Prize at the Modern Language Association and was a Lambda Literary Foundation Finalist for LGBT Studies. In 2019, she co-edited a special issue of TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly on "Trans Studies en las Americas." In addition to her publications in academic journals internationally, her work has been featured in Aperture; NPR's Latino USA, NBC.com, Canadian News Network, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and Cosmopolitan for Latinas. She is completing a book on visual culture and Latina sexual labor, under contract with Duke University Press.*

**Ivy:** *To begin, we've been asking all of our guest scholars to start with the same question which is: what is queer theory to you?*

**Juana:** I think that theory in general is supposed to help us come up with ways of explaining the world and our place in it. So, queer theory is supposed to help me understand my queer, messy, queer life. And so, I really like those moments that are hard for me to explain to myself. And those are the places where I really turn to theory. Like, why can abjection be so sexy and fun, right? Like, I don't know how to, I didn't know how to answer that question so I tried to write a book about it. So I think it's about trying to help us figure out the things that rumble around in our heads as we're trying to make sense of the world and our place in it.

**Lee:** *Yeah, which leads me into the first question about the book, Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings because I loved it. Quite a lot. One of the things I liked so much about it is that it's so purposefully sexy, which I thought was really inspiring on a personal level, but also methodologically and to read an academic text where we get to talk about gestures from dancing to fisting. It's all in there and I loved that. So I was curious, you wrote in the introduction that you wanted the book to be "sexual in the queerest of ways, meant to inspire intense feeling rather than reproduction" and I wanted to ask how you felt about the process of writing that and how a developing scholar might approach working with sexual materials and spaces in that way too, what was it like?*

**Juana:** Well, again, I was trying to figure out things that I don't have an answer for, a lot of which have to do with my own queer messy life. So, I did notice queer theory wasn't doing so great on the sex. And somebody had to talk to that and bring sex back into it. And I think it's really in these most intimate moments, when we're our most vulnerable, that our psychic lives really reveal themselves. So, rather than trying to theorize the sex that was happening in a book or on a film, I really was turning to my own sexual practices – I think I called it a sexual archive – like, what have I learned about sex? I've had a lot of sex, what have I learned? What have I learned about myself? About what happens when bodies come together? About those moments when things can be so great, until they're not. What is that moment when someone can say something or look at you a certain way and all of sudden you...right?

So I wanted to take seriously, sex. And I also wanted to take sex out of the space of just the individual, just the private, just what's happening in my interior psyche. And I wanted to think about sex as a public policy issue. Particularly in the chapter on "Who's Your Daddy? Queer Kinship and Perverse Domesticity"

so much of gay and lesbian politics was really trying to make us not seem perverse. And, at a time when straight people were just jumping all over the perverse – like who doesn't want to jump all over the perverse, right?? So I thought, wait a minute, they get to be hella kinky and we have to show up to PTA meetings and talk about carrot cake? So I was trying to think politically about what it meant that queers had stepped away from the space of perversity and sex, politically. Because I think they are political issues.

Sex work is still illegal in most parts of the United States. You and I, all three of us, we can do anything we want! But if I give you each 20 bucks afterwards, it's illegal. And so the fact that the queer movement doesn't really seem to care – like why aren't queers all over that? Why isn't sex work part of everybody's political agenda? Why isn't that something that queer people are talking about all the time, it effects so many of us. So I wanted us to think more and not be scared to be unrespectable, to step into the space of 'yeah I'm queer, I'm kinky, I'm perverse – I'm also a mom, I also have a job, I show up every day'—so, all of those things are true. I felt it was politically important to step into the space of sex. And I also felt, in some ways, the fact that I'm cis, that I have a certain ability to kind of move in circles, to pass in certain ways that – it's sort of what tenure's for, I have the privilege to be able to talk about just how kinky and perverse I am without any repercussions, for the most part - I have a job. So, why not? I feel I have to do that precisely so that younger scholars and emerging scholars can. To provide a sort of theoretical cover for other folks that are wanting to do this kind of work because I think it's important work.

