

INTRODUCTION

Archive, Region, Affect, Aesthetics

The image stopped me in my tracks. “I know you,” I thought as I gazed at the black-and-white photograph from the early 1950s. Identified in the caption simply as “Abed, a tailor,” the subject in the photograph looks directly into the camera as he leans on his elbows with his hands folded gracefully under his chin. There was something in Abed’s gaze—forthright, uncompromising, fierce—and the precise and delicate gesture of his hands framing his face, that evoked the femme aesthetic of the young queers of color I remember seeing on the Hudson River piers during my young adulthood in New York City in the early 1990s. With his finely chiseled face, perfectly arched eyebrows, and elaborately coiffed hair, Abed was to my contemporary gaze immediately recognizable as a gender-queer figure.

I first encountered this image while leafing through the 2004 coedited book *Hashem El Madani: Studio Practices*, by the Beirut-based Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari. El Madani is a studio photographer from Saida (Sidon), Zaatari’s coastal hometown in southern Lebanon, and the book was created to coincide with the first exhibition of El Madani’s work in the United Kingdom, cocurated by Zaatari at the Photographer’s Gallery in London in 2004. El Madani opened his Studio Shehrazade in Saida in 1953, and over more than fifty years created hundreds of thousands of portraits of Saida’s residents:

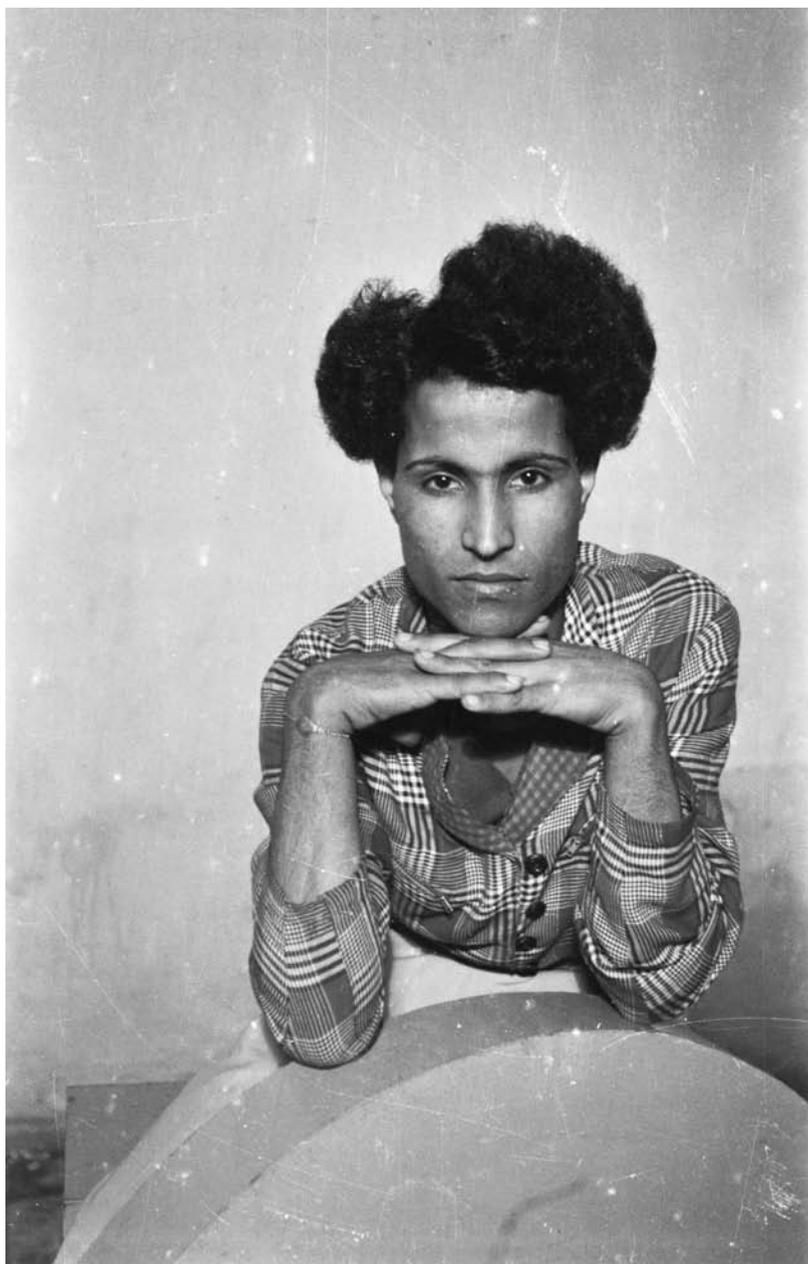


FIGURE INTRO.1 “Abed, a tailor. Madani’s parents’ home, the studio, 1948–53,” from *Hashem El Madani: Studio Practices*, courtesy of Akram Zaatari and Arab Image Foundation.

brides and grooms, wrestlers and babies, resistance fighters and refugees. The portraits in *Hashem El Madani: Studio Practices* date from the early 1950s to the mid-1970s, and tell of everyday life and the self-representational practices in the mid-twentieth-century city. Zaatari's fascination with El Madani's work stems from his general interest in the making of modernity in Lebanon, and specifically in the role of image-making practices such as studio photography. But of special interest to Zaatari is El Madani as a chronicler of everyday life in south Lebanon per se, a region rendered "other" in relation to the larger Lebanese nation by successive waves of war and Israeli occupation between 1978 and 2000.¹

In *Hashem El Madani: Studio Practices*, Zaatari in his dual role as artist and curator reproduces and organizes specific images from El Madani's vast collection that he finds especially significant and moving. Of the thousands of negatives in El Madani's collection, a striking number of the images reprinted by Zaatari suggest some version of gender nonconformity or same-sex eroticism. This includes the photograph of "Abed, a tailor" that I found so arresting, and whom El Madani matter-of-factly notes was "effeminate."² Despite my initial, visceral sense of familiarity upon encountering this image in El Madani's reconstituted archive, the longer I gazed at it the further it receded. Given that a photograph can never act as a transparent or unmediated visual record of the past, the image of "Abed, a tailor" cannot tell me who Abed "really" was, who or how he desired, or what his gender embodiment definitively meant to him or those around him. Rather, as my own initial shock of (mis)recognition suggests, Zaatari's re-presentation of El Madani's images activates transtemporal relays of affective relationality between the subjects in the photographs, Zaatari, and other contemporary viewers (such as myself) that produce new meanings for these images as they circulate in the present.

