

Archive, Affect, and the Everyday

Queer Diasporic Re-Visions

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Figure 7.11 *In the Air*

This essay explores the interface of archive, affect, and the everyday in the works of contemporary South Asian queer diasporic visual artists Allan deSouza and Chitra Ganesh. In their work, as I hope to show, queer diasporic affect becomes a portal through which history, memory, and the process of archiving itself are reworked, in order both to critique the ongoing legacies of slavery, colonialism, and contemporary forms of racialization, and to imagine alternative forms of affiliation and collectivity. The materiality of the everyday—the anti-monumental, the small, the inconsequential—is closely linked to this project of excavating the past: it is precisely through what Kathleen Stewart terms “ordinary affects” that saturate the everyday that this grappling with the past occurs (2007). My point of entry into a discussion of the work of deSouza and Ganesh is Saidiya Hartman’s much-praised memoir, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007). Hartman’s text traces her journey along a slave route in Ghana and is a powerful reckoning with slavery’s aftermath, its wiping out of individual and collective histories and genealogies. Situating Hartman’s memoir as an important intertext to the work of deSouza and Ganesh, as I do here, runs the risk of flattening out the distinctions between the kinds of diasporic roots and routes traveled by differently racialized populations. Hartman is an African American literary scholar and a descendent of slaves whose own familial genealogy fades into obscurity after three generations; her relation to Ghana and to the postcolonial Africans from all parts of the continent that she encounters there is marked with an irreducible sense of her own strangeness and estrangement. DeSouza, on the other hand, grew up in postcolonial Kenya, a descendent of Goan Indian immigrants who arrived in British-ruled East Africa in the 1930s to work on the railroads that were initially built by Indian indentured laborers in the late nineteenth century. He migrated with his family to London, then as an adult moved again to Los Angeles and San Francisco. His parents settled in Portugal, “one step closer to their colonial histories” (deSouza, 2008a). DeSouza comments on the spatial and temporal dislocations

engendered by these various movements as he recalls being viciously beaten in a racist attack in London: “perhaps I was too often in the wrong place, but if your family history and childhood experience are routed through three different colonies and their colonial powers—Goa under the Portuguese, India under the British, and Kenya, again British—then being in the wrong place and at the wrong time too easily becomes habitual.” Chitra Ganesh’s diasporic trajectory appears at first glance to be more straightforward than that of deSouza: born and bred in Brooklyn, NY, Ganesh is the daughter of South Indian immigrants from Calcutta who settled in New York in the early 1970s. Her parents were already cosmopolitan, migrant subjects before entering the US, in the sense that they belonged to the community of Tamil Brahmins that had become a settled presence in Calcutta since the 1920s; their background thus speaks to the displacements and movements that happen within the nation itself and prior to the experience of transnational migration. While Ganesh’s parents were part of the influx of mainly professional South Asians that entered into the US as a result of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, they did not follow the typical trajectory of South Asian middle class migrants. Her mother was a school teacher, her father a bank clerk, while their circle of acquaintances were other middle and working class South Asians who labored as mechanics, shop owners, and housewives. Significantly, they chose to remain in the multiracial urban environment of Brooklyn rather than escaping to the suburbs “as part of [the narrative of] desi immigrant upward social mobility,” as Ganesh puts it (Ganesh 2009).

Clearly the traumas and space/time disjunctures precipitated by slavery are distinct from those of indentureship and postcolonial displacement: each of these historical phenomena engenders its own affective ties, traps, and possibilities. At the same time, situating these formations as utterly incommensurate rather than as co-constitutive ignores, in Lisa Lowe’s evocative phrase, “the intimacy of four continents.” In her essay of the same name (2006), Lowe uses this phrase to name the “world division of labor emerging in the nineteenth century,” where Asian indentured labor was used to both supplement and replace African slave labor in the plantations of the Americas; the labor of black and brown bodies thus provided the conditions for republican statehood in Europe and North America (2006, p. 193). But Lowe also understands “intimacy” to name the “volatile contacts of colonized people” (p. 203) that this new division of labor engendered, and the possibility of cross-racial alliance that emerged from this contact. By considering the work of queer South Asian diasporic artists in tandem with Hartman’s memoir, I seek to illuminate the intimacies of these different diasporic histories, and trace some of their intersections and divergences as they engender specific forms of affect and temporality.

In the last chapters of Hartman’s memoir she journeys north, to “the heartland of slavery,” and experiences “a moment of fleeting intimacy” with a young Ghanaian man who is a descendent of slaves himself. This intimacy, she writes, “was not a matter of blood or kinship, but of affiliation. We were the children of slaves. We were the children of commoners” (2007, p. 204). This notion of affiliation, defined outside a logic of blood and kinship, in the words of one critic, “offers an active form of identification that can recognize difference, conflict, and change over time, an alternative to the ‘emptiness and irrelevance of an “African identity” in making sense of the Atlantic slave trade’” (Seigel 2008, n.p.). Hartman’s notion of affiliation here resonates with theories of kinship articulated by queer studies scholars, who have sought to map the bonds of relationality between subjects and communities outside of a recourse to blood, biological reproduction, and patrilineal genealogy. Indeed I would argue that it may be useful to read Hartman’s memoir as a queer text and as a work of queer theory, as it offers queer studies a model of non-blood-based affiliation that is routed in and through difference, in an awareness of the difficulties and traps of identification, rather than in a fantasy of sameness, wholeness, or completeness. The queerness of the text resides in its refusal of origins, in its insistence on the impossibility of tracing lineage and accessing the past through bloodlines, genealogy, or conventional historiography. The model of racialized subjectivity that Hartman sets forth, then, is one that is always already queer, in the sense that it is marked by non-reproductive futurity, the failure of generation, and the desires and losses associated with normative genealogies of belonging. Queerness here is not so much a brave or heroic refusal of the normative, as it appears in some narratives of queer subjectivity, as much as it names the impossibility of normativity for racialized subjects who are marked by histories of violent dispossession; for such subjects, a recourse to the comforting fictions of belonging is always out of reach.¹

A queer reframing of *Lose Your Mother*, then, brings to the fore those moments in the text that in fact reframe our understanding of “queerness” itself; these moments might otherwise be obscured if the text is read solely as a narrative of racial trauma and melancholia. Read through a queer lens, the text articulates a model of queer affiliation that may indeed be transitory and fleeting, and may not coalesce into an easily intelligible or quantifiable form of political coalition, but it nevertheless produces moments of affective relationality that open the door to new ways of conceptualizing the self and others. Hartman’s memoir does not address the presence or histories of non-Black Africans in postcolonial Ghana, nor does it comment on the relation between African Americans and other diasporic communities in the US. However we can use the model of affiliation that a queer reading of the text gives us to map the

intimacies of seemingly disparate diasporic trajectories. In this post 9/11 moment where South Asian and African American populations in the US have been quite explicitly framed through and against one another, it seems particularly urgent to create modes of analysis that account for these braided and overlapping diasporic histories.