**Lee:** *It is definitely how I've felt about it as a scholar in the dissertation phase of things with this book, so as to be like, 'look, we can do things this way, right?'—so thank you, on that note, for that.*

**Ivy:** *And also yes, definitely on the same page that queer people need to talk more about sex work, and about how sex work is both a lot broader than we conceptualize and it's a lot more overlapped with other issues than is often talked about.*

**Juana:** And sex is much broader than we think about. I love my students, my students teach me so much. I had a fabulous student that was working, Ianna Owen who was writing about asexuality. And it was really interesting, and I credit her in a footnote somewhere. As I was writing this book I was thinking about sex and really thinking about what does the absence of sexual desire mean? How does sex become sex or how do we even define sex? So a lot of my conversations would be about how, in order to be asexual we have to define what sex is. It doesn't necessarily mean that bodies are in the same room – many of us are doing virtual stuff *now* – and it doesn't necessarily have to do with genitals. So what is sex? Even the questions of what is sex, what constitutes sex, and what makes something an erotic experience. This morning on Twitter, I posted that I stepped in cake once.

**Ivy:** *We were talking about that before you got on the call—*

**Juana:** I love the cake! I love the cake, it's just the kinkiest thing in the world! I love it, I so highly recommend it. You know you can buy a cake for like 10 bucks. And it's a short thrill, it doesn't last long, but I love it. And is that sex? Well, yeah. And it was really good. It was really good. So I think those are the kinds of questions, like: what is sex? What constitutes sex? Who gets to figure that out? Why is there so much panic about it? What's the shame around it? The cake is good, right?

**Lee:** *There's a whole episode of Tina Horn's sexualities podcast about cake-sitting, as a thing.*

**Juana:** Oh, see I haven't sat in cake yet. But maybe I'm going to level up.

**Ivy:** *I appreciate the 'yet' at the end of that, like it's inevitable.*

**Juana:** I think it's true – any day now I will be sitting in cake. I think if I decide to sit in cake, I might want to monetize that. Somebody already said, you really should be charging for this content and I might. A little passive income stream of cake-sitting videos. It's true. It's true. So questions like what is sex, and what's the sex that people care about and the sex that people don't care about? As queers we get to figure out all the things that get to be sexual for us – we're just more imaginative than straight people.

**Lee:** *Firm agree.*

**Ivy:** *I wasn't going to say it, but...*

**Juana:** Yeah! Right?

**Lee:** *I think I can use that to leap into the next question about the book, which is about the approach to methods/theorizing/real life, all at the same time. What do you think some of the benefits of talking about sex and sexual practice, those things, using critical race theory and performance theory and queer studies to look at: what does fucking do? What are some of the joys of that for you? As opposed to, maybe—ethnography?*

**Juana:** Yeah! I guess watching people fuck could have been a fun project. My joke used to be that in the absence of funding, I'd just study sex because I can afford it. What's the advantage? I would say that performance studies, as a critical lens – and performance studies can very often include things like ethnography – I think for me that thinking about performance studies forces you to think about forms of embodiment. And also the *trace*. In performance studies, you're seeing something on a stage and you're writing about something that's not there anymore. You can't go back to the page, it won't be the same. You can go to the same performance night after night and it will always be different. And so performance studies is really thinking about the ephemeral and is really thinking about the trace that an event leaves behind. And so if we think about sex as an event, what's the trace? What's the kind of psychic trace that it leaves behind? So performance studies is a way of engaging the intangible aspects of sex in particular ways.

And in terms of thinking about race and racialization, I think it's curious what a limited vocabulary we have for thinking about all the ways that race inflects our erotic lives. And I think language is certainly one way. Like what language you're fucking in? I had a partner that would talk to me in Greek, which I don't know. So it's interesting to be in a sexual exchange with someone that's speaking to you in a language you don't understand, right? You're just hearing sounds and I think there's something really curious about that.

Also we have the language of fetish. But fetish doesn't quite get at all the ways in which we desire. And what do we desire? How do we desire? How are those desires shaped by who we are as racialized embodied subjects that move in the world, and how we see and engage the bodies that we encounter. And thinking about things like age, like race, like fatness, to a certain extent like transness - like if this is what you desire. I really love fat bodies, I like laying on someone that feels like a fleshy pillow. Is there a way to do that, to say that, without someone asking if you're not seeing the person and you're just

seeing the flesh? Well, sex is kind of fleshy. So what do we do with that? What do we do with the things that we like? That we don't like? That we're attracted to, that we're not attracted to?

