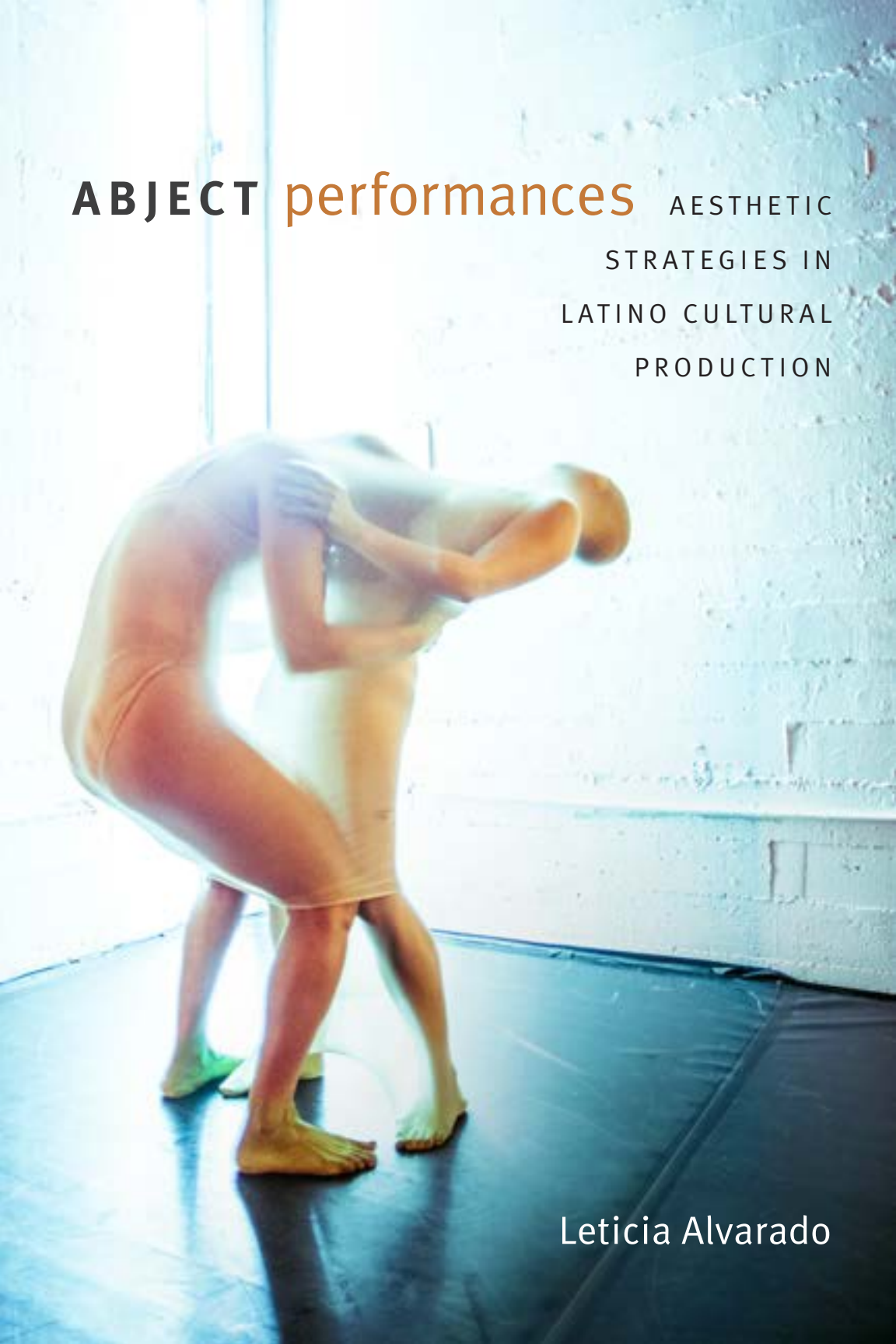
ABJECT performances

AESTHETIC STRATEGIES IN LATINO CULTURAL PRODUCTION



Leticia Alvarado

ABJECT performances

Dissident Acts *A series edited by Macarena Gomez-Barris and Diana Taylor*

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AESTHETIC STRATEGIES IN LATINO CULTURAL PRODUCTION

LETICIA ALVARADO

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For the only people I ever want to see on purpose:
Sydney, Lu, and Mika.

And also for JEM. Love, a Hologram.

Contents

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Sublime Abjection

On July 22, 2013, a group of nine transnational immigration activists approached the U.S. border severing Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, from Nogales, Arizona, United States to reenter a country they had been brought to as young children and then left—three voluntarily for this particular activist event, three on their own before the event to reunite with family, and three through federal deportation.[1] Resplendent in the synthetic iridescence of graduation caps and gowns, the Dream 9—as they've come to be known—locked arms and proceeded toward the national border to the cadence of their supporters' chants, who bridged the Nogales of here and there. Against the throng of these same chants, the Dream 9 were immediately taken into custody by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. They were released a month later into the limbo of the asylum process with the promise of a hearing date. Their release from custody marked the end of the first #BringThemHome campaign, orchestrated and staged by the

National Immigrant Youth Alliance. The activist protest event mobilized social media (Twitter, Facebook, and various video streaming sites) and a transnational base to integrate grassroots support as part of a large media performance event resonant to many of the political and aesthetic strategies of famed civil rights mobilizations of the 1960s and 1970s.

The group has been rightfully lauded for their bold challenge to border agents and to the larger American public to acknowledge them as subjects worthy of entry and sanctioned residency. Special note has been made of the three that chose to leave the United States to meet those in Mexico for a staged return, volunteering their own deportation after a life lived in fear of one. While self-deporting or attrition through enforcement was the ultimate goal of an aggressive conservative political agenda that created an increasingly hostile environment for the undocumented, on the rise since the 1990s, here it set the stage for insistence on admission, with the brandished signs of their supporters reading "undocumented unafraid" providing rich background scenery.[2] The participants were very purposefully attired and then christened to create a direct connection to the undocumented student activists known as DREAMers but also to the student activists of prior decades who were central to the institutionalization of Chicano and ethnic studies broadly, as well as gender and sexuality studies, among other forms of civic representation.[3]

Given these past successes, it is no surprise that the representative figure selected as part of a strategy to achieve concrete small victories with potentially large implications was that of the student. The political border performance mobilized familiar affects—pride over shame, bravery over fear—throughout its strategic staging along with a well-recognized aesthetic vocabulary. The Dream 9 both embraced a subject position that has served to demarcate the boundaries of American belonging through the distinction between sanctioned and unsanctioned residents—that of undocumented—while at the same time seeking to expunge the status and category of undocumented of its shameful associations through the figure of the student. To do so, they borrowed a strategy from LGBTQ coming-out narratives that perform the prideful revelation of a true self, an enactment of a performative calculus that equates revelation of status and inhabitation of the category of student as redeeming truth.[4] Focusing on the performative component of their action, its aesthetic gesture, the figure of the student is vital for a transformative equation that dissolves the patina of

criminality that clings to the undocumented subject in favor of the sheen of the garbed graduate, the successful student at the cusp of potentiality and civic contribution.

In the face of very material consequences—incarceration and sustained separation from loved ones to name just a few—the activists mobilized a strategy that put on display their cultural citizenship, leveraging the ideological promise of meritocracy at the core of education to signal belonging and the right to civic participation.[5] In their caps and gowns they literalized the vision of eligibility for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which went into effect just a month before their publicized border crossing, surely in part due to the pressure exerted by DREAMers for over a decade. The aesthetic gesture of the event ultimately offers a performative argument for incorporation through assimilative potential. As immigration activists celebrated DACA while continuing to apply pressure and insist that this policy fails to assist many undocumented individuals, even after revisions to the policy in 2015, I watched coverage of this incredible intervention with ambivalence as once again, the revered, respectable, and protected figure of the student was mobilized despite its lack of applicability across the undocumented community and its limited implications for a diverse group identifiable under the umbrella of Latinidad.[6]

I want to linger in the folds of polyester on display to reflect on what they occlude and whom they obscure, to grapple with Latino performative strategies and the political possibilities they illuminate as well as the limits of a recourse to assimilationist appeals for respectability, to ultimately highlight and center strategies alternate to those on display in this border-crossing event. While the majority of the individual participants that constitute the Dream 9 were in their twenties, it was unclear from media coverage which of them were concurrently enrolled as students or were seeking return in order to enroll in institutions of higher education. I mention this to underscore the strategic representational deployment of the figure of the student as opposed to an adherence to an educational reality for the participants. We do know that one participant was a mother in her late thirties who had been brought to the United States as a child but left for Mexico when her husband was deported, bringing their U.S.-born child with her. Imagine her as a central performative figure—the reproducing foreign-born mother with her anchor baby.