It is precisely an excavation of the “fleeting intimacies” of cross-racial affiliation that fuels the recent, renewed interest in the pan-Third Worldist movements of the mid-twentieth century, such as the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the Non-Aligned Movement of the 1960s. Vijay Prashad’s (2008) reconsideration of the legacies of such Afro-Asian solidarity movements speaks powerfully to the desire on the part of contemporary scholars and activists of color to trace a genealogy of shared resistance to first world hegemony that works through and across racial and geographic difference. In an essay tellingly entitled “Bandung is Done: Passages in AfroAsian Epistemology,” Prashad recognizes that in a moment where “the bold pronouncements [of the Bandung era] for a radical reconfiguration of the international political economy has vanished . . . these excavations of AfroAsian solidarity might be nostalgic, anachronistic or even aesthetic” (Prashad, 2008, p. xiv). Indeed, generations of feminist and more recently queer scholars have long critiqued such pan-Third Worldist projects for their exclusions and hierarchies, both in their cultural nationalist and state nationalist forms. In keeping with these critiques, both Hartman’s text as well as the queer visual art that I discuss here can be seen as enacting a queer critique of the Bandung era moment and its promises of liberation and solidarity. Yet in its engagement with the pitfalls and dangers of both dominant and anti-colonial nationalist projects, such work also suggests that the memory of these apparently failed, ephemeral movements, marked as out of time and out of place, may still have a powerfully transformative effect on the present. Bandung may indeed be done as an explicit political platform, but there are other modes of Afro-Asian political relationality that can be gleaned if we produce alternative understandings of what constitutes the political. The texts that I discuss here demand that we rethink those perhaps anachronous cultural forms, practices, and affective relations (such as nostalgia) that may be dismissed as “merely” personal, apolitical, trivial, or transitory. This essay then contributes to a collective project that attends to the ties that have bound differentially racialized populations to one another, and that may ultimately provide the conditions of possibility for conjoined futures.

An exquisite meditation on diasporic loss and longing, *Lose Your Mother* is not a triumphal return to origins; rather, the diasporic sensibility that emerges from the text is one that is marked by the impossibility of return as well as, for the most part, of commonality or affiliation. Throughout much of Hartman’s narrative, there is unbridgeable distance

and alienation between her and those she encounters in Ghana. “The rupture was the story,” she writes, not the hope of recreating lineage and familial genealogy. Indeed the affect of diaspora, in Hartman’s text, is that of irredeemable loss, failure, longing, loneliness, defeat, and disappointment. It is these forms of negative affect that saturate the text, and where Hartman herself as narrator resides. Speaking of the numerous African American tourists who travel to Ghana to view slavery’s ruins, she writes, “did the rich ones suffer from nostalgia? Did I? Was longing or melancholy what defined the tribe of the Middle Passage?” (Hartman, 2007, p. 106). The “rich ones” here refers to the African Americans who travel to Africa in search of a sense of belonging, propelled by a fantasy of commonality and shared identification that is always and inevitably a failed project of recuperation. Hartman quickly finds that in the grim economic realities of postcolonial Ghana, the pan-Africanist embrace of the diaspora that characterized the anticolonial liberation era (encapsulated in the slogan “Africa for Africans abroad and at home”) is indeed ancient history, almost as remote to the daily lives of postcolonial Ghanaians as the memory of slavery. She writes, “Pan-Africanism had yielded to the dashed hopes of neocolonialism and postcolonialism and African socialism . . . had been ambushed by the West and bankrupted by African dictators and kleptocrats, all of whom had made a travesty of independence” (p. 45). Hartman, like those African American expatriates who settled in Ghana in the hopes of being part of the new nation, finds herself to be “just another stranger.”

Svetlana Boym (1994) helpfully distinguishes between two forms of nostalgia: “utopian (reconstructive and totalizing) and ironic (inconclusive and fragmentary)” (p. 284). She writes:

The former stresses the first root of the word, *nostos* (home), and puts the emphasis on the return to that mythical place on the island of Utopia where the greater patria has to be rebuilt . . . Ironic nostalgia puts emphasis on *algia*, longing, and acknowledges the displacement of the mythical place without trying to rebuild it . . . If the utopian nostalgic sees exile . . . as a definite falling from grace, the ironic one accepts (if not enjoys) the paradoxes of permanent exile.

(p. 284)

Anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis’ (1994) meditation on the role of the senses in history and memory making further nuances Boym’s distinction between ironic and utopian nostalgia. Juxtaposing the English word “nostalgia” to the Greek “*nostalghia*,” she notes:

In English the word nostalgia (in Greek *nostalghia*) implies trivializing romantic sentimentality. [*Nostalghia*] . . . evokes the sensory

dimension of memory in exile and estrangement . . . In this sense *nostalghia* is linked to the personal consequences of historicizing sensory experience which is conceived as a painful bodily and emotional journey. *Nostalghia* thus is far from trivializing romantic sentimentality. This reduction of the term confines the past and removes it from any transactional and material relation to the present; the past becomes an isolatable and consumable unit of time. Nostalgia, in the American sense, freezes the past in such a manner as to preclude it from any capacity for social transformation in the present, preventing the present from establishing a dynamic perceptual relationship to its history. Whereas the Greek etymology evokes the transformative impact of the past as unreconciled historical experience.

(1994, p. 4)²

Unlike the nostalgia of those who seek and believe in a fantasy of return, we can understand the nostalgia with which Hartman is afflicted as ironic in Boym's sense of the term. For Hartman the mother is always lost, and as she puts it, "routes are as close to the mother country as [she] would come" (Hartman, 2007, p. 17). Similarly, Hartman enacts precisely the dynamic, dialogic, and transformational relation to the past that the Greek word *nostalghia* implies. Her journey is one that seeks not to recover a fixed, whole subjectivity prior to the rupture of the middle passage, but rather to enter into slavery's archive—the material documents and the physical ruins of slave holds and dungeons—in order to search "for the traces of the destroyed" (p. 17). Her engagement with the material archive, however, yields nothing but greater historical blankness. In one particularly haunting scene in *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman stands in one of the slave dungeons; the floor of the dungeon is made up, hideously, of the "compressed remains of captives—feces, blood and exfoliated skin." Hartman concludes, "I came to this fort searching for ancestors, but in truth only base matter awaited me . . . Waste is the remnant of all the lives that are outside of history . . ." (p. 115). This is all that slavery's material archive offers her: "blood, shit, and dirt" (p. 119). This passage speaks powerfully to the failure of the archive to "raise the dead," as Sharon Holland (2000) phrases it, to restore to Hartman any sense of their humanity. As Hartman writes, "In the dungeon, there were remains but no stories that could resurrect the dead except the stories I invented" (Hartman, 2007, p. 116).