Like even the sound of someone's voice, right? I've had a lot of trans male lovers, and there's something about the tone of their – right, if you're on T – right away your voice changes and it changes what sex is. And it's become one of the things that I like, and I didn't know I liked, until I started having it. It doesn't mean I have to have it, but just like fat, fleshy bodies, you have to try something that you've never tried—and you're like 'wow, that was really good. I'm gonna try more of that.' And I think the language of fetish is always this language that creates these hard distinctions. Like it's only a fetish if we're not *supposed* to like it. If we're not supposed to like fat bodies. If we're not supposed to like old bodies. If we're not supposed to like trans bodies. And so if that's what we like, then the only way to make sense of that is to say that's a fetish. But if you're a white person and you date other white people, is that a fetish? If you're a black person and you date other black people, is that? I just think that we need more robust vocabularies for thinking about this stuff. I think the language of ethnic studies and taking race seriously in relation to sex and I think of someone like Darieck Scott and Darieck Scott's beautiful book *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* where he's really thinking about of the ways that race gets attached to sex in ways that are complicated and messy, but also hot and delicious and exciting.

**Lee:** *Yes! I also just finished reading Nguyen Tan Hoang's A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation and thought, 'Oh, that's interesting!'—in terms of in dealing with issues, like: what does it mean if you do occupy the sexual subjective position that people stereotype you as occupying?*

**Juana:** Yeah, exactly! Exactly, exactly.

**Lee:** *Like, how have I thought about this? I think that's a valuable question to ask.*

**Juana:** The questions are always more interesting than the answers!

**Ivy:** *I had a quick follow up question. I was also curious, what relationship you might see between one's embodiment and the ways that one wants to be desired—like not the ways we desire, but how we're desired?*

**Juana:** Yeah, I think—for example, I'm getting older. And so a lot of people want Mommy! One of my tag lines is like, 'mommy is the new daddy,' and I do think mommy is kind of the new daddy in some ways. And so, for me... do I *want* to be wanted as Mommy? Right? There can be ways where we're desired, but not necessarily—I mean it's a really smart question. What happens when someone's desire *for* me is not doesn't quite align with how I might want to be desired. I think the other thing that happens, and we know this, is when we're smashing I can have something going on in my head about who you are to me, why you're there with me, what you love about me... And you can have something else going on in your head, and maybe it's okay if we don't talk about it. Maybe it's okay if in our psychic lives, in our fantasy lives, we're not fully aligned, if our bodies are doing the kinds of things that we want our bodies to do.

So, that was actually something that I had to really wrestle with. Again—in the "Daddy" chapter—I remember having a conversation with a top, and he was like, 'yeah, being daddy's a lot of work.' And he wasn't into it; he wanted to choose who he was going to be daddy for, and to, and how. Right? I thought that was interesting for me, you know, as someone that has historically occupied more bottom, femme,

receptive positions. I guess I hadn't really thought that much about the kind of labor involved in running the show.

**Ivy & Lee:** *Yeah, yes.*

**Juana:** Right? It's labor to run the show. I don't want it to it. I'm glad somebody wants to do it. There's a show to run! But yeah, the fact that we might be hailed into these positions—that we may or may not fully want to occupy. And then sex, like other forms of communication, are always this kind of iterative process where we're trying to figure out what works, what connects, where do we align, and how can we both extract pleasure from this exchange?