I discuss Zaatari's work at length in chapter 4, but I open with this image, and my initial response to it, because it exemplifies the interrelation of archive, region, affect, and aesthetics that is my central concern in *Unruly Visions*.³ Zaatari's reading of El Madani's archive, and the reordering and re-framing of the images he finds there, stand as a model for the queer curatorial practice I offer here; indeed there are multiple layers of queer curation at play in this book. Zaatari curates El Madani's images to do a specific kind of work: in Zaatari's hands, El Madani's images "perform new histories," as he himself puts it.⁴ He uses them to tell an alternative history of the Lebanese nation in a minor key, so to speak, through foregrounding the queer desires and embodiments that suffused everyday life in mid-twentieth-century Saida.

In turn, I situate Zaatari's images alongside the work of other artists to do a different kind of work, and in this sense *Unruly Visions* stands as my own act of queer curation. As scholars/curators Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton point out, the root meaning of the word "curate" is "caring for": this connection between "curation" and "caring for," they contend, demands that we think of curation "not only as selection, design, and interpretation, but as care-taking—as a kind of intimate, intersubjective, interrelational obligation," an obligation to "*deal with* the past" in particular.⁵ The notion of curation not only as "repositioning" and "re-arrangement,"⁶ but also as a mode of "intersubjective, interrelational obligation" to engaging the past, resonates deeply with my own sense of *Unruly Visions* as a queer curatorial project.⁷ I want to suggest that the "caring for" the past that is at the root of curation can take the form of carefully attending to aesthetic practices through writing: the critical analysis of art objects/aesthetic practices by placing them in relation to one another can function as a mode of queer curation. To "care for" is also to "care about"; thus the project of queer curation, as I understand it, is the obligation to impart that "caring about" to others. Queer scholars have powerfully demonstrated the ways in which queer art, scholarship, and activism have always evinced a sense of obligation to document, analyze, archive, and value the small, the inconsequential, and the ephemeral, so much of which make up the messy beauty and drama of queer life-worlds.⁸ My own project of queer curation in these pages is similarly engaged with valuing that which has been deemed without value, but, even more importantly, it deliberately stages "collisions and encounters" between aesthetic practices that may seem discontinuous or unrelated.⁹ My queer curatorial practice entails an obligation to "care for" and "care about" the connections between these texts and, crucially, to make apparent why these connections matter and what they tell us about our imbricated pasts and futures. As such, *Unruly Visions* is an act of queer curation that seeks to reveal not coevalness or sameness but rather the co-implication and radical relationality of seemingly disparate racial formations, geographies, temporalities, and colonial and postcolonial histories of displacement and dwelling.