In a sense it is waste, the excess that exists outside of official narratives of memory, which links Hartman's memoir to the work of Allan deSouza, even as they respond to its challenge in different ways. By juxtaposing Hartman and deSouza, as I do here, I do not mean to suggest that different historical processes (of slavery, colonialism, indentureship,

nationalism, migration) have the same material or discursive effects in the production of bodies, psyches, and subjectivities. While the work of both Hartman and deSouza bears out Jonathan Flatley's assertion that the experience of modernity is "constitutively linked to loss" (2008, p. 3), clearly the losses that attend to the legacies of slavery are distinct from those of colonialism or postcolonial nationalism.³ Nevertheless, it is worth putting these different experiences of diasporic loss into dialogue in order to bring to the fore the common ground that they do in fact share. Ultimately both Hartman's text and deSouza's artworks are a reckoning of the place of the individual within history: they suggest that it is through what writer Minal Hajratwala calls "intimate history" (2007)—a narrative of the self in relation to an opaque past and a stubborn present—that one confronts the limits and gaps of the material archive.⁴ For Hartman, her longing to "reach through time and touch the prisoners" yields only the abjected material of destroyed bodies; this waste seems to speak of nothing but destruction, amnesia, and annihilation. Yet this waste, and the historical blankness that it connotes, is ultimately what propels Hartman towards the genre of memoir, into the realm of the imagination, and into creating herself what she finds missing from the material archive: the voices, sensations, feelings, and emotions of the slaves themselves. Similarly for deSouza (as I will discuss) it is precisely bodily waste and excess, the detritus of the everyday, that allows him to call into a diasporic present a postcolonial African past. This inhabiting of multiple times and places, and the double vision it affords him is, in fact, what marks deSouza as a queer diasporic, postcolonial subject. He writes,

born into a colony, and later living in the colonial mother country, I saw myself outside history since it never seemed to be of my making or made by anyone that seemed to resemble me. I experienced time not as a linear sequence but as fragmented, a compression of lost pasts and disputed presents . . . in attempts to invent possible futures. (deSouza, 2008a)

For Hartman, the "compressed remains of captives" speak to her failed attempt to conjure forth the dead through the evidence available to her within slavery's material archive. Yet ultimately for both Hartman and deSouza, bodily detritus is in fact generative; waste speaks to history, even if that history has to be imagined. Waste allows for a reckoning with the past while being marked by the present, in order to, as deSouza says, invent possible futures.

DeSouza's 2004 photographic series, the *Lost Pictures*, created in the aftermath of his mother's death, grapples with similar questions of historical memory, genealogy, and diasporic loss and longing that haunt

Hartman's text. In deSouza's photoworks, the queer diasporic body itself becomes an archive of multiple displacements and colonial histories. The *Lost Pictures* are digitally manipulated prints made from slides taken by the artist's father of deSouza and his siblings during his childhood in post-independence Kenya. After making the slides into prints, deSouza allowed them to be overlaid with the detritus of daily life as he left them in the intimate spaces of his apartment in Los Angeles: the bathroom floor, the kitchen counter, next to the sink, and the shower stall. In their final version, the past, in the form of the original slide images, is rendered ghostly, fading into white yet barely visible nevertheless, while the diasporic present asserts itself through the detritus of the artist's own body: semen, blood, hair, food, sloughed-off skin. As in Hartman's text, "intimate history" (to use Hajratwala's phrase) functions as a mode of theorizing the archive and the relation of diasporic subjects to an elusive past. Situating deSouza's photoworks in relation to Hartman's memoir allows us to reflect on the limits and uses of these different genres in the project of excavating the past and reimagining the present. Indeed deSouza's work is a profound meditation on visuality, and specifically on the genre of photography itself: the contradiction between its promise of rendering a transparent reality, and its inevitable opacities and occlusions. In his essay, "My Mother, My Sight" (2008a), which accompanies the catalog for the *Lost Pictures*, deSouza beautifully details the deterioration of his own sight as he is diagnosed with cataracts at the age of 38. DeSouza writes of how he obsessively takes photographs of the minutiae of his childhood sites/sights in Nairobi to show his mother, who lies dying of cancer in a hospital in Portugal: the photographs are an attempt to "see for" his mother, who is also losing her eyesight, and to heal her own "dis-ease of dislocation." The visual functions as the primary arena through which his identification with his mother is solidified; yet he is always aware of the failure of the photograph to capture what he terms an "inner vision—that complex amalgam of memory, imagination and projection." As his own sight falters and transforms, he finds himself relying more on what he terms this "internal vision" rather than the "externally visual" captured by photography. Reflecting on the notion of the photograph as evidence of the past "as it really was," he writes:

I remember photographs even as other memories fail. It is the photograph—and my enduring faith in its veracity—that I have held onto as proof. And for many years I have had the proof, the many photographs taken by my father, the tangible evidence of our life in Kenya . . . And yet the recent return of memories in such physical, bodily ways has accumulated and layered meaning beyond the simply visual. As a result, my faith in the photograph as ultimate repository

of memory is, if not shattered, at least shaken. Now, when I look at the two-dimensionality of photographs, I wonder how much else is lost along with that third dimension. Or perhaps I'm merely re-experiencing my earlier disenchantment: the failure of the photograph to match the vividness I have ascribed to it within my memory and imagination.

If Hartman turns to memoir and her own imagination to respond to the gaps of the official archive, deSouza turns to the material of his own body, to the tactile and the affective, in order to conjure into the present precisely that which is lost within the two-dimensionality of the photograph. The *Lost Pictures* that deSouza produced from his father's originals are indeed the pictures of what is lost within an official archive of both familial and national formation. They are deSouza's attempt to mediate and perhaps close the distance between an "internal vision" and the external, apparently indexical and fixed image of the past exemplified by the original photographs. DeSouza's transformation of the original images can also be read as a rejection of "looking (seeing) like his father" and an embrace of "looking (seeing) like his mother" instead: as such, deSouza repudiates a narrative of patrilineal oedipality that subtends many conventional framings of diasporic subjectivity.⁵ The practice of looking that deSouza enacts in the *Lost Pictures* resonates with what Christopher Pinney (2003) terms "looking past": Pinney uses this phrase to describe a reading practice through which subaltern subjects challenge dominant visual representation, and photography in particular. He writes:

"Looking past" suggests a complexity of perspectival positions or a multiplicity of layers that endow photographs with an enormously greater complexity than that which they are usually credited. The photograph ceases to be a univocal, flat, and uncontested indexical trace of what was, and becomes instead a complexly textured artifact (concealing many different depths) inviting the viewer to assume many possible different standpoints—both spatial and temporal—in respect to it.

(pp. 4–5)

As with Hartman's memoir, deSouza's refashioned images "look (to the) past" not with utopian nostalgia (in Boym's sense of the term) but rather with *nostalgia* as Seremetakis understands it, enacting a palimpsestic, dialectical relation between past and present. He in effect "looks past" the past to foreground the contradictions of postcolonial nationalism and the complicities of the heteronormative family form within this project.

Many of the final images in the *Lost Pictures* are deliberately opaque, and appear to the viewer to be almost completely bleached out, veiled,

or obscured by fog. The human figures are barely distinguishable, existing as simply darker or lighter blotches against obscure backgrounds that are blurred, mottled by white watermarks, delicate black squiggles, stains, and shards. DeSouza's images frustrate the "will to see" on the part of the viewer; however long and hard a viewer gazes at the images, the fog refuses to lift and the figures remain ghostly, indistinct, unknowable, and ungraspable. In his essay, deSouza speaks of the fear with which his mother, as she dies, feels a "fog" descending on her; deSouza understands this "fog" as "an internal blindness," one that obscures her "inner vision" (deSouza 2008a). As Eve Oishi (2008) argues in her astute reading of the *Lost Pictures*, "the internal terrain of memory itself is externalized and made strange, reenacting the 'fog' of his mother's 'internal visuality'" (n.p.). In rendering the images so impenetrable, deSouza invites us as viewers into a shared identification with his mother—we too look (and see) like his mother—and thus into the site of memory's failure.