**Ivy:** *That was an excellent answer.*

**Lee:** *Yeah. So, I was recently listening to a podcast by Stoya, the pornographer—that's the word she's been using recently, which I like—talking about that difficulty and enjoying it. Like, the space between my perceptions and what's going on in someone else's head while we fuck, where I don't actually have to know all of it. And maybe that's okay? They don't have to know what I thought about, either, as long as we found something in the middle where we were both enjoying it. I've been thinking about that a lot this week, so it's an interesting crossover of topics.*

*Another thing that I enjoyed from the book is the way that relationality and futurity come into the picture. With Muñoz, who obviously we all love—*

**Juana:** Ah, yeah!

**Lee:** *What are some of the resonances you feel, with queer futurity then and now? Does it feel the same, or, maybe, how do you feel like it's buoying us now—through kinship, friendship, all of those things?*

**Juana:** Hey, I am totally a 'friendship as a way of life' kind of girl. The pandemic has really highlighted that. And in my first book I wrote about a Latinx HIV organization called Proyecto ContraSIDA por Vida that would be, 'The Project Against AIDS for Life.' At their core, they were a harm reduction agency—about reducing harm and amplifying good. But one of the things they did that was the most radical in their thinking was challenge the idea that everybody wanted to live.

So, if we begin with challenging the idea that everybody wants to live, and what does it mean to *give* people a reason to want to live... How is friendship a reason to want to live? When I think of futurity, I think of: what's a good reason to get up today? What's a good reason to want to live? And good sex is a reason to want to live. Friendship is a reason to want to live, food is a reason to want to live, my students are always terrific reasons to want to live. So I think that they're politicizing *life*, and the value of life not as this natural thing, but as something we choose, that we keep choosing. I think that futurity is thinking about a future, thinking about a life projected forward, and how do we make that life better—how do we make it more delicious, more pleasurable, more enjoyable, more just? How do we reduce harm and amplify good? So, part of what Muñoz really did is remind us of the future as a political project that that we call into being.

Over and over again.

**Lee:** *Yes, and that definitely hits home. There's a bit at the end of the book, about the eros of friendship, and I did screenshot it and send it to a bunch of people like, 'I love you.' It gave me some language for that feeling during this pandemic especially. On that note, how do you feel about the queer nightlife situations, over the past couple of years? What's that been like?*

**Juana:** I was in Berlin in the fall, and oh my god. I love Berlin! It was never on my radar or anything, I don't know, but I just loved it. So I actually got to enjoy a lot of queer nightlife, there. And this semester, I came back, and I'm doing a class on queer nightlife this semester where we're reading *Queer Nightlife* by Kareem Khubchandani, Kemi Adeyemi, and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera; we're reading Kareem's book *Ishtyle: Accenting Gay Indian Nightlife*; we're reading Kemi Adeyemi's book that isn't published yet—there's a lot of people thinking and writing about nightlife.

And yes, the pandemic certainly makes us appreciate it more. But these are spaces of sex and pleasure, and also spaces of public policy—also spaces that are really impacted by gentrification, spaces steeped in history. And also places of exclusion, places of 'who is this space for?' You know, it's so funny, you can walk into a club and right away you feel a certain way, like: 'Is this a place for me? How do I feel here? Am I dressed right, do I match the crowd? Am I going to get lucky? Am I there with my friends, and is it welcoming to all of us—or, is it welcoming to some of us? How long do I have to stand at the bar before the bartender pays attention to me?' These are all highly charged political spaces, too, so there's a lot there to think and talk about.

I'm also interested in the apps, because I'm on them, right? So, how do we represent ourselves on apps, what are these algorithms? I'm certainly thinking about age a lot more. For example, Tinder has different pricing for young people. If you're under the age of thirty, I think it's like \$9.99 or something, and if you're older they charge you more. Are you surprised? Don't be surprised.

**Ivy:** *I know I had never heard of this or thought about it.*

**Juana:** Yeah, I mean maybe you're young and beautiful and you don't need Tinder, blah, blah. [laughter]

**Ivy:** *More like, I'm a grad student so I don't have the paid version. [laughter]*

**Juana:** That's right! Exactly. Well, the only reason I'm paying for the paid version is so that I can hide my age—because algorithms, right? Like, OKCupid is not really a hook-up app, it's more about 'love and romance,' but you get a lot more text. So, you get to hear more about people's politics and things like that, because they have to answer the zillion questions. What's the nature of these apps, how do they perpetuate and how do they break down? What are the hierarchies around the economies of desirability?