With her demographic-growing capabilities, the woman of Latin Amer-

ican descent has long figured in the dominant U.S. imaginary as a particularly virulent threat, able to anchor in the nation with her resource-consuming offspring.[7] Represented as overly fertile, irresponsible, lazy, and manipulative, she is the ultimate figure to expunge if not relegate to the periphery of the nation. Stigmatized by a "moralized maternity," the abject mother is a figure that, along with cognate women of color archetypes, has been represented as in a state of perpetual sexual availability—impure yet desirable—against which proper white womanhood is forged.[8] Long a subject of legal and moral discourses, she shores up a normative national body organized around the responsible citizen-subject within a respectable family unit.[9] A central target of contemporary anti-immigrant legislation, what would it have meant to deploy the abject mother with her anchor baby, figuratively if not materially, at the performative center of this activist effort—not a mother within the romanticized family unit, the vessel for the propagation of a people and its culture, but rather an abject figure grappling with and deciding on separation within a mixed-status family of loved ones across the expanse of the border?[10] Herein lies an invitation to envision how strategies that center abjection might unfold, by gazing back as well as forward, to privilege the nonassimilative irreverence with which this pathologized mother might call forth new strategies, and indeed new politics, through abject performances.

The deployment of abjection as an irreverent aesthetic strategy unites the artists, performers, and cultural producers profiled in *Abject Performances*, as does their challenge to a bounded understanding of Latinidad. As a group, they are often active and informed, if marginal/ized, participants of political movements—Chicano nationalist, liberal feminist, immigration rights—who prioritize strategies and affects distinct from those long recognized as effective and elaborate them across a number of different terrains. Instead of the pride, bravery, and redemption on display by the Dream 9 that linked them to a politicized aesthetic history, these cultural producers cohere their aesthetic gestures around negative affects—uncertainty, disgust, unbelonging—capturing what lies far outside mainstream, inspirational Latino-centered social justice struggles. Collectively, they depict the structures of feeling of a contrapuntal affective terrain that demarcates a complex periphery of political projects as well as the incoherence and instability of interpellative identitarian categories (including "Latino," the very category that brings them together in these pages). Latinidad emerges here as a performative utterance that gestures at once to

an affective state shared by a diverse community of individuals of Latin American dissent and the challenges of finite denotation.[11] As the work of cultural theorist José Esteban Muñoz has shown us, centering affect provides a narrative alternative to "standard stories of identity politics," especially those that place a premium on cultural/biological essence, community unity, and racial uplift.[12] The four principal chapters in this book take up these narrative alternatives, rooting in abjection, not merely to revisit well-trodden historical terrain but also to attend to the undertheorized relationship between performative and embodied nonrepresentative aesthetics and political movements.

Throughout, I rely on the unifying heuristic of affect, particularly negative affect as shaped by queer theory. An expansive body of scholarship has theorized the complexity and nuances of affect, underscoring its value for the analysis and politicized instrumentalization of collective feelings.[13] Building on this scholarship, I position affect as having prime importance for a study of aesthetics that seeks to understand and expand the collectivity we call Latinidad. The negative affect I invoke here is not of the nihilistic vein that has come to characterize the antirelational, "no future" camp of gay theory propelled by Lee Edelman.[14] Instead, I invoke the affective heuristic that avoids foreclosure of utopian longing for the future, the same heuristic proffered by a Muñozian camp of queer theory that privileges a nonhierarchical commons, a being-with defined by a logic not-yet-here Muñoz called queerness.[15] This not-yet-here, Muñoz argued, following the work of Marxist cultural theorist Ernst Bloch, was glimpsed often through minoritarian aesthetics.[16] I thus direct our attention to modes of community formation and social critique rooted in minoritarian abject performances as well as a refusal of identitarian coherence, a root and refusal that nonetheless coalesce into Latino affiliation and possibility theorized by a growing cadre of scholars as "brownness."[17] The depathologizing of negative affects glimpsed in the aesthetic renders them "resources for political action rather than as its antithesis," lending a predictive value to the aesthetic, opening up possible futures for our close interrogation.[18]

In *Abject Performances*, I both indicate the continued relevance and impact of aesthetic theory and advocate for its robust engagement in Latino studies in order to shift, within the ideologies it proffers, what we are able to imagine and demand of our political practices. Given scholarship that has shown us the centrality and indeed mutual constitutiveness of cultures of taste and distinction to those that regulate the strictures of race, classical

aesthetic theory, specifically Immanuel Kant's offerings on the beautiful and sublime, must be engaged to make sense of dominant structuring logics of aesthetics and its effects but also contemporary elaborations of race.[19] With its rich history of the romantic embellishment of emotion, the Kantian structure of the sublime, specifically, serves as a necessary conduit if centering affect when thinking through the political workings of aesthetics. Instead of a desire for and focus on recuperative beauty—the other category of judgment in the Kantian dyad—the sublime is a complicated and vexed category that, as I show below and throughout, reveals the limits and fissures within the dominant organizing logic for aesthetic engagement derived from the famed enlightenment philosopher. My own theorization of the abject within the frame of the category of the sublime shows how an aesthetic of abjection can indicate a point beyond the horizon of what is currently known, provoked, or arrived at through negative affect. In doing so, the abject propels the sublime to simultaneously undermine the very logic of its framing.

Departing from Kant's foundational work, I designate the aesthetic as a collision with the sensate—the activation of the sensorial realm—and the political world within which it is bound, honing in on the subjectivities that might emerge from this collision.[20] The aesthetic here is a decidedly political and historically constituted terrain, an Althusserian apparatus that enables us to explore the subject that is hailed by aesthetic engagement as performatively construed and constructed while also querying the limited conventions through which individuals matter as subjects in and of (or denied) modernity. Foregrounding a performative understanding of the subject, *Abject Performances*, then, explores aesthetics as a site for the doing of a Latinidad predicated on a shared sense of being and a way of performing the self often in negative relation to majoritarian publics, a dynamic we might call intrinsically abject.

It then follows that within aesthetics, performance—broadly understood—and the challenges it poses to spectators is particularly generative in my analyses. Throughout I center practitioners that generate sustained cultural encounters within both the expected confines of art performance and installation but also the commercial endeavors of television and the religious stage. Durationality of audience engagement comes to be a key component of performance as I understand it, especially as it provides an affective link to the sublime within which I root abjection as an aesthetic practice. Theorized as boundless and without form, the sublime is evoked

by performance's resistance to restrictive formal parameters in favor of the temporal drag of performance events that provide the sustained occasion to be accosted by an aesthetic against beauty.

Below I elaborate the two principal strands of theory on which *Abject Performances* builds: theories on the abject, opened up by the figure of the mother—occluded in the scene with which I opened—and Kantian aesthetic theory, whose structuring logic urgently requires our attention given its continued cultural impact. Both have long scholarly histories, especially in postmodern cultural criticism. I bring together these genealogies, unable to dislodge the modern subject forged through imperial and colonial projects that they rely on, to posit abjection as a fissure capable of reorienting our aesthetic engagement and therefore the politicized subjects we can imagine, relevant both within and beyond Latino studies.