That deSouza uses the dead matter of his own body as the artistic medium through which he obscures the original images is particularly striking. In his earlier work, such as the *Terrain* series (1999–2003), he photographs landscapes that he creates entirely out of street trash as well as his own ear wax, fingernails, eyelashes, and hair. DeSouza's use of bodily remains powerfully engages with notions of abjection, filth, and disgust. As Oishi writes:

These images link the very process of art and representation with the notion of the abject, defined by Julia Kristeva as the horror of the impure and the improper figured as the body turned inside out . . . While the abject embodies the limits of human understanding, the inevitability of death, its presence also provides a reassurance against death's encroachment on the body: These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death.

(2008, n.p.)

Oishi captures here the double-edged valence of deSouza's use of bodily detritus: while the images speak to the horror of death, obliteration, and bodily disintegration, they also perhaps offer a way of understanding such bodily waste as potentially productive. William Cohen's (2005) formulation of filth underscores the ways in which "contradictory ideas—about filth as both polluting and valuable—can be held at once" (Cohen, 2005, p. xiii). He writes:

While filthy objects initially seem utterly repulsive and alien . . . they also paradoxically bear potential value. But are there conditions under which filth might actually provide an appealing point of identification

for subjects? When people who understand themselves to be degraded, dispossessed, or abjected by a dominant order adopt and appropriate . . . what is otherwise castigated as filth, there is a possibility of revaluing filth while partially preserving its aversiveness. Not merely owning up to, but taking comfort in, one's supposed dirtiness can serve powerful purposes of self-formation and group identification. In these senses, filth is put to important use, both psychologically and politically.

(2005, pp. x–xi)



Figure 8.1 Allan deSouza, "Fountain," from the *Lost Pictures* series, 2004

I quote Cohen at some length here because I find his formulation of filth as both polluting and reusable as naming precisely the ambivalent meanings and effects of deSouza's use of bodily remains. In deSouza's images, filth is indeed put to use: the abjected remains of the dispossessed (signified by the dead matter of his own body) in fact become the medium through which deSouza re-visions a personal and collective relation to colonial and anticolonial nationalist pasts, and to multiple diasporic locations in the present. In "Fountain," for instance, the artist and his siblings stand with their backs to the viewer, facing an indeterminate, vaguely apocalyptic future. They appear to be gazing at what could be a fountain, or a mushroom cloud or some kind of ominous sun, but that is in fact a spot of blood that stains the print's surface. For a viewer there is something deeply unsettling about the image: parts of the children's bodies seem to be quite literally under erasure, mottled by white, black, and brown stains, while the entire surface of the image is covered with a delicate filigree of black etchings, created by the artist's hair. In Oishi's reading of the image, she writes that "the impulse towards nostalgia, prompted by family photos, is re-routed through the unfamiliar and the *unheimlich*" (2008, n.p.). Indeed, the image is the antithesis of the optimistic forward looking gaze of the newly independent nation; it refuses to consolidate into a comforting narrative of what Boym would term the utopian or reconstructive nostalgia of nationalist projects.

The title of deSouza's image, "Fountain," can be read as an oblique reference to Marcel Duchamp's infamous 1917 installation piece, also entitled *Fountain*, where he mounted a mass-produced urinal on a pedestal, signed it with a pseudonym, and sought to exhibit it as a work of art. Svetlana Boym (1998) finds intertextual echoes between Duchamp's *Fountain* and the work of contemporary Russian conceptual artist Ilya Kabakov, who recreated Soviet-era toilets for the 1992 Kassel Documenta show. Boym reads Kabakov's installation, like Duchamp's work, as "trespassing the boundaries between the aesthetic and everyday life" (1998, p. 511).⁶ I would argue that deSouza's image references Duchamp (and by extension, Kabakov) to suggest the elevation and memorialization of precisely that which is conventionally expunged and discarded. In doing so deSouza disturbs the boundaries between the mundane and the everyday (which falls outside of history) and the monumental and the spectacular (which constitutes official history).

DeSouza's particular mobilization of ideas of abjection and filth must be situated in relation to the specific historical moment out of which the original images emerge—the early years of Kenyan independence from colonial rule—and the fraught location of Kenyan Indians within that nation building project. Under British colonial rule, Indian indentured laborers were brought in mass numbers to East Africa from the 1860s to 1917 to work primarily on building the British East African Railroad,

"a key element in Britain's imperial strategy during the scramble" (Metcalf 2007, p. 188). As historian Thomas Metcalf argues, the British imperial project was dependent not only upon Indian indentured labor but also upon Indians making up the management and bureaucracy of the railways at all levels. In Savita Nair's (2008) research on Indians in colonial Kenya, she points to the heterogeneity of the Indian population and argues that Indians in Kenya were just as likely to be traders, merchants, and professionals as they were to be indentured labor or descendents of the indentured. East African Indians inhabited a "dubious status," situated as they were "in a precariously liminal category between colonized and colonizer . . ." (p. 85). This liminality meant that "Indian Africans remained vulnerable to a politics of hostility, exclusion and even, in the case of Idi Amin's Uganda, expulsion" (Metcalf 2007). For Hartman the slogan from the anticolonial nationalist era, "Africa for Africans abroad and at home," conjures forth the seductive promise of diasporic belonging in the new nation that, forty years after independence, rings hollow; it highlights her own sense of estrangement as a black diasporic subject in postcolonial Africa. For Indian Africans such as deSouza, however, this slogan from its very inception is no seduction, but rather an ominous sign of what is to come, as it names a collective history of dispossession as "authentic Africanness" came to be defined in strictly racial terms.

DeSouza's work thus necessarily speaks back to the feelings of alienation that saturate Hartman's text: I would suggest that in her emphasis on her own strangeness, Hartman may in fact grant a fictional stability of identification to the postcolonial Africans she encounters. In his engagement of Hartman's text, anthropologist Michael Ralph comments:

[I]t seems, paradoxically, evidence of too strong a romance with the violent dehumanization of enslavement to suggest "towns vanished from sight and banished from memory" are all any African American "can ever hope to claim" (Ibid, p. 9). What of the historical understandings African people developed beyond the rigid criteria of verifiable proof (cf. Brown 2003), the meaningful ties they manage to forge despite "the slipperiness and elusiveness of slavery's archive"? (Hartman 2007, p. 17)? Whose ancestral connection, after all, is indubitably real?

(Ralph, 2007, p. 27, n. 48)

Ralph suggests here that Hartman's overwhelming sense of loss and failure as the primary affective responses to the "violent dehumanization of slavery" has the inadvertent effect of privileging conventional notions of "evidence" and obscuring other existing, possible modes of relationality

between individuals and communities. When read through the prism of deSouza's work, it becomes clear that Hartman may indeed elide the ways in which the postcolonial others that she encounters also have deeply vexed, complicated, and unfixed relations to both time and place. It is precisely the ambiguity and ambivalence of racialized Indian African subjectivity that deSouza's images reference, through their deployment of notions of dirt, filth, and abjection. The "borderline feelings" (Cohen, 2005, p. xiii) that his images evoke—between disgust and fascination—speak not only to the borderline positionality of the artist himself as a multiply diasporic subject but also to the borderline status of Indian Africans as both inside and outside the national project.