**Ivy:** *Yeah.*

**Juana:** So, yeah. I grew up in bars, I love bars. I will go out dancing, anytime. And I'll dance to almost anything. So, bars have always been a super important place for me. You're in the dark with strangers, moving to a beat.

**Lee:** *Nothing quite like a good leather bar.*

**Juana:** Right, how sexy is that?

**Ivy:** *A windowless basement bar—*

**Juana:** I thought it was interesting, in Berlin, a lot of the bars had dark rooms—and some of those dark rooms were more gender inclusive. Generally dark rooms are spaces for cis men. There was one fabulous performance artists, Liz Rosenfeld, who was assigned female at birth, they're non-binary with all their original parts, but they like to go to men's dark rooms as a kind of butch-presenting non-binary person. So, again, what does it mean that there are these spaces, and what are the rules of those spaces?

But for me, those things don't exist here, for cis women. There's less of that. Or, I don't know about them. There are sex parties, sure, but this was this weird combination between a club and a sex club—and I kind of appreciated that.

**Lee:** *I wonder how much that will keep changing. Because in the last decade, for me it's gone from being like, 'oh, as a trans guy I can't go into those spaces'... to a lot of the spaces that used to be cis men only now shifting toward, 'come on in, new exciting thing.' And I am curious how that'll keep changing.*

**Juana:** I really think it's interesting in terms of sexual cultures, the role of trans people in general in breaking down binaries between what had traditionally been lesbian culture and cis gay male culture. One of my sexual partners is this trans dude who's bisexual, and most of his other partners are cis dudes—cis gay dudes. And so, how trans people are actually doing a kind of political work in these spaces to break down binaries, in particular ways through sex, through desire, and through their bodies not fitting into these other configurations of what *gender* is. So I think that's interesting, yeah.

**Ivy:** *All existence is political, and yeah, as trans people we are caught in a very particular form of the way that's politicized.*

**Juana:** Yeah. And sometimes you want to step into it and sometimes it's like, really...

**Ivy:** *Yeah, sometimes you just want to go grocery shopping.*

**Juana:** Exactly, exactly. The kind of challenge that transgender people and trans *politics*, have made—it's a theoretical challenge, it's a social challenge, it's a political challenge. Because it really goes to the very root of thinking about how these binary systems of gender impact all sorts of things, like clubbing, like sexual spaces, like what we think of as sex. How we imagine our desire to function is already coded by this binary language. And theoretically, it's, it's been some of the most exciting work out there.

**Ivy:** *Yeah, and moving along, as a fellow admirer of your writing I wanted to inquire about your recent experience co-editing the "Trans Studies en las Américas" issue of TSQ. For example, how has being an editor impacted your writing practice or vice versa?*

**Juana:** I will say, for example, for that issue it was myself, a senior established senior scholar from Brazil, and two graduate students. What was challenging about that volume was that we wanted to make sure people could submit pieces written in whatever language they wanted to. So, we accepted pieces in English, Spanish and Portuguese, and that meant we needed peer reviewers in English, Spanish and Portuguese, that had some knowledge of trans *something*, and perhaps some regional specificity—



because what's happening in Mexico is very different than what's happening in Argentina, or in Brazil, or Puerto Rico, so it was really challenging.

Otherwise, I don't think I would say that it changed my writing very much. In some ways, I see my editorial role there as a kind of service to the field and to these two graduate students. They had this vision, they reached out to me, and I was like, 'sure!'—because I wasn't quite sure who else was going to be able to do it, and I thought I could do a good job, and I was interested in reading the work. And I thought it was a terrific issue! It was really fun to work on, but I didn't write anything for it. It was my first time editing, and the editing was a lot of work. So, it didn't quite change my writing but it gave me great insights in that I had never edited a volume before.

As scholars, we're always doing things for the first time. You know, when you write a dissertation, you've never written a dissertation—when you turn your dissertation into a book, you've never written a book. When you get your first article, you've never done that; when you go up for tenure, you've never written a tenure application before. We're constantly mastering new genres of writing and we're constantly trying to learn new skills. So for me, I had never edited something so it was like, 'Let me take this on.' And I'm pretty proud of it.