Abject Mother Matters

Abjection, as an aesthetic strategy that reverberates in the social realm, emerges from an engagement with the scholarship of feminist and queer theorists who grapple with the legacies of psychoanalysis to reflect on projects of subjectivation as well as critical race scholars and their writing on abjection and specifically racialized minoritarian populations. A significant point of reference for these scholars, and for my own study, is Julia Kristeva's influential *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, a Lacanian psychoanalytic tome that reflects on abjection as tied to the process of subject formation in part through literary analysis. For Kristeva, the abject is distinguished as something other than subject or object, sharing with the object its opposition to the speaking "I."[21] The abject coheres the subject through its exclusion as an in-between, ambiguous, and composite intermediary entity, yet threatens the constitution of the subject who is invested in the myth of wholeness and completeness lest he acknowledge the process by which he becomes subject. As Karen Shimakawa explains in her work on Asian American abjection, the abject in Kristeva refers to both an ontological state—the entity opposed to the subject, "the condition/position of that which is deemed loathsome"—and a continual process "by which that appraisal is made," involving the jettisoning that confirms but also repeatedly determines the status of that which "disturbs identity, system, order [and] does not respect borders, positions, rules."[22] In other words, the subject is perpetually differentiating itself from the not-quite-subject, relying on an expulsion of what Darieck Scott calls "objects-to-be"

to establish a relationship with the abject of simultaneous "attraction and repulsion."[23]

This theorization of subject formation lends itself well to thinking through the composition of Latinidad, a category already under duress by discourses on race and ethnicity that conjures diverse and unstable subjectivities. Dominant U.S. relationships to Latinos can be characterized by the above-mentioned attraction/repulsion dynamic. At times we are called into the life of the nation, invited to provide labor and to vote with our strong family values, while at other times we are central to xenophobic discourses that seek to expel or remove Latino traces from the national body. What is clear in this dynamic is the failure to account for the diversity of Latinidad within and across the national groups understood as Latino that, in some places, have become the demographic majority.[24] Some Latino national/ist groups were already present as conglomerations of different empires with their own enduring legacies of racial stratification when the U.S. was expanding its own borders; others were welcomed during specific historical moments as symbolic of reigning political ideologies; still others are part of the United States' colonial present. This is part of a dynamic Antonio Viego identifies as the queerness of Latinidad that "disturbs the logic by which ethnicity/race can be posed as a binary pair," concepts readily, if problematically, applicable to other minoritarian groups.[25] Latinidad's queerness as defined above is at the core of how I read and understand the political possibilities of Latino abject performances. Understood in this way, Latinidad signals an inherent incoherence whose queerness is shared by the figure of the pathologized mother eschewed in the political performance with which I began, herself outside normative prescriptions, primed to make use of abjection as a politicized strategy.

Turning to Kristeva allows us to understand why the abject mother, a significant figure in the history of representations of Latinidad, matters. In her *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva suggests that the maternal figure is central for the negative process of subject formation described above.[26] If we read Kristeva's "mother" not as an actual empirical mother but rather as a symbolic mother within a discursive order where heteropatriarchy is dominant, entering proper subjecthood entails abasement and expulsion of the feminine.[27] The subject must cast out the beloved symbol of that which is weak and despised in a patriarchal order in order to acquire social power, indeed, to cohere as subject. Further application of abjection to the social material realm allows us to reflect on the formation of a normative national

identity cohered by the casting out of other undesirable bodies whose own interiority is diminished.

In her *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler facilitates precisely an application of the symbolic to the social, providing a model of subjectivity forged through performative enactment that has served as a touchstone for scholars who elaborate a theorization of the abject through minoritized populations. Butler argues that the status of "subject" is guaranteed through an "unlivable" domain—the uninhabitable zones variously and "densely" populated by minoritized communities, significantly always "'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation."[28] Described as a foundational part of a system by both Butler and Kristeva, the resistive possibilities of the concept of the abject has been questioned. It is instead perceived as a reifying element of the social order.[29] But like Butler's now-famous offerings on gender's performative operation, an aesthetics of abjection makes visible the continuous labor required to cohere a dominant majority but also the dangers of desires for normative inclusion that will require repudiation of other abjects if seeking out proper subject status. Given Latinidad's instability as a performative site for the doing of racialized subjectivity, the elaboration of abjection in this book capitalizes on the lack of a proper singular subject that centers the antinormative sensibility at the core of brownness.

Those who do not desire to move from abject to subject but instead perform an abject collision that threatens to reveal the inequalities of a national body insistent on a legacy of freedom and equality propel my argument. While the figure of the pathologized Latina mother may serve to cohere national structures for the citizen subjects for whom the normatively structured home serves as principal site of patriotic indoctrination, she also has the ability to threaten the dignity of those normative structures, especially when she performs a critique and lack of aspiration to belong. In other words, the pathologized mother may indeed reify an existing order through a refusal of what the abject figure signifies, but threatens the nation's organizing myths when she insists on an alternate ethical barometer for understanding justice across national borders. What does it mean, then, that while included she is occluded from the stage of Latino national protests, such as the one with which I opened this book, unless she is recast as respectable through the ideological protection of normative family formations or the sheen of student robes? What might it mean to embrace her symbolic abjection and the strategies that could offer?

With this figure in sight, a focus on Latino abjection does not posit Lati-

nidad as an exemplary site. Rather, following the important work of those who name the denizens of the abject realm, Latino abject aesthetic strategies expand the pantheon of available contestatory subjectivities while augmenting possible approaches to politicized aesthetics. Previous scholarship has elaborated the abject realm as composed of a largely minoritized populace providing a model to think about collectivity through negative affect as well as ways to think about abjection as a resistant engagement with identity politics writ large.[30] Few works center abjection in conjunction with Latinidad. It is no surprise that those that do share a deployment of queerness as an analytic to highlight the disruptive potential of abjection against dominant master narratives but also against those identity-reifying and exclusionary ones that organize minoritarian populations.[31] In her writing on recovering pleasure from our shameful desires as captured by a pornographic archive, for example, Juana María Rodríguez offers a counterintuitive proposition: "Rather than proposing a decolonial project aimed at wiping away the taint of racialized abjection," she states, "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."[32] In her argument for entanglement with the complex affects that surely accompany an appeal to the abject, we are entreated to consider what might be useful about abjection. Instead of a rejection of abjection or working in opposition to its ethos—for instance, producing uplifting subject positions shored up by positive figures—given diversity successes and demands for national incorporation, an embrace of abjection as an aesthetic strategy allows us to center different goals and possibilities that, for myself as for Rodríguez, has "world-making" potential. I analyze a range of performative enunciations that show us how abjection becomes a powerful aesthetic mode to highlight the limits of assimilation that reinforce hegemonic norms by underscoring their desirability, simultaneously revealing and mobilizing the always abject root of difference. In doing so, abjection builds on women of color feminist approaches—architected in those Lordeian houses of difference—to coalition building and imagining futurity.[33]

Engaging abjection specifically as a heuristic additionally highlights the performative strategies of a Latinidad that makes its way within existing and minoritizing logics. Again, while not an exemplary site, the case studies explored in each of the chapters of this book reveal Latinidad as a promising rubric within which to explore the offerings of abjection. The works

of the profiled cultural producers significantly gesture toward a mode of being beyond respectability politics of proper minority comportment in a postracial era.[34] To be clear, I am not centering here on a dynamic of ontological desire—a desire to be abject—but one of recognition of a social location and strategies to propel this recognition into a destabilizing force. While recent bombastic neonativist utterances on the national stage may seem to call for a counterstrategy of creating distance between abjection and minoritized communities through respectability, conservative performances of racism only underscore what we in communities of color have long known about the structure of nationalist fervor. It is against the politics of respectability and its seemingly successful dynamic of incorporation that I instead seek to parse out strategies for continued demands and expansion of what we understand as justice and freedom.

Latino abject performances reveal abjection not as a resource for empowerment fueled by a desire for normative inclusion but as a resource geared toward an ungraspable alternative social organization, a not-yet-here illuminated by the aesthetic. Mine is an elaboration of abjection aware of potential disappointments—a Blochian hope distinct from unhinged utopian dreaming that is tethered and reserved in its hope for the not-yet-here—but that is nonetheless insistent on an engagement with negative affect.[35] Led by the abject mother out of Kristeva and through Butler, abject performative strategies reveal a way beyond the entrenchment of respectability politics to which the robed student gestures. Centering the performative through the aesthetic requires that we take up one of its dominant organizing theories in productive critique in order to transform our understanding of an influential site often regarded as peripheral to political concerns despite its ability to structure our everyday. Namely, Immanuel Kant's aesthetic philosophy.