DeSouza's engagement with both the promises and the failures of decolonization movements is particularly apparent in an image entitled "Harambee!" The original slide was taken by deSouza's father during Kenya's 1963 Independence Day celebrations. Here the ghostly outlines of the artist and his siblings are seen on either side of a man dressed, oddly enough, in a gorilla costume—a representation, according to deSouza, of something "generically African . . . [even though] there are no gorillas in Kenya!" (deSouza, 2008b). In the background is the barely visible exterior of a parade float, draped with the black, red, and green stripes of the Kenyan flag. DeSouza's reworking of the original image comments directly on the contradictions of the anticolonial nationalist project. "Harambee," a Swahili word literally meaning everyone working



Figure 8.2 Allan deSouza, "Harambee!," from the *Lost Pictures* series, 2004



Figure 8.3 Allan deSouza, "Tomorrow," from the *Lost Pictures* series, 2004

together for a common cause, was adopted as the official motto of the newly independent nation, and was used by Jomo Kenyatta as a nationalist rallying cry that called for national unity and collective endeavor. Ironically, this term is thought to have originated with Indian indentured laborers toiling on the British East African Railroad in the nineteenth century, and is imagined to have come from their evocation of Durga, a Hindu goddess (*"Hare, Ambi"*) as they pulled heavy loads together. DeSouza's photograph thus directly confronts the legacies of overlapping systems of colonial, capitalist labor extraction upon differently racialized populations in the postcolony. The image speaks to the fragility and fissures of this post-Independence nationalist vision of unity, given the vexed position of "the Asian African" within Black African nationalist discourse.

Finally, in the image "Tomorrow," we can barely make out the outlines of the artist and his brother as they obediently stand to attention, flanking what appears to be a Black African train conductor; behind them a huge billboard carries an image of a train seemingly speeding forward, while the words ". . . for to-morrow" in bold red lettering are partially visible across the top of the billboard. Both the image of the train, a symbol of nationalist pride and the technological prowess of the new nation, as well as the slogan "for to-morrow," promise a new beginning, a utopian future that lies just beyond the frame of the image. Ironically, as I have suggested, the train is also a potent symbol of the British imperial project

and the various systems of labor extraction upon which it depended. Thus deSouza's image lays bare the continuities between imperial and postcolonial nationalist projects in their adherence to a developmentalist narrative of progress and modernity, and in the inevitable violences upon which this modernity depends. Referring to both "Harambee!" and "Tomorrow," deSouza writes, "People often ask me if the train conductor is my father, but I'm tempted to think of both, the conductor [in "Tomorrow"] and the gorilla [in "Harambee!"] as father substitutes, as well as stand-ins for the new nation" (2008b). DeSouza's suggestive comment underscores the ways in which both imperial and nationalist projects invariably rest upon conventional gendered and sexual hierarchies. Savita Nair (2008) documents how in colonial East Africa, the railway as an institution, and the railway station in particular, were key sites of contestation where assertions of racial and class power and privilege between white British, Indian, and African men were played out.⁷ Similarly in deSouza's image, the railway becomes the backdrop against which differently racialized masculinities come into contact and conflict in the moment of national liberation. In the original slides it is the patriarchal gaze of deSouza's Indian father that, in Oishi's words, "affirm[s] and witness[es] the family unit within domestic and public space" (2008, n.p.). In this sense the *Lost Pictures* implicitly reference the centrality of the heteronormative family unit to the making of the modern nation. Yet this is a gaze that is always under threat of its own dispossession: in "Tomorrow" the father's ownership of the gaze is contested by the figure of the Black African train conductor who seems to claim the mantle of nationalist patriarchal authority. And ultimately, in the final images that become the *Lost Pictures*, the organizing patriarchal gaze of the camera utterly loses both its centrality and authority. The camera's eye is blocked, mediated, and rendered barely functional: the images do not connote scopic mastery but rather the failure of vision, the impossibility of a transparent access to the past and to laying claim to what exists inside the frame.

The *Lost Pictures* "queer" Bandung in the sense that they enact a disidentificatory relation to an early moment of postcolonial nationalism: its promises of Third World solidarity and radical social transformation are neither monumentalized nor totally rejected.⁸ Rather the images prompt an ironically nostalgic gaze upon this project, one that brings to the fore its inherent instabilities, particularly in its management of heterogeneous racial, gendered, and sexual others within the newly decolonized nation. There is now a significant body of work in queer scholarship on how the postcolonial nation defines its boundaries over and against the bodies of those subjects deemed "perverse" within a nationalist imaginary. Jacqui Alexander (1994), for instance, writes of the particular sense of anger and betrayal that attends to the realization

that "flag independence" for the newly liberated nation simply enacts another form of radical disenfranchisement for queer and feminist subjects who are outside the "charmed circle" of criteria for national and communal belonging.⁹ But rather than responding to unbelonging with simple resignation and a rejection of the past, deSouza's work allows us to imagine history as "a weave of possibilities" (2008a), as he puts it; histories of dispossession may in fact open new ways of imagining collectivity, beyond the horizon of decolonization and civil rights.

I move now from the archive of slavery, colonialism, and anti-colonial nationalism, to that of the post-9/11 surveillance state in the US. There are fruitful connections to be drawn here that work against what Roderick Ferguson calls the "ideologies of discreteness" (2004, p. 3) that would deny the material and discursive linkages between these different sites. I turn to the work of Brooklyn-based, Indian American artist Chitra Ganesh, who in collaboration with Arab American media artist Mariam Ghani, created an ongoing multimedia installation and web-based project entitled *Index of the Disappeared*. By placing the work of Hartman and deSouza in relation to that of Ganesh and Ghani, I am deliberately challenging models of area studies for which such "ideologies of discreteness" have long been foundational. As historian Sujata Bose writes in his study of the Indian Ocean arena, "Regional entities known today as the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, which underpin the rubric of area studies in the Western academy, are relatively recent constructions that arbitrarily project certain legacies of colonial power onto the domain of knowledge in the post-colonial era" (Bose, 2006, p. 6). For Bose, "[t]he world of the Indian Ocean . . . has much greater depth of economic and cultural meaning" than can be captured through conventional area studies models; he therefore argues for an "inter-regional" approach that underscores the inadequacy of area studies models in crucial ways. While Bose and others have rethought the "area" of "area studies" (p. 6) through such interregional, postnationalist, and comparative frameworks, I would like to suggest that queer studies offers another important way of critiquing the fixity of area studies and producing alternative mappings of both space and time. Through the rubric of queer studies, we can place seemingly incommensurate texts, geographic locations, and temporal moments in relation to one another, not to empty out their historical and temporal specificity, but rather to map the continuities and dissonances between different regimes of power as they discipline and indeed "disappear" bodies in particular ways. If Hartman grapples with the losses generated by the distant past of slavery (which remain all too present for her in the material realities of everyday racism in the US), and deSouza's the *Lost Pictures* engage with those absences engendered by the more recent past of postcolonial nationalism, Ganesh and Ghani's *Index* documents those who have been disappeared

by contemporary forms of state terror in the US. By placing these works in relation to one another, we can begin to unravel the ways in which black and brown bodies traverse common diasporic ground as they are both marked and rendered invisible by ongoing legacies of slavery, colonialism, and contemporary discourses of race and nation.