**Ivy:** *In that editing role, how did you approach editing for trans studies or queer theory—these fields that often revel in breaking established rules and challenging them?*

**Juana:** It's kind of curious. For the most part, the articles in that issue were pretty standard, run-of-the-mill academic articles; there wasn't anything super genre-breaking. I would have been open to that! A lot of the articles were doing 'state of the field' stuff, and we got tons of work about law and policy. We got a lot more social sciences than we did humanistic things, but it was really lovely for me to work with different writers. And editing—just like teaching—makes you a better writer, because you have to really think about why isn't the sentence working, what is it about the structure, what am I losing here, and what could help. As a professor, I already do that a lot with my own graduate students. It was a terrific project, and I'm really proud of that work, glad to see it circulating. It was the first publication for several of those authors, so that was really nice too.

**Lee:** *Yeah, there's so much there. Obviously, teaching and editing in general are both very socially connected sorts of mentoring things, and I wanted to ask—because I was reading your bio, and saw you'd gotten some awards from Berkeley for mentoring—*

**Juana:** Yes, I've gotten some awards for that! [laughter] So, I have a Distinguished Teaching Award and a Distinguished Faculty Mentor Award. For example, this queer nightlife class that I'm teaching, I want to say, 90% of the material we're reading is stuff I haven't read. But, I've read enough of these authors that I know that the book is going to be great, and I'm not afraid to be vulnerable. I don't mind being vulnerable with my students, saying, 'I don't know.' Like, if you're really into Lacan, I'm not gonna be your go to Lacan person. And I think creating classrooms where we are okay talking about what we know, what we *don't* know, learning together, is important. I have really brilliant students; I love the conversations we have. Teaching is still a joyful thing for me.

**Lee:** *Yeah, so how does all this fun queer theory stuff inform or intersect with all that fun mentorship and teaching stuff?*

**Juana:** Yeah, it really does. Students projects, really—I get really excited! And the thing about mentoring, or maybe about queer mentoring, is: these are really long relationships. They're really intimate relationships. There is this intellectual intimacy where you share your ideas when they're just starting to form, and you're not sure if there's a *there* there, and to share that with someone. So many of my former students are people I really hope to have relationships with for the rest of my life. I value that there's something really lovely with this kind of intergenerational exchange.

The other thing is, maybe it's weird, but on Twitter: every now and then I just hand out random advice to people! And so I also get people that I end up helping out there. There's something about that exchange, when you give of yourself. When we think about what it means to be receptive, or what it means to give, right? These are these really reciprocal processes. I learned so much from my students. I learned stuff from random people on the internet. So, it's just a large ecosystem, where we offer what we have.

**Ivy:** *Yeah, and that vulnerability you mentioned bringing definitely also comes across in your writing. There's a self-honesty and vulnerability there that is really incredible. We were also wondering, how has the pandemic affected that mentorship and teaching practice?*

**Juana:** Well, we're back in the classroom now at Berkeley. One of the things that I'd say that's difficult is that even with something like Omnicom—which, while for the most part if you're healthy and boosted you can get Omnicron and be fine, not everyone *is* healthy and boosted. And so, there is an anxiety about *knowing* the impact that COVID is having. You know, we're queer, AIDS is still a thing. All of my friends that are HIV positive, they're immunocompromised, and they have to think differently about the kinds of risks they take in a club, or otherwise. Thinking about disability justice, and the fact that we've always known that we all have different risks and different life chances, in relation to all kinds of things. But the pandemic has exacerbated those divides.

So, there might be a moment soon after the surge dies down where clubs will open again, and you can show your pass that you're vaccinated, and you can party down. And some people won't be able to, because of their own health. That's this conflicted thing, because we want everyone to be there, right? When we're not all there, we're not all there. What does it mean to have queer community without disabled people, what does it mean to have queer community without HIV positive people? Like wow, so, what can we do to reduce harm and amplify good? How do we make sure that some of our parties are outside, or make sure... I don't know, I'm not sure. Literally, they're the kinds of questions that we're trying to figure out.