Kant on Cable

When performance artist Nao Bustamante—one of two performers under consideration in chapter 3—was asked to explain her abject performance *Barely Standing* (2010), she instead engaged her judges in a conversation about process, an elaboration of where she was trying to arrive and what wasn't supposed to, but ended up being, read by her audience. Echoes of an earlier proclamation—"I'm not responsible for your experience of my work"—lingered in the air between artist and judges. Bustamante refused to provide a coherent narrative to explain what her judges perceived as mas-

turbatory fecal play, a reading Bustamante would neither confirm nor reject. The visibly distraught collective of judges found a representative voice in Jerry Saltz, the resident art critic, who summarized the discussion and provided what would later serve as the logic for Bustamante's dismissal, as follows: "So you don't really know what this piece is, we don't know what the piece is and it comes off, therefore, as incredibly familiar kind of adolescent mixed with shock-your-grandmother performance."[36] Bustamante's was the fourth elimination of the televised competition *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist*, which premiered during the summer of 2010 on the cable television network Bravo. Modeled after its successful sibling antecedents, *Project Runway* and *Top Chef*, all of Magical Elves Productions lineage, *Work of Art* elaborated a caricature of Kantian aesthetic judgment that informs broad approaches to the creation, reception, and judgment of cultural production. Its presence here, on cable, underlines the importance of a rigorous engagement with the theoretical apparatus that has informed the formation of art history as a field and process and that now seeps into the everyday and widely accessible format of television, especially for the consideration of the visual field within which Latinidad is signified. It is for this reason that I turn directly to Kant and his seminal work on aesthetics.

Kant's third critique, *The Critique of Judgment*, presents a disjointed, often tangentially constructed theory on beauty and the sublime, pure aesthetic judgment, the valuation of taste, and the figure of the genius—issues central to the discipline of art history and its project of canon formation as well as its culture of experts. For Kant the artist bears the status of genius, with innate aptitude guided by the rules of nature. This genius-artist's production of fine art is operationally concerned with attaining beauty through similitude or representational authenticity. Though limited by the form of the object itself, its subjective purposiveness, beauty is nonetheless predominantly concerned with quality; its judgment spurred by positive pleasure distinct from emotion, which Kant considers foreign to beauty. This absence of emotion or affect comes to be of prime importance. Indeed, Kant explains that the beautiful "is the symbol of the morally good, and only in this light (a point of view natural to every one, and one which every one exacts from others as a duty) does it give us pleasure with an attendant claim to the agreement of every one else, whereupon the mind becomes conscious of a certain ennoblement and elevation above mere sensibility to pleasure from impressions of sense, and also appraises the worth of others on the score of a like maxim of their judgment."[37] By

establishing the beautiful as something naturally agreeable, through the repetition of "every one," and by way of a pleasure that simultaneously makes those enacting a judgment of beauty aware of an "ennoblement and elevation" among "every one else," Kant draws a connection between the moral and the aesthetic that pretends universality. The judgment of beauty, then, is determined by feelings of pleasure that provide a standard of universal validity. To achieve universality, declarations of beauty must be derived strictly from representation and must not be concerned with the real existence of the object, its material life or economy. For Kant, the ideal spectator, or judge of taste, therefore, must be disinterested. Pure aesthetic judgment cannot be tainted by empirical delight.

While Kant's organizing logic continues to inform cultures of spectatorship and especially judgment, the cultural and visual turn that can be said to constitute cultural studies has insisted on a study of the visual and aesthetics that is more broadly alive to relationships of power, placing cultural production squarely within social relations and in relation to capital, while expanding possible objects of study.[38] This scholarship insists that cultural products participate in ideological projects with the ability to hail spectators into specific subject positions and that aesthetic judgments partake in this dynamic. While aesthetic judgment, this scholarship helps us see, is "historically and socially conditioned," what the Kantian system "demanded was the discrete suppression of the vicissitudes of interpretive desire—social investment, particular identifications, and personal biases—under the imperatives of critical rigor."[39] Framed as such, it is no surprise then when we read that to serve as an appropriate judge, Kant stipulates that "[only] when men have got all they want can we tell who among the crowd has taste or not" and that taste "has not yet emerged from barbarism."[40] For this overbearing system of aesthetic judgment, the supposed "every one" that is capable of exerting fair judgment cited in Kant's earlier passage has a classed and gendered position that is absent from want and thus necessarily excludes those who don't participate in the plentitude required for disinterest, despite pretensions of universality—the poor, women, and racialized peoples. I emphasize these passages to show how race and class, among other vectors, are built into the foundation of Kantian aesthetic theory and the ideas of taste, judgment, and distinction, which structure contemporary cultural apparatuses.[41]

The Enlightenment project of modernity (of which Kant is a preeminent poster boy) instituted a tripartite division of knowledge wherein a culture

of experts developed treatises on morals, science, and aesthetic theory.[42] The expert subject at the core of this development and division of modern knowledge systems needs to be thought of alongside those denied the category of subject. Through Kristeva, who amplifies our understanding of those that don't partake in the prerequisite plentitude described above, we can understand these individuals denied subjecthood as Enlightenment's abject. In his study of the concurrent emergence of cultures of taste and slavery, Simon Gikandi calls forth the abject ghostly presence of those "excluded from the domain of modern reason, aesthetic judgment, and the culture of taste" who are yet integral to its formation.[43] Indeed, Enlightenment's abject individuals emerge as a consequence of the relationship between aesthetics, among other cultural discourses, and structured racial and gender dominance and its economies—the selling of black bodies and the dispossession and displacement of native peoples—even when these were "structurally construed to be radical opposites."[44] These dynamics, Gikandi underscores, forge a dialectical relationship that serves as a condition for modernity, showing us the relevance for the application of Kristeva's theory of abjection on the aesthetic in order to understand constitutively hierarchized subject formations as integral to cultural apparatuses and built into the practices of spectatorship seeking beauty as the ideal.[45] If the subject is reified through its judgment of beauty, through representational simulacrum, what are the effects of cultural practices that avoid representation or Kantian purposiveness?

Kant brackets a much more interesting, though less elaborated, set of affective reactions as having to do with the sublime: an aesthetic judgment, triggered more by displeasure than pleasure, which captures precisely the limits of the imaginable. Described as about "negative experience[s] of *limits*," the category of the sublime has enjoyed contemporary critical attention.[46] Theorists of the sublime have argued that this is because the category of beauty "seems inadequate to account for the most recent contemporary arts, which have been interpreted as disruptive of classical and especially formalist form," or, as Sianne Ngai has argued, in order to meet "the twentieth-century avant-garde's attempt to separate the concepts of art and beauty."[47] It is precisely in its designation of the limits of the imaginable where I find promising misfires in the apparatus of the aesthetic.

Kant describes sublimity as directly connected to emotion, as opposed to the specifically articulated un-emotion-like pleasure of beauty. In distinction to the form-boundedness of beauty, a judgment of the sublime

can be triggered by objects without form, producing what Kant describes as "negative pleasure." Within philosophy, the sublime has been theorized as the emotive site that frustrates reason—it is at once pleasurable and repulsive. The sublime is precisely about this seemingly unrepresentable paradox; it is "to be found, for its part, in an 'object without form' and the 'without-limit' is 'represented' in it or on the occasion of it, and yet gives the totality of the without-limit to be *thought*."[48] In other words, the sublime is most beckoned by the formally permeable or unbounded while providing the "occasion" to contemplate its own "without-limitness." Additionally, its affective proximity to unknowing, "awe" and "wonder," can "blur into terror."[49] This dissolution and formlessness has marked the sublime, in a way similar to abjection, as affiliated with queerness, despite its association with nature and religious transcendence; a queerness capable of magnifying the possibilities of Latinidad as a useful rubric.[50]

Bustamante's appearance on *Work of Art* was an extension of her televisual and popular culture interventions, dating back at least to the early 1990s.[51] Her grandmother-shocking performance suggests the type of abject failure around which this book is organized. Failing to create shocking art in line with commercial cable network standards, Bustamante instead challenged her judges to grapple with what Jennifer Doyle calls "difficult feelings," to excavate the affective terrain provoked by aesthetics beyond beauty, a terrain shared with the sublime's awe and wonder, as well as its queerness.[52] As Doyle explains, a difficult cultural text "addresses the political and historical dimension of our personal selves; it also expands the sphere of the intimate."[53] The abject as genre is characterized by difficulty—narratively and temporally—leaving spectators uncertain of their experience, a consequence of which is a self that ruminates, as Doyle suggests, on the political and historical as funneled through the personal, a deeply feminist intervention. Further, lingering or residual aftershocks of feeling returns the spectator to the performance into the indefinite future. The performance's boundaries extend beyond the knowable. They are both difficult to dismiss and difficult to sustain. They provoke the sublime and its attendant ambivalence and ambiguity. They unsettle spectators, constructed as cool and disinterested in the Kantian schema, affectively drawing them in to the disrupting parameters of the work.

For some, the sublime is necessarily emotionally disinterested and transcendent, much like the judgment of beauty, arguing that the sublime is sublime precisely because of "its emphatic affective resolution."[54] In my

reading of Kant, however, his attempts to narrate resolution are tinged with uncertainty and anxiety, revealing attempts to grapple with the changing world. Bringing abjection as a concept to bear on aesthetic theory, the sublime is rendered vulnerable, especially when we consider its fruition as also reflecting a collision with racial and cultural difference and the incorporation of this difference through exhibitionary practices, recasting the awe and terror of racial difference into consumable and graspable beauty through truthful representation. In Kant's sublime, I read a fissure of possibility from which we can mine challenges to the very political apparatus it constructs in tandem with the beautiful. This possibility is activated through the use of the abject precisely by those cultural producers interested in provoking the spectator into the realm of the "indiscernible or unnameable, undecidable, indeterminate and unrepresentable," especially in relationship to racialized difference and identity formation.[55] At its most basic level, this book argues that abject performances produce a generative affective vortex within which a politics is elaborated by irreverently tapping the sublime. Traced back to and alongside the historic mobilizations of the late 1960s and early '70s that we now credit for effecting social change, the questions at the center of this book revolve around the alternative worldscapes illuminated by abject performances.

Abjection Performed

As is illuminated by the case studies that follow, the cultural producers of this study resist, play with, and frustrate their reinscription into hegemonic logics, pushing the sublime to rend asunder the dominant aesthetic apparatus through the abject, such that we might glimpse other possible arrangements of politicized collectivity. Latino studies scholars have long engaged in recuperative art historical excavations and canon reformation, seeking participation, indeed representation, in a broadly Eurocentric field. I take seriously the investment in identity formation and recuperation displayed in aesthetic practices from the hegemonic iterations of the Latino and feminist movements focused on creating empowered minority identities through biologizing and essentializing rhetoric. However, like Butler, I "despair over public politics when identity becomes its own policy," with boundaries policed and shored up at the expense of those whose visibility disrupts the uplifting image of a respectable population but who nonetheless deserve inclusion in the public life of the nation.[56] Consequently, in the case studies that follow, I seek to broaden critical perspectives on the

relationship between politics and aesthetics by challenging the limited conventions upon which political art rests within the field of Latino studies, namely community building and ego reinforcement through recuperative identity formation. Through a politicized engagement with aesthetic theory rooted in the sublime, a disruptive, abject aesthetic practice can provide a site to shift "away from a hermeneutic that is primarily attuned to the epistemological"—to center a hermeneutic of doing as opposed to a known identity—when thinking about Latinidad.[57]

Abject Performances elaborates this disruptive aesthetic practice through a series of case studies on the abject aesthetic strategies of those Latino artists and cultural producers who shunned the standards of respectability used to conjure concrete minority identities by the most widely recognized political actors within activist communities since the late 1960s. Collectively they privilege the negative affect that most often becomes a target for elimination in recuperative identitarian projects. I draw from a diverse expressive archive ranging from the early performances of Cuban exile Ana Mendieta and the East Los Angeles collective Asco to the popular culture interventions of Chicana artist Nao Bustamante, as well as from the mass cultural production of ugliness on prime-time television's *Ugly Betty*, to the performative testimonies of personal subjection of Latino Mormons. This archive not only illustrates the broad performative cultural texts that help us think about abjection across different sites but also decenters the organization of Latino studies focused on a particular U.S. national coast, border, or national grouping and resists offering a teleological progress narrative. While temporally I shift from the late 1960s and early '70s, with performers engaged in productive critique of dominant movement politics within the liberal feminist and Chicano nationalist movements, to contemporary cultural producers negotiating the legacies of these movements—their successes and failures—I do so to show the parallel existence and persistence of abject strategies to those that are much more recognized and celebrated as politically efficacious. Geographically, I move across the nation from California to the Midwest and New York, with transnational gestures out to the Caribbean and Mexico, attentive to regional particularity while nonetheless emphasizing affective collectivity.

The first half of *Abject Performances* uses performance artists Mendieta (chapter 1) and the collective Asco (chapter 2) to reflect on and augment the art practices of the liberal feminist movement and Chicano nationalism, respectively. As the best-known artists with the largest amount of scholarship

on their work, the first two chapters modify art historical narratives while making aggressive political claims about the offerings of these artists and abjection more broadly. Chapter 1, "Other Desires: Ana Mendieta's Abject Imaginings," seeks out an alternative framing of the Cuban-born artist long lauded for her Silueta Series (1973–1980), an earth-body works series that occupies a large expanse of the artist's working life and serves as the principal focal point that orients scholarship on her reception. This chapter, on the other hand, looks to Mendieta's engagement with alterity, the racial and gender vectors approached through the unsettling aesthetic force of her early abject performances from the 1970s. These performances have been historically relegated to a cursory status in the art historical canon and sometimes dismissed as inconsequential juvenilia in favor of her long-sustained Siluetas, with only recent shifts in scholarly focus. Art historical narratives into which Mendieta has been conscripted seek to interject her and her influence into a continuum of modern, minimalist, postmodern, and contemporary artists, sometimes drawing on this early work for their mapping. Instead, I am interested in situating Mendieta squarely within a theoretical genealogy of women of color feminisms and queer of color critique, an epistemological project that enlivens the political import of Mendieta's avant-gardism. I focus on abjection as a politicized aesthetic strategy, linking her early performances to her curatorial work in the early 1980s. These then bookend and reframe the more-recognized earth-body works in order to revise their critical interpretations. This frame requires a tracing of Mendieta's transnational currents and her negotiation of a racialized self through the racial stratifications of multiple locations—including Cuba, the U.S. Midwest, and Mexico—theorized comparatively alongside blackness. While not a redemptive reading of Mendieta's Siluetas, nor a dismissal of their aesthetic possibilities, I reflect on their epistemological contours, brought into focus anew when bookmarked by the abject and oppositional aesthetic practices that precede and exceed the Silueta Series. Ultimately, I argue Mendieta's recourse to the abject brings into focus analogous and shared relations to dominance by minoritized subjects beyond Cuban or even Latino particularity, and certainly beyond the essentialist feminist camp to which her Siluetas are often relegated, allowing us to think expansively about Mendieta's contributions specifically to the field of Latino studies, but also more broadly for American and ethnic studies to insist on comparative frameworks and expanded boundaries for the field.