Jonathan Flatley's (2008) notion of "antidepressive melancholia" is particularly suggestive in thinking through the connections between the work of Hartman, deSouza, and Ganesh. Flatley understands melancholia to mean "an emotional attachment to something or someone lost," but argues that "such dwelling on loss need not produce depression . . . In fact, some melancholias are the opposite of depressing, functioning as the very mechanism through which one may be interested in the world" (2008, p. 1). He continues:

insofar as the losses at the source of individual melancholias are seen to be generated by historical processes . . . melancholia comes to define the locus of the "psychic life of power" . . . the place where modernity touches down in our lives in the most intimate of ways. As such, melancholia forms the site in which the social origins of our emotional lives can be mapped out and from which we can see the other persons who share our losses and are subject to the same social forces.

(p. 3)

In Flatley's formulation, melancholia is not privatizing and narcissistic but rather communal and relational; it opens one up to new forms of affiliation and connection on the basis of a shared sense of loss that is socially and historically produced. Following Flatley, we can understand the melancholia that suffuses the work of Hartman, deSouza and Ganesh—their refusal to let go of the lost object and their insistence on dwelling on that loss—to be politically productive in that it allows us to place in relation to one another these various experiences of loss and the queer world-making to which they give rise. As I have suggested throughout this essay, the losses that adhere to black and brown bodies are not "the same"; nor are they produced by the "same social forces." However, as the work of Hartman, deSouza, and Ganesh reveal, the social forces, discourses, and institutions that uphold slavery and colonialism are indeed intimately linked to contemporary forms of racialized incarceration and detention in the US. Thus Flatley's suggestion that melancholia provides the site for new modes of relationality resonates with my own desire to map the lines of queer affiliation between different diasporic communities.

Ganesh and Ghani's *Index* emerged as a response to the disappearance of hundreds of predominantly South Asian and Arab Muslim men in

the wake of 9/11. On their website, Ganesh and Ghani describe the project as follows:

As an archive, *Index of the Disappeared* foregrounds the difficult histories of immigrant, 'Other' and dissenting communities in the U.S. since 9/11. Through official documents, secondary literature, and personal narratives, the Index archive traces the ways in which censorship and data blackouts are part of a discursive shift to secrecy that allows for disappearances, deportations, renditions and detentions on an unprecedented scale. The Index builds up its collection by collaborating with others actively engaged in political and legal challenges to the policies we track, and draws on radical archival, legal and activist traditions to select, group, and arrange information.

(www.kabul-reconstruction.net/disappeared)

Central to their production of an alternative archive is what Ghani and Ganesh call their "Warm Database." Warm data, as Ghani explains, stands in opposition to the "cold hard facts" elicited by official interrogations of the detainees and that are used to produce, discipline, and contain the "terrorist." To that end, the artists have posted on their website what they term a "Warm Data Questionnaire"; they invite all those who have been "affected by detention and/or deportation" to answer questions such as the following:

Who was the first person you ever fell in love with? What is your favorite flavor, and what is the one food that if you had the choice you would never eat? Which family member are you the closest to? Describe a place you see when you close your eyes at night. Name a piece of music that is always running through your head. What is your earliest childhood memory? Which muscle do you use the most in your normal daily activities?

The artists state that their intention is to collect material or information that would be deemed "useless" and without value in the eyes of the surveillance apparatus; this is precisely the information that is excised or never granted entrance in the first place in the official archive. If what is deemed as "religious fervor" or "anti-Americanism" are the only forms of affect that the security apparatus seeks to elicit and document as "proof" of the detainee's terrorist status, the "warm data" gathered by Ganesh and Ghani instead constitutes an alternative "archive of feelings," to use Ann Cvetkovich's evocative phrase. As with the archives of lesbian and gay history theorized by Cvetkovich, the Warm Database catalogs "emotional memory, those details of experience that are affective,

sensory, often highly specific, and personal" (2003, p. 242). Yet the danger of any such project is that despite the intentions of the archivists, the very act of gathering and indexing information—however arbitrary, fragmented, and impressionistic this information may be—produces a body of material that may in fact make the detained ever more available to the state's scrutinizing gaze.

The tensions and contradictions inherent in the project of creating alternative archives are suggested by Ronak Kapadia (2008) in his analysis of the *Index* as well as other activist artistic responses to the post 9/11 detentions. Kapadia argues that while many of these projects powerfully engage with questions of disappearance and surveillance that have so catastrophically impacted immigrant communities, their attention to the visual also inadvertently "replicates the link between vision and information central to the super-panopticon" (Kapadia 2008). Kapadia instead urges that we pay attention to "other ways of sensing the world," and suggests that the sonic, in particular, rather than the visual may be a more fruitful site for resistance and critique. In his reading of Ganesh and Ghani's *Index* in particular, he points out that, despite the artists' stated intent to "see the disappeared," to render visible those that have been rendered invisible both materially and discursively, the "warm data" collected by the questionnaire actually moves beyond the visual by "evoke[ing] heat, intensity, vibration, feeling, tactility, energy and affect" (Kapadia 2008). I would add that the "warmth" of such "warm data" consists of those affective attachments—to places, people, things—that are experienced sensorially and through the body itself. As Nadia Seremetakis asks,

how is history experienced and thought of, on the level of the everyday? . . . Where can historicity be found? [I]n what sensory forms and practices? And to what extent [is] the experience of and the capacity to narrate history . . . tied to the senses?

(1994, p. 3)

Seremetakis's questions allow us to understand the *Index* as archiving the "sensory experience of history" (1994, p. 3); sensorial memory—smell, texture, touch, sound, heat—conjures forth those affective attachments that store individual, familial, and collective histories, and that evade or are banished from the official archive. Thus for Ghani and Ganesh, the collection of "warm data" has the potential to reverse the process by which complex lives and subjectivities are transformed into nameless and faceless "special interest immigrants."

Furthermore, what is most fascinating about the questionnaire is the power of the detail, the mundane, and the everyday which work through and beyond a visual register to mobilize an affective response that conjures

forth other times and places, other landscapes both physical and psychic, and other relationalities and affiliations that are deemed excessive or irrelevant within the conventions of the official archive. It is the stray detail that does not stay in place that stands against the monumentalism of state terror. This strategic use of the detail and the mundane is particularly apparent in a series of watercolor portraits by Ganesh entitled *Seeing the Disappeared*. Here Ganesh critiques processes of memorialization by mimicking the form of the flyers of missing persons that covered public surfaces directly after the World Trade Center collapse of 2001. Ganesh was compelled to produce these watercolor portraits as a response to the public silence, indifference, and invisibility that surrounded the mass detentions of immigrants, in stark contrast to the tremendous vocal and visible outpouring of public emotion that attended the deaths of those killed in the collapse. Evoking Allan deSouza's refashioning of the family photograph, Ganesh "remakes" the original photographic images of the disappeared gleaned from newspaper articles, family photos, or police mug shots into watercolor images framed by cursive text. These portraits of those who in various ways have been disappeared by the dragnet of counterterrorist policies tell the stories that cannot be told by the official mug shot or the newspaper account. In keeping with Ganesh's larger body of work, the portraits compel the viewer to think through the interplay and tension between text and image: the text does not "explain" the image as much as it underscores the limits and gaps of the visual field in producing the "truth" of what it purports to represent.¹⁰ The disjointed fragments of phrases that float around the figures of the disappeared refuse to cohere into a linear narrative; rather they evoke, in Cvetkovich's words, "the idiosyncracies of the psyche and the logic of the unconscious" (2003, p. 241) that escape codification in the visual field. As such, the portraits grant to their subjects a much more complex, rich, and variegated psychic landscape than can be captured by the flat, indexical nature of the original photographs. Ganesh's transformation of the photograph into the watercolor image blurs the boundaries between photography and painting and thereby makes apparent the inherent instability of all forms of representation. If watercolor as a medium is notoriously unpredictable, its lines bleeding and transforming regardless of the artist's original intention, Ganesh's portraits also underscore the "volatility of the [photographic] image" (Pinney 2003, p. 6) itself, despite its apparent purchase on fixity, transparency, and truth.¹¹