**Ivy:** *Absolutely. I don't think there are any clear, simple answers and I don't think there will be in the future, but grappling with that.*

**Lee:** *One of our colleagues from the queer theory seminar who's also working on this journal had a question I'd like to ask too, which is: how can queer theory as a field situate itself to more effectively critique those dominant logics we're talking about with the pandemic, like neoimperialism, heteronormativity, militarization—and maybe queer futurity? How does that build on, perhaps, how can we do a better job?*

**Juana:** One of the things is, I think, that there are a lot of lanes. Let's start there. So, I have fabulous colleagues that, for example, study questions of militarization, questions of ecology and queer ecology, and what is the relationship between queerness and climate change? Wow, right, I just think climate

change is one of the most pressing issues of our time. So, there are all sorts of implications for queer people, but what can we do? Part of what I was trying to do in *Sexual Futures* was to ask the question of what is sex, to ask the question of what is politics, what does political work *mean*? What does it look like?

And so, rather than these kind of more... I would call them masculinist forms of activism, right? It's standing on the soapbox, it's the strike, it's the walkout, it's these overt forms of rebellion—which I'm always down for! But I think if that's the only way we're thinking of politics, then we're missing out on a lot of things. So, thinking of how we connect our work to other places, to other issues, and that can happen in all kinds of ways. It can happen in the language we use. It is connected to possibilities for pleasure, how we think of pleasure and where we look for it, and the *price* of those things. So, Israel might be a great place to party, but... we see these campaigns trying to get us to avoid politics, or avoid these thorny political issues, just to get down. The role of queer theory is to say 'no, we still have to think about this. We still have to think about what are the implications of this.' And I think we can do that in all sorts of places.

I mean, queer theory is huge. Queers are impacted by everything, and so we have queer things to say about everything, including climate change.

**Ivy:** *On that note, where would you like to see queer theory go in these next years? I'm hearing climate change in there, but what would you like to see like the field more directly engaging?*

**Juana:** Curiously, I think—it almost sounds contradictory, but I would say one of the most influential books for me the last couple of years was Dean Spade's beautiful, tiny little book on mutual aid. I love Dean—great, so smart! But thinking about mutual aid as a practice, and as a particularly queer practice, as a racialized practice, as a practice that's so built into how poor people have always done things, is a different way for us to think about community. To think about organizing, to think about the work of politics.

So there's mutual aid on the one hand, and then there's also—I'm still kind of attached to the state, just because I'm so *impacted* by the state. Mutual aid is not expecting the state to solve our problems, but the state keeps making more problems. So it's both mutual aid, where we're organizing outside of the structures of the state, and also more directly confronting the state, asking the state to do better. For example, my understanding is that in Germany they did something where they're expanding—I don't think it's marriage, but polycules, poly people, can actually register together. How awesome is that? Of course it's Germany, so you don't even need to be married to get health insurance, but we can still ask the state to do better, right? To reduce the harm that the state itself is causing. So something like, 'wow, let's just decriminalize sex work already.' If you care about the prison industrial complex, if you care about workers' rights: can we just get this done with, and stop making that a crime? When sex is criminalized, it's always a bad idea. So again, this is something where we could, as a community, significantly reduce harm, for all kinds of people, immediately. And I don't think we should step away from that. I don't think we should stop asking the state to do better, but we also need to not wait for the state to do better.

**Ivy:** *Thank you so much! We have one question left—*

**Lee:** *Which is, let's move from the field's changes to: what are you working on right now?*

**Juana:** Duke University has in their little hands a book called *Put a Life: Seeing Latinas Working Sex*. It's about the relationship between visual culture and forms of racialized sexual labor. It has 84 print color images, a fair sprinkling of autobiographical stuff, and just wonderful stories of amazing women working sex. So, that's what I've been working on, and I'm excited to have come out soon.

And then I'm going to write some kind of really spicy sexual memoir, where I deconstruct the—yeah, like, a lovers' discourse, with those little scenes. I like to write, so I'll probably keep doing it, and then I'll maybe make some baskets.

**Lee:** *Well, I can't wait to read both of those, it'll be delightful.*

**Ivy:** *Thank you so much, this was wonderful.*