My process of selection is driven both by my personal friendship and political networks, as well as by happenstance: some of the artists I write about are known to me through the queer and/or progressive South Asian activist circles we share, while others are established figures who circulate widely in global art markets, and whose work I came across in galleries, exhibitions, museums, and film festivals. My own access to these works speaks to the un-

even circuits of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception through which they travel. I seek to call attention to the relatively obscure work and defamiliarize the more established work by placing them in relation to one another, in juxtapositions that may seem surprising given their apparently dissimilar formal and thematic concerns. My goal is to arrange and reposition these works so as to identify a shared queer visual aesthetic that mobilizes new ways of seeing both regions and archives, and that puts into play, through an affective register, an intimate relation between the two.

As I hope will become evident in the pages that follow, queer visual aesthetic practices function simultaneously as archival practices that suggest alternative understandings of time, space, and relationality that are obscured within dominant history. But, as Zaatari's reanimation of El Madani's portraits makes clear, queer visual aesthetic practices also transform regional archives into queer archives: they bring into the field of vision the memory of quotidian forms of queerness and gender nonconformity that mark the space of the region, as defined both supranationally and subnationally. Such practices thereby conjure forth what I term "a queer regional imaginary," which I discuss in chapter 1, that stands in contradistinction to a dominant national imaginary that effaces nonconforming bodies, desires, and affiliations. My turn to the region in *Unruly Visions* as a fruitful concept for both queer and diaspora studies stems from my dissatisfaction with standard formulations of diaspora that inevitably foreground the nation as the primary point of reference, as well as with standard formulations of queerness that fail to grasp the texture of regionally inflected gender and sexual formations.¹⁰ In the aesthetic practices that I consider in this book, the evocation of a queer regional imaginary suggests the possibility of tracing lines of connection and commonality, a kind of South-South relationality, between seemingly discrete regional spaces that in fact bypass the nation.¹¹ Thus, to foreground the category of the region in queer diaspora studies, as I do here, is to produce a new mapping of space and sexuality; this alternative cartography rejects dominant cartographies that either privilege the nation-state or cast into shadow all those spaces, and gender and sexual formations, deemed without value within the map of global capital.

While much of the work under discussion in *Unruly Visions* explores the contours of a queer regional imaginary that mobilizes the concept of the region in its subnational sense, other work in these pages simultaneously explores supranational framings of the region. For instance, Zaatari's experimental documentary *This Day* (2003) referenced in chapter 4 calls into ques-

tion the production of the “Middle East” as a knowable and mappable entity. Similarly, Delhi-based artist Sheba Chhachhi’s installation *Winged Pilgrims* (2007), which I analyze in chapter 1, disrupts area studies framings of “Asia” as a region by mapping older histories of encounter and exchange that predate European colonialism and entirely provincialize the global North.¹² As such, much of the work I consider in *Unruly Visions* represents a queer incursion into area studies, where a queer regional imaginary in its supranational sense instantiates alternative cartographies and spatial logics that allow for other histories of global affiliation and affinity to emerge.¹³ In this sense, my book is aligned with the rich body of scholarship that maps lines of interregional and transnational influence and confluence between and among colonized peoples that transcend a colonial cartographic imagination.¹⁴ The queer visual aesthetic practices that are the focus of *Unruly Visions* both enable and deploy a queer cartographic imagination, which brings into the field of vision precisely those bodies, desires, and modes of affiliation that are elided within dominant colonial—or, indeed, postcolonial nationalist—cartographies.