The portraits restore to the disappeared the "warm data" that the questionnaire collects: along with the names of the disappeared and the supposed reason for their detention, the text alludes to those apparently random or useless details of lives that have lost the luxury of the mundane. One of the portraits is of Ansar Mahmood, a green card holder originally

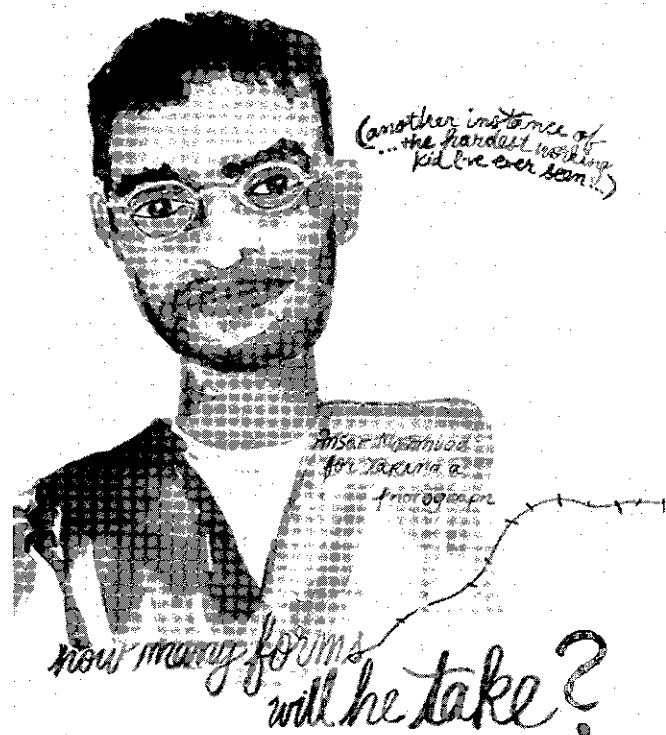


Figure 8.4 Chitra Ganesh, *Seeing the Disappeared*, 2005

from Pakistan arrested in October 2001 for taking a photograph of himself in front of a water tank in upstate New York. He was turned in to immigration authorities by security guards who could not believe that he was taking a tourist photo rather than being engaged in some form of terrorist activity, and as of this writing is still in indefinite detention. Below the image of Mahmood's face, taken from a family photograph, Ganesh notes in small script his name and his ostensible crime: "Ansar Mahmood, for taking a photograph." Surrounding the image are fragments of text: "the first time he saw a body of water/or the smells and textures of his wedding day/another instance of . . . the hardest working kid I've ever seen!" These phrases, while seemingly nonsensical and incoherent, in fact grant a psychic interiority and relationality to Mahmood that the official data effaces. Svetlana Boym's (1994) insights on the everyday are useful in reading Ganesh's use of the detail here. Boym writes, "we only become aware of [the everyday] when we miss it in times of war or disaster, or when it manifests itself

in excess during spells of boredom . . . The everyday is anticatastrophic, an antidote to the historical narrative of death, disaster and apocalypse" (Boym, 1994, p. 7). Ganesh and Ghani's *Index* then uses the power of the detail and the mundane against the catastrophic disappearance of entire populations. The artists appear here to heed Judith Halberstam's recent call for "low theory in popular places, in the small, the inconsequential, the anti-monumental, the micro, the irrelevant" (n.d., p. 5). Halberstam advocates turning to what she terms "low cultural sites" in order to locate alternatives to the seemingly totalizing forces of capitalism and heteronormativity. This resonates powerfully with the turn to the minor, to the tangential and excessive, the banal and the everyday, that is at work in the art of both deSouza and Ganesh and Ghani. In deSouza's use of the detritus of the everyday, as well as in Ganesh and Ghani's attention to the everyday of lives lost, it is precisely the anti-monumental that suggests "alternative political imaginaries" (p. 8) as Halberstam phrases it.

DeSouza's two most recent photographic series, *UFO* and *Divine*, speak even more directly to the transformative effects of the mundane, mining its power to connote both the innocuous and the dangerous. In the *UFO* series, showcased in an exhibit tellingly entitled (*i don't care what you say*) *Those are Not Tourist Photos*, deSouza manipulates photographs that he initially took from the interior of the airplane as he commuted between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The title of the exhibit comes from a confrontation that he had with a fellow passenger that eerily echoes the experience of Ansar Mahmood memorialized by Ganesh. This passenger, responding to deSouza's brown skin and the apparent lack of the scenic in what he was photographing, stated, "I don't care what you say, those are not tourist photos, and as an American citizen I want you to stop taking them!" (Talwar Gallery, 2008). The encounter crystallizes the hierarchies of power and privilege that determine who is allowed a tourist gaze and who is not, who is allowed the luxury of the mundane and the everyday, and for whom the mundane is effaced, or seen as a threat that is subject to discipline and incarceration. That the fellow passenger was a young, professional African American man further complicates this scenario, and demands that we create analytical frameworks that can unpack the ways in which minoritarian claims to citizenship have been routed through and against each other particularly since 9/11.

The photographs that constitute the series *UFO* were created by making mirror images of the unspectacular and the unremarkable, the aggressively anti-scenic: the tarmac and the runway taken in that liminal space just before take-off or just after landing. The title, *UFO*, in light of deSouza's encounter with the fellow passenger, can be read as either Unidentified Flying Object or Unidentified Foreign Object, and as referencing both

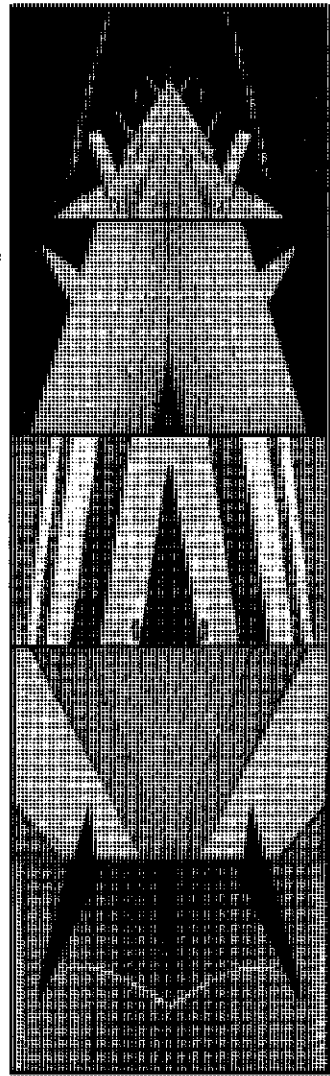


Figure 8.5
Allan deSouza, *UFO1*, 2007

the image and deSouza himself. Inhabiting the threat that is attributed to his body and his actions, deSouza transforms the mundane into a missile, a rocket, some kind of potentially murderous object. Similarly, in the *Divine* series, deSouza's apparently nefarious aerial surveillance activity renders strange and spectacular the most featureless of landscapes, transforming them into organic and skeletal outlines of divine (female) bodies. As such they fall outside the grasp of what is readily imagined as knowable and graspable within the logic of the surveillance state.