Chapter 2, "Phantom Assholes: Asco's Affective Vortex," shifts our focus

to California's East Los Angeles via the art collective Asco, rough contemporaries of Mendieta's. Just as Mendieta broadened a liberal feminist movement's understanding and deployment of the gendered body, Asco broadens Chicano nationalist understandings of community. A surge in Asco scholarship and exhibition, galvanized predominantly by two Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) exhibits—*Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement* (2008) and *Asco: Elite of the Obscure, a Retrospective, 1972–1987* (2011)—has significantly expanded the accessibility of the Asco archive, including an extended network of Asco collaborators. Together, these contributions extend an invitation to rethink Asco's artistic and political contributions.[58] Accepting that invitation, this chapter renarrativizes existing accounts of Asco's formation and unifying ethos to show how the group's abject aesthetic strategies offer an alternative political vision of national belonging predicated on uncivic participation. Foregrounding a queer discordant site of genesis and recruitment that recasts Asco not as a concrete group but as an abject structure of feeling in Chicano East Los Angeles, I show how Asco's abject play uniquely highlights and challenges Chicano nationalist heteronormativity and its connection to representative presence as the grounds for enfranchisement in order to problematize sedimented models for minority national inclusion. By harnessing negative affect, Asco instead reveals a vulnerable collectivity that coheres around and validates feelings of disenchantment and dis-ease while resisting a reparative move toward coherent minority subjectivity and unified communities.

Together, these chapters intervene in prescribed modes of political engagement for Latinos. They entreat us to expand our bounds of study but also to be attuned to the local. They offer insight across multiple fields—critical race theory, queer theory, and gender and sexuality studies. They offer us ways to think about collectivity differently, to think through racialization comparatively by centering affect to arrive at, not unity, but a dynamic desire to work together for a world not-yet-here. Though these artists were sympathetic and shared political desires with those movements they traversed alongside, they chose abjection as a strategy not to belong to a hegemonic order but to critique it. They offer us a model for the doing of a Latinidad that is contestatory and heterogeneous.

The second half of *Abject Performances* shifts to consider contemporary cultural producers negotiating the legacies of the Chicano and liberal feminist movements. During what Ralph Rodriguez has called the postnationalist moment of the 1980s to the early 2000s, Latinos have been brought

into and pushed out of the national body, sometimes at concurrent historical moments.[59] The third and fourth chapters cover the same terrain, taking us from the 1980s, dubbed "the decade of the Hispanic," through the liberal multiculturalism of the 1990s, peppered as it was with xenophobic backlash, and into the neoliberal present. Given the incorporation of difference in the contemporary political arena in what some have called neoliberal multiculturalism,[60] in chapter 3, "Of Betties Decorous and Abject: *Ugly Betty*'s America la fea and Nao Bustamante's America la bella," I pair an analysis of America Ferrera's mainstream performance of "Betty" in the prime-time television series *Ugly Betty* (2006–2010) and the abject performances of femininity throughout performance artist Nao Bustamante's repertoire, but especially her *America, the Beautiful* (1995–1998, 2002) and her appearance on Bravo's *Work of Art* (2010), in order to make sense of work that challenges the beautiful as linked to a politics of tolerance and diversity.

Throughout *Abject Performances*, different cultural producers are shown to use performance to bring disparate spaces into dialogue. For Mendieta and Asco, these spaces were the urban and rural landscape, the space of the museum or gallery, and that of quotidian thoroughfare. Their performances engaged a general public beyond the art world, whether through the accidental encounter—as in the case of Mendieta's bloody installations—or by performing down the middle of a busy street—as in the case of Asco's promenades. Thus, these first two chapters engage and expand the sites of art. The second two chapters further expand these sites, an action facilitated by the seemingly unlikely pairing of Bustamante and Ferrera in chapter 3. Like Mendieta and Asco, Bustamante engages political movements and a broader non-art-specific public but does so through her presence on television. Because Bustamante's performative brand has us approach performance art and television differently, in chapter 3 she is put in dialogue with another key performance of Latinidad on prime-time television, Ferrera's ugly Betty.

Both performers elaborate a gendered and racialized subjectivity, legible by reference to traditional standards of normative beauty. I argue that Ferrera's camp ugliness reifies this standard, functioning as the necessary complement to its white binary opposite and, by the show's end, coming to elaborate what we might call a mimetic minority beauty, providing popular aesthetic support for political strategies of racial uplift and decorum. Meanwhile, Bustamante's contemplation of the beautiful performs abject

negotiations, deploying queer tactics that highlight the uncontainable excesses that seep through the mechanisms for beautifying the Latina body, as well as the rigid categorizations of proper normative minority identity, through an embrace of failure. Against the backdrop of multiple surges in anti-immigrant legislation and, counterintuitively, minority political representation, the juxtaposition of these two performers provides insight on the gendered incorporation of difference as structured by popular cultural apparatuses and explores queer abject aesthetics as a political strategy of identitarian refusal.

Where chapter 3 expands my fields of analysis beyond fine art performance to include popular television, the final chapter, "Arriving at Apostasy: Performative Testimonies of Ambivalent Belonging," opens out to yet a different terrain of cultural expression, the stage of religious conviction, and offers a sort of author performance for religious studies. Chapter 4 analyzes the performative testimonies of Latino members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints—popularly known as the Mormons—as well as a personal testimony of apostasy, an abject position that marks a willful departure from the organized church. The performative testimonies are augmented by a consideration of Mormon visual culture. The paintings contained within the central doctrinal text of the faith, the Book of Mormon, provide a visual entry point for my analysis. I argue that together with scripture they issue an interpellative call to several communities (Native American, Polynesian, Latin American, and Latino) through the protagonists they narrate as pre-Columbian denizens of the American continent, foremost among them the iniquitous Lamanites and righteous Nephites. In this chapter, I focus on Latino citation of Lamanite heritage and their affective oscillation between an embrace of abjection and cultural nationalist celebration as they navigate their seemingly contradictory status within the church—they are of unique spiritual import yet are abject subjects within its hierarchy. A focus on testimony allows me to center the aesthetic sensuousness of religious experience as testimonies often narrate the individual's sublime encounter with the divine. I do so to explore the sublime revelry of religiosity, read against the grain of a Kantian aesthetic register, and expand my consideration of the politics of an aesthetic of abjection beyond the realm of the cultural sector. Following María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's insistence that "the act of testifying . . . issues an interpellative call to form a community of action," I analyze self-identified testimonies and testimonial enunciations both written and spoken as a

performative genre in order to map the subjects and communities hailed by testimony.[61] From the first Latino bishop's 1978 "Mormonism and the Chicano" to the published proclamations of members who have recently migrated and joined the church, necessarily abject Lamanite identification seems to facilitate a sense of ambivalent belonging. This closing chapter also facilitates a reflection on my own investment in abjection as a former member of the church, the ways abjection offered a way out of what felt like a position full of promise, one left wanting in its abdication to normative desires for respectability.

These two final chapters allow us to meditate on the prevalence of aesthetic structures in the quotidian realm. Further, they compel us to question the success of visibility and belonging through existing political, cultural, and social models. At a contemporary moment demarcated by the postracial incorporation of difference across representative forums, *Abject Performances* offers timely intervention. The assumption that visibility, or what Cristina Beltrán calls racial presence, "is quickly presumed to signify not only racial progress but racial justice" guides this book's desire to seek out a set of politicized aesthetic strategies alternative to those of the Latino cultural renaissance that often accompanied and supported those movements now punctuated by institutional successes.[62] In these movements, the goals of civic representation were literalized in representational or realist aesthetic codes. The political effects of aesthetics have long been theorized, with more recent scholarship highlighting its racial, sexual, and gendered implications.[63] I owe a genealogical debt to this scholarship when I stress the centrality of aesthetics and a critical engagement with aesthetic theory for our political imaginings, centering cultural production situated beyond the representational in style, composition, and political aspirations. My own study hopes to add to this body as well as to scholarship organized under the rubrics of American and ethnic studies, performance and religious studies, as well as Latino studies, visual culture, and gender and sexuality studies.

The cultural producers profiled in this book offer us an incremental expansion of performance as a heuristic: from Mendieta's intergallery critique at A.I.R. to Asco's community engagement on neighborhood streets, to Bustamante and Ferrera's televisual invocations, and finally to the corporeal gestures signaling a heavenly beyond.

Collectively, they also tell us something about the difficulty of sustaining abject performances, the precariousness of staying with abjection as a

strategy, but also, I hope, the difficulty in turning away from the possibilities it offers. Abject performances offer us a terrifyingly moving glimpse of a dynamism worth the risk of unfurling the polyester iridescence that cloaks respectability politics so that we might engage with the difficulty and promise of Latinidad's abject otherness.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 Hennessy-Fiske, "'Dreamers' Stage Action in Laredo."
2 Nicholls, *The DREAMers*, 147.
3 DREAMers take their name from the policy they promote: the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act.
4 In his study, *The DREAMers*, Nicholls credits these overlaps to the prevalence of LGTBQ-identifying leadership in the movement that has also made use of the queer symbology of the butterfly. The most visible artists of what some now call the undocu-queer movement include Faviana Rodriguez and Julio Salgado. The modality of queerness in their works is deserving of its own essay.
5 Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy," 402.
6 Bogado, "Here's How DACA Will Be Expanded under Obama"; Bogado, "The Executive Action Learning Curve"; and Bogado, "Obama Introduces Deferred Action for Parents."
7 Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge."

8 Gómez-Barris, "Regarding the Central American Child's Pain." In her "Regarding 'the Mother of Anchor-Children,'" Vera-Rosas argues that this figure "[has] been historically imagined as violable, impure, and unable to achieve familial normalcy, a precondition to being an upstanding female and U.S. citizen." One might think of Moynihan's pathologized black mother as a symbolic cognate.

9 For more on Latina mothers and the culture of poverty see Cruz-Malavé, *Queer Latino Testimonio*; and Vargas, "Rumination on Lo Sucio."

10 On anti-immigrant legislation, Vera-Rosas specifically cites the Birthright Citizenship Act of 2009 and 2013. In her article "Regarding 'the Mother of Anchor-Children,'" she offers a glimpse into what this strategy might look like through an analysis of Jesus Barraza's poster art. She ultimately argues that centering this specific figure allows us "to formulate a dream of alternative futures of freedom from race, class, sex, and citizenship boundaries, while establishing a continuation between the past and present policing of racialized maternity." Here I am interested in what this abject figure foregrounds and the deployment of abjection as an aesthetic strategy.

11 Much has been written about the incoherence of the category "Latino." I draw inspiration from, among others, the work of Viego, *Dead Subjects*; Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity*; and the recent special issue of *Women and Performance*, "Lingering in Latinidad: Theory, Aesthetics, and Performance in Latino/a Studies," edited by Guzmán and León.

12 Muñoz, "Feeling Brown," 68.

13 This is not a project that is invested in teasing out the differences between affect and feelings. Significant works that address affect and feelings include Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*; Highmore, "Bitter after Taste"; Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down" (among others); Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*; Doyle, *Hold It against Me*; and Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures*.

14 Working to elaborate a notion of queer temporality and noting the symbolic significance of the child to normative markers of time, Edelman argues that queerness charts an alternate mode of being in the world not beholden to those future symbolic inheritors, around whom heteronormative plans are structured, in favor of focusing on a present structured through the death drive (Edelman, *No Future*).

15 Muñoz, "Gimme Gimme This," 98, 96. In two of his final published essays, Muñoz emphasizes the reparative project he has been elaborating after his mentor Eve Kosofky Sedgwick. See Muñoz, "Gimme Gimme This"; and Muñoz, "Race, Sex and the Incommensurate."

16 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

17 This formation has been theorized as brownness by Latino studies scholars thinking beyond the models proffered by cultural nationalist ideologies including Muñoz, "Feeling Brown," "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down," "Vitalism's After-Burn," and "Wise Latinas" (among others); Vargas, *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music*; and Rodriguez, *Brown Gumshoes*.

18 Cvetkovich, "Public Feelings," 460. See also Love, *Feeling Backward*, who argues for the "need to pursue a fuller engagement with negative affects and with the intransigent difficulties of making feelings the basis of politics" (14).

19 Kant, *The Critique of Judgment* and *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*; Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*. See also Lloyd, "Race under Representation"; Jones, *Seeing Differently*; and Brown, *The Repeating Body*.

20 Highmore, "Bitter after Taste"; Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

21 See Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*, 15. For links on abjection and language, see Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

22 Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 3; Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

23 Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*, 17.

24 Census data released 1 July 2014 reveal that in California, Latinos are now the majority population.

25 Viego, *Dead Subjects*.

26 Kristeva's proposition that the mother is always already abject and her general adherence to Lacanian psychoanalysis, specifically what Wilkie-Stibbs calls a "reliance on the Oedipal paradigm," has garnered criticism or suspicion, especially from feminist theorists wary of psychoanalysis ("Borderland Children," 317). See Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*; and Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, for some of the critiques of Kristeva and the adoption of Batailles as the root of abject art in the 1990s. Also see Arya, *Abjection and Representation*, for the ways Kristeva both uses and transforms the psychoanalytic apparatus she draws from.

27 Menninghaus, *Disgust*.

28 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 3.

29 Georgelou, "Abjection and *Informe*," 27.

30 See especially Halperin, *What Do Gay Men Want?*; Shimakawa, *National Abjection*; and Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*. Halperin traces a queer, not psychoanalytic, genealogy of abjection into which he inserts Kristeva, seeking out a nonpathologizing account of abjection's appeal to gay men. For him, abjection reflects social stratifications, "an effect of the play of social power," that can promisingly congeal in collective "[expressions] of antisocial solidarity" (*What Do Gay Men Want?*, 71, 93). By casting abjection's function as such, he provides a way to move from Kristeva's model of interiority and through Butler's social matrix to a model for thinking about collectivity. For Shimakawa, abjection's collectivity, especially embodied Asian American collectivity, functions to cohere the notion of Americanness as national identity. Her invaluable study reminds us that "abjection is at once a specular and affective process" underscoring the utility of the performative for its study and inviting an engagement with aesthetics through its focus on the theatrical stage and the law (*National Abjection*, 19). Meanwhile, Scott's *Extravagant Abjection* seeks to reframe heroic narratives of overcoming historical legacies of trauma and abjection, instead performing queer readings of novels and essays of the "sexual exploitation or humiliation of black men . . . written by canonical African American authors in the 20th century" in order to render ab-

jection a source of "counterintuitive *power*—indeed, what we can begin to think of as *black* power" (10, 9). Other contributions include Cruz-Malavé, "'What a Tangled Web!'"; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Nguyen, *A View from the Bottom*; Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies*; Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*; and Wilkie-Stibbs, "Borderland Children," in addition to the work in Latino studies cited below.

31 In his brief meditation on the politicized possibilities of abjection for queer Latino men living with AIDS, Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez narrates "bodies in revolt" as "corporalize[d] difference and heterogeneity with the potential to never cease 'challeng[ing their] master' (2) with a boundary crisis, the instability of meaning, and the disruption of order" ("Politicizing Abjection," 549). Deb Vargas's work on the queer analytic of *suciedad*—dirtiness—shows us there is much to be gained from pairing the study of Latinidad and the abject realm. Vargas offers us a study of *lo sucio*, suciedad, and *sucias* that spells out the characteristics of the discursive parameters through and in which the abject can occur that underscores the queerness at the core of Latinidad, amplifying Viego's claim of Latinidad's queer ethno-racial disruption. Within those social spaces marked by suciedad, Vargas locates a mode of queer sociality she terms *socia*-dad—a play on the phonic proximity between *sucia* (dirty) and *socia* (partner/colleague) (see Vargas, "Ruminations on Lo Sucio as a Latino Queer Analytic"; and Vargas, "Sucia Love").

32 Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures*, 21.

33 It is not my intention to position my own intervention against the decolonial project to which Rodríguez's points refer. A growing body of scholarship in many ways emerging from Latin American subaltern studies, the decolonial reframing of aesthetics within "global-local histories entangled with the local imperial history of Euro-American modernity, postmodernity, and altermodernity" is a project that renders visible many of the dynamics at play in my own study (Mignolo and Vázquez, "Decolonial AestheSis"). Indeed, in their "Decolonial AestheSis," Walter D. Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez's understanding of aesthetics as having played "a key role in configuring a canon, a normativity that enabled the disdain and the rejection of other forms of aesthetic practices, or, more precisely, other forms of aestheSis, of sensing and perceiving," outlines a social organization linked to aesthetic discourses that underscores the importance of its study. While scholarship focused on decoloniality stresses alternate origins and parallel understandings of sense and perception that Mignolo and Vázquez term aestheSis, I share with Rodríguez a desire to ruminate in the "taint of racialized abjection," situating it within one of the traditionally privileged categories of aesthetics, the sublime, with the hope of reorienting this dominant ideology instead of elaborating or exploring parallel practices. I do this with the understanding of Latinidad as a racial formation that emerged from and through these dominant discourses. On the decolonial, see also See, *The Decolonized Eye*; Hanna, Vargas, and Saldívar, *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*; and Lane, Godoy-Anativa, and

Gómez-Barris, "What Decolonial Gesture Is." Another project with a similar political impulse worth noting is Imogen Tyler's *Revolting Subjects*. Her study elaborates a distinct methodology that centers an "empirical archive" over the affective and aesthetic archive that is the focus of this study.

34 I want to make note of a not-unrelated literature on Latino shame and gay shame in particular by Cruz-Malavé, "What a Tangled Web!"; Pérez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!"; La Fountain-Stokes, "Gay Shame, Latina- and Latino-Style"; and Muñoz, "Race, Sex and the Incommensurate." These were largely a response to white gay scholarship on the topic, particularly as it emerged from the Gay Shame conference held at the University of Michigan in 2003. For more about the conference, see Halperin and Traub, *Gay Shame*.

35 Ernst Bloch posits artwork as performing a productive presentiment that can incite a longing look forward, an anticipatory illumination that "provides *a connection to knowledge* at the very least, and it provides a connection to the *material of grasped hope* at the very most" ("The Wish-Landscape Perspective in Aesthetics," 74, emphasis in original). As José E. Muñoz interpreted and applied him in his study of queer utopias, "the anticipatory illumination of certain objects is a kind of potentiality that is open, indeterminate, like the affective contours of hope itself" (*Cruising Utopia*, 7). Engagement with negative affect is a sentiment also echoed in Juana María Rodríguez's work when she writes, "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" (*Sexual Futures*, 12).

36 Starkman, "Episode 4."

37 Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, 121.

38 For more on the "visual turn," see Mitchell, *Picture Theory*; and on the development of visual culture see Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader*.

39 Doyle, *Hold It against Me*, 4–5; Jones and Stephenson, *The Performing Body/The Performing Text*, 3.

40 Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, 31, 39.

41 In his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, Kant makes the classed, sexed, gendered and racialized parameters for judgment extraordinarily clear in his dedicated sections on the differences between the genders and nations. Of special note is the appearance of colonization and slavery at the periphery of his study in his brief mention of slaves and noble savages. See also Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 22.

42 Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity."

43 Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, 5.

44 Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, xii.

45 Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, 29.

46 Morley, *The Sublime*, 15–16.

47 See Gasché, *The Idea of Form*, 119. Rancière argues similarly, stating, "The reinterpretation of the Kantian analysis of the sublime introduced into the field of art a concept that Kant had located beyond it. It did this in order to more effectively make art a witness to an encounter with the unrepresentable that cripples all thought, and thereby a witness for the prosecution against the arrogance of the grand aesthetico-political endeavor to have 'thought' become 'world'" (*The Politics of Aesthetics*, 10). Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 265.

48 Derrida, "Parergon," 41.

49 Morley, *The Sublime*, 12–13.

50 Brett Farmer has labeled the sublime "queer" as it can signal "radical discontinuity in sensory experience through which the quotidian is ruptured and transposed" ("The Fabulous Sublimity of Gay Diva Worship," 173).

51 For some, Bustamante's appearance on Bravo is itself a performance (Doyle, "Guest Stars"), and for others this is an experience that would lead to the development of her Soldadera project (Muñoz, "Wise Latinas"). I certainly read her participation in the series as a performance that possibly extended after her dismissal from the show into her viewing parties. I situate it, above, within the bounds of her earlier interventions.

52 Doyle differentiates between the acceptable difficulty within the art world, that of "the illegibility of nonfigurative and nonrepresentational work; the austerity of abstraction and minimalism; the rigor of institution critique," and the difficulty of audience engagement and discomfort (*Hold It against Me*, xvii).

53 Doyle, *Hold It against Me*, 146.

54 Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 19. Elsewhere she writes that sublime encounter "ends by reversing these initial challenges to the self's autonomy, culminating in 'inspiriting satisfaction' rather than unpleasure" (*Ugly Feelings*, 265–266).

55 Morley, *The Sublime*, 16.

56 Butler, "Imitations and Gender Insubordination," 311.

57 Muñoz, "The Sense of Watching Tony Sleep," 550.

58 Both exhibits, for example, produced voluminous catalogues of the same title with scholarly essays, images, and, in the case of the later exhibition, the reproduction of primary sources. In her "Lost Bodies: Early 1970s Los Angeles Performance Art in Art History" for the catalogue *Live Art LA: Performance in California, 1970–1983*, Amelia Jones delineates what can be considered the institutional archive of Asco. She writes, "For the past twenty years accounts of histories of Los Angeles and/or Chicano/a art have included the work of Asco—for example, the historically ground-breaking CARA: *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation 1965–1985* at the UCLA Wight Art Gallery in Los Angeles in 1990; the 2008 *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* show and the 2011 retrospective, part of the same Pacific Standard Time initiative supporting the book, *Asco Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective 1972–1987*, the latter two both at LACMA, an institution that has worked hard to redress its 1970s exclusion of Chicano art. And scholars such as David James, Chon Noriega, and C. Ondine Chavoya, Shifra

Goldman, and Marcos Sanches-Tranquillino have contributed important essays and books addressing Asco's history and practice. Perhaps most importantly, in 1998 Gamboa published his own collection of writings (edited by Noriega and entitled *Urban Exile*) which gives one side of the story, and the UCLA César E. Chavéz Center for Chicana and Chicano Studies acquired the archives of Gronk, among other key materials relating to Asco, in 2005–2007. The Center has also published a 2007 book by Max Benavidez on Gronk" (*Seeing Differently*, 133).

59 Rodriguez, *Brown Gumshoes*.

60 Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*.

61 Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination*, 156.

62 Beltrán, "Racial Presence versus Racial Justice," 138.

63 A list for this inspiring literature is long. A very short sampling includes Doyle, *Hold It against Me*; Nash, *The Black Body in Ecstasy*; Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies*; English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*; Fusco and Wallis, *Only Skin Deep*. Many, many more can be found in the footnotes throughout this book.

CHAPTER 1. OTHER DESIRES

1 Mendieta, *Dialectics of Isolations: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*. Catalogue. 1980; The A.I.R. Gallery Archive; MSS 184; 11; 440 Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

2 Ricky, "The Passion of Ana," 75.

3 Quote taken from the earliest mission statement found in the collective's archives from 1987. Mission statements, 1987–1991, The A.I.R. Gallery Archive; MSS 184, Series 1, Subseries B, 2:61, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

4 As José E. Muñoz explains, "Raymond Williams coined the term 'structure of feeling' to discuss the connections and points of solidarity between working-class groups and social experience that can be described as 'in process' yet nonetheless historically situated" ("Feeling Brown," 68). Further, Williams explains, "An alternative definition would be structures of experience: in one sense the better and wider word, but with the difficulty that one of its senses has that past tense which is the most important obstacle to recognition of the area of social experience which is being defined . . . not feeling against thought but thought as felt and feelings as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension" ("Structure of Feeling," 132).

5 Hong and Ferguson, *Strange Affinities*, 9.

6 Carl Andre, famous minimalist sculptor and husband to Ana Mendieta, was tried and acquitted after being charged with pushing his wife, naked, out of their apartment window, thirty-four stories high, to her death in 1985. Her body left an indentation in the roof of the deli below their window that many found resembled her Siluetas, especially those that made use of blood or red pigment.