I understand these queer visual aesthetic practices, through which a queer regional imaginary takes shape, more precisely, as “the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora.” These practices negotiate diasporic movement in multiple geographic locations, and suggest other ways of being in and moving through these spaces that deviate from the straight lines of hetero- and homonormative scripts that typically determine one’s life trajectory.¹⁵ My conceptualization of “queer diaspora,” which is the formation out of which these aesthetic practices emerge, draws on my previous work in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. There, I theorize queer diaspora as both a spatial and a temporal category: spatial in that it challenges the heteronormative and patrilineal underpinnings of conventional articulations of diaspora and nation, and temporal in that it reorients the traditionally backward glance of conventional articulations of diaspora, often predicated on a desire for a return to lost origins.¹⁶ One of my central arguments in *Impossible Desires* was that queer diaspora provides us with an alternative model of visibility, in that it allows us to see those forms of sexual subjectivity, desire, and relationality rendered invisible and unintelligible within conventional mappings of diaspora and nation, as well as within dominant Euro-American articulations of queerness.¹⁷

Unruly Visions elaborates upon this alternative model of visibility, which a queer and feminist reformulation of diaspora brings into being, by turning our attention to “minor” sites and locations of queer possibility (such as the

region). My focus is specifically on aesthetic practices that engage the visual register, and that constitute, and are constituted by, the historical and epistemic formation of queer diaspora. While the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora may take any number of forms—literature, performance, music—in this book I specifically emphasize visuality because of its centrality to the workings of colonial modernity and its afterlives.¹⁸ Imperial, settler colonial, and racial regimes of power work through spatial practices that order bodies and landscapes in precise ways; these regimes of power also instantiate regimes of vision that determine what we see, how we see, and how we are seen.¹⁹ The legitimacy and authority to rule and regulate particular populations has been inextricably linked to the concomitant power to visually survey these populations and the landscapes they inhabit. The targets of this surveilling gaze are consigned simultaneously to both hypervisibility and invisibility.²⁰ An abiding legacy of colonial modernity is its institution of a way of seeing, and hence knowing, that obscures the interrelation of imperial, racial, and settler colonial projects as they produce racial, gendered, and sexual subjectivities.

Thus, as part of a first generation of scholars working on queer diaspora,²¹ *Unruly Visions* is my attempt to foreground new directions in the field. Tracing the interrelation between region, archive, and affect through the aesthetic allows queer diaspora studies to engage with bodies of knowledge that have only tangentially entered its purview, and to bridge divides between disciplinary and area studies. A careful tending to (and attention to) the aesthetic—and to queer visual aesthetic practices in particular—enables and demands that connections be made between fields of thought, geographic areas, and temporalities that would otherwise not be grasped readily through standard disciplinary approaches. *Unruly Visions* argues that it is in the realm of the aesthetic that we can excavate these submerged, comingled histories and become attuned to their continuing resonance in the present as they echo across both bodies and landscapes. Through a sustained engagement with queer visual aesthetic practices, we can identify alternative ways of seeing and knowing capable of challenging the scopic and sensorial regimes of colonial modernity in their current forms. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora, in other words, disrupt the normative ways of seeing and knowing that have been so central to the production, containment, and disciplining of sexual, racial, and gendered bodies; they do so, crucially, through a particular deployment of queer desire and identification that renders apparent the promiscuous intimacies of our past histories as they continue to structure our everyday present, and determine our futures.

These aesthetic practices enact an excavation of the past through a queer optic, which allows us to apprehend bodies, desires, and affiliations rendered lost or unthinkable within normative history. This queer excavation of the past does not seek to identify or mourn lost origins; nor do queer visual aesthetic practices necessarily aim at visibility or coherence. Instead, the queer optic instantiated by these practices brings into focus and into the realm of the present the energy of those nonnormative desires, practices, bodies, and affiliations concealed within dominant historical narratives. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora evoke history without a capital H, one that is ingrained in small acts and everyday gestures that play out not on the stage of the nation but in the space of the region. These minor histories can be carefully extracted from informal archives made up of discarded or devalued objects, and in haptic journeys through dust, dirt, and detritus. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora conjure these minor histories into being and make them apparent. Their value lies in their ability to demand that we look beyond the main event and instead become attuned to submerged and forgotten modes of longing, desire, affiliation, and embodiment that may in fact allow us to envision an alternative present and future. As such, these aesthetic practices enact a queer mode of critique that demands a retraining of our vision and a reattunement of our senses, and in so doing point to the limits of the entire apparatus of vision that is the inheritance of colonial modernity.

The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora are clearly the product of the “intimacies of four continents,” as Lisa Lowe phrases it, in the sense that they emerge out of, and respond to, the legacies of the colonial labor relations that tie Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas to each other; such legacies include the dispossession of indigenous peoples, postcolonial nationalisms, and the diasporas of racialized, migrant labor.²² I argue that these aesthetic practices transform “the scales and timetables of intimacy”²³ that were enjoined under colonial or imperial regimes, and that are often resuscitated in contemporary nationalist, postcolonial, or diasporic contexts. For instance, as I discuss in the chapters that follow, the reconstituted family photographs of artists Chitra Ganesh and Allan deSouza, or Tracey Moffatt’s collages and photographs of the sites of her childhood, lay bare the ways in which “home” spaces—whether the South Asian immigrant household or the Australian Aboriginal “settlement”—function as dense zones of sexual/gender/racial regulation under contemporary iterations of empire and colonialism. I understand “intimacy,” then, to reference the micropolitical spaces of the body, the family, and the domestic as key spaces where power under successive colonial and

nationalist regimes is consolidated, as well as the spaces where the colonial (or postcolonial) “order of things” may be disrupted and fractured.²⁴ But I also use the term “intimacy” more broadly, to reference the forms of affiliation and affinity, encounter and crossing, not only between bodies but also between histories, spaces, and temporalities. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora, in other words, both make apparent and instantiate the intimacy of fields of thought, historical formations, geographic areas, and temporal frames conventionally viewed as discrete and distinct.²⁵

Queer desire, identification, and affiliation are central to apprehending this indiscreteness of multiple histories, spaces, and temporalities. If these aesthetic practices bring to the fore those shadow histories, subjectivities, and desires that are occluded in dominant history, queerness is the conduit through which to access the shadow spaces of the past and bring them into the frame of the present. It is through the backward glances of Akram Zaatar’s queer curation of El Madani’s portraits (chapter 4), or David Kalal’s queering of the late nineteenth-century oil paintings of the South Indian painter Raja Ravi Varma (chapter 1), or the queer genealogies traced by Chitra Ganesh (chapter 2) and Allan deSouza (chapter 4) via their family photographs, or through Tracey Moffatt’s reframing of the scenes and sites of her childhood (chapter 3), that we can glean the queer modes of affiliation, desire, and embodiment that suggest alternative possibilities of organizing social relations in the present.²⁶ The queerness of the archive in these works rests not only in the fact that it acts as a record of queer desires, embodiments, and affiliations that connect different temporal moments, but that it revalues that which is seen as without value: the regional, the personal, the affective, the everyday. From Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani’s creation of a “warm database” that collects information on post-9/11 South Asian and Arab Muslim male detainees that has meaning to the detainees themselves rather than to the U.S. surveillance state, to Allan deSouza’s use of the dead matter of his own body in his queer reframing of postcolonial Kenyan nationalism, to Sheba Chhachhi’s repurposing of cheap Chinese-made “plasma TV toys” to tell the history of precolonial Asian cosmopolitanisms, the artists I discuss in *Unruly Visions* amass and curate queer archives out of precisely those objects that are deemed insignificant, marginal, minor, tangential.²⁷ In so doing, they reveal, interrogate, and transform the ways in which hierarchies of value determine archival production in the first place.

The rubric offered by “the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora” allows me to group together seemingly unrelated objects of analysis not typically placed

in conversation. These works are heterogeneous in form as well as in the variegated histories and geographic locations they reference, and out of which they emerge. As I noted earlier, some are by well-established artists, and have garnered significant critical attention, while others are relatively “minor” texts, in that they have limited circulation and fall outside of traditional art-historical frames