I want to end now where I began, by circling back to the final passages in Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* that speak to a sense of queer affiliation and possibility; these passages are striking in that they mark a shift from the sense of intransigent despair that permeates much of the text up until this point. Indeed they seem to gesture to Hartman's conversion, in Jonathan Flatley's terms, of "a depressive melancholia into a way to be interested in the world" (2008, p. 2). Hartman writes, "At the end of the journey, I knew that Africa wasn't dead to me, nor was it just a grave. My future was entangled with it, just as it was entangled with every other place on the globe where people were struggling to live and hoping to thrive" (2007, p. 233). Hartman here articulates a capacious sense of affiliation and of her place in the world that stands in sharp contrast to her experience of irreducible strangeness that, in earlier portions of the memoir, forestalls any possibility of connection with those she encounters. This sense of affiliation is achieved, paradoxically, through a recognition and acceptance of the difference of the other rather than through an attempt to narcissistically mirror the self in the other. As Hartman observes, "in listening for my story I had almost missed theirs. I had been waiting to hear a story with which I was already familiar. But things were different here." (2007, p. 233). Hartman thus leaves us with a model of affiliation through difference that I have been calling queer; such a model opens the way to placing different diasporic formations, and their attendant longings, losses,

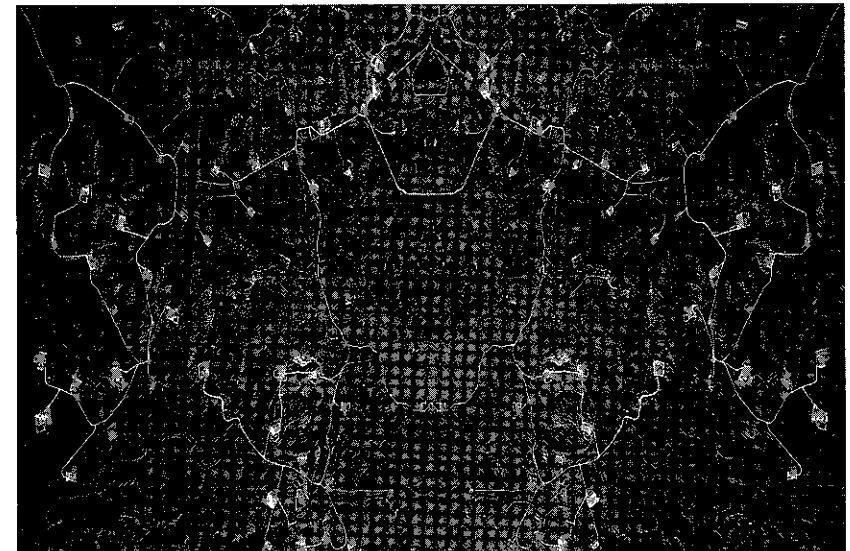


Figure 8.6 Allan deSouza, *Divine 1881*, 2007

aspirations, and “dreams of an elsewhere”(2007, p. 234), as Hartman puts it, within a common frame.

Hartman’s memoir ends in Gwolu, her last stop on the slave route. She writes, “I had come to the end of my journey, so if I didn’t recover any traces of the captives here, in the heartland of slavery, then it was unlikely that I would ever find any”(2007 p. 232). But as she watches a group of girls dancing, singing, and clapping, she is told by a young man who translates for her the song they are singing that this, finally, is the story she has been searching for. He tells her “the girls are singing about those taken from Gwolu and sold into slavery in the Americas. They are singing about the diaspora.” Hartman concludes, “Here it was—my song, the song of the lost tribe. I closed my eyes and I listened”(2007, p. 235). Ultimately then, it is not the material archive of slavery, nor even the triumphal counternarratives of those who eluded slavery’s grasp, that allow Hartman to finally touch the past. Rather this intimacy with the disappeared comes, tellingly, in the form of the non-visual, the tactile, the audible, the kinesthetic, and the anti-monumental. As in the work of the queer diasporic artists that I have engaged with here, it may very well be through the inconsequential and the tangential, the excessive and the abject, that we can divine alternative, more generative forms of knowledge and affiliation.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

- 1 For a critique of “queer heroism,” see Judith Halberstam, “Sex, Failure and the Anti-Heroic Queer,” paper presented at the “Rethinking Sex” Conference, University of Pennsylvania, March 5, 2009.
- 2 My thanks to Ann Cvetkovich for pointing me to Seremetakis’ work.
- 3 I thank Ronak Kapadia for pointing me to Jonathan Flatley’s work.
- 4 Minal Hajratwala uses the term “intimate history” to describe a literary non-fiction approach to narrating diaspora. She writes, “By juxtaposing journalistic, historical, and ethnographic methods with literary techniques, I found a narrative structure that was open to both parts of the story, allowing a more complex model of diaspora to emerge. Such a structure, an act of intimate history, enables the portrayal of sweeping social forces without resorting to fictionalization, anonymity, or the flattening out of individual lives.” See Hajratwala (2007) p. 304.

- 5 For a queer feminist critique of the oedipality of diasporic narratives, see my chapter, “Surviving Naipaul: Housing Masculinity in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, *Surviving Sabu* and *East is East*,” in Gopinath (2005), pp. 63–92.
- 6 My thanks to Martin Manalansan for pointing out this reference to Duchamp’s work to me.
- 7 While Nair does not specifically engage with the gendered dimensions of the racialization, it is clear that she is documenting a contest around different notions of racialized masculinity within the space of the railway station.
- 8 I borrow this notion of disidentification from Jose Esteban Muñoz’s *Disidentifications* (1999).
- 9 I borrow the term “charmed circle” from Gayle Rubin’s groundbreaking essay “Thinking Sex: Notes Towards a Radical Theory of Sexuality.”
- 10 Ganesh has long been interested in the form of the graphic novel. In her best known early work, Ganesh reworks the genre of the Hindu mythological comic book, known as the *Amar Chitra Katha*, by creating a dissonance between text and image and thereby transforming tales of sexual and gender conformity into queer, feminist fables of unruly female bodies and desires. See Gopinath (2009) for a more detailed reading of Ganesh’s work.
- 11 As Christopher Pinney notes, “[t]he photographer can never fully control the resulting photograph, and it is that lack of control and the resulting excess that permits recoding, ‘resurfacing,’ and ‘looking past’”(2003, p. 7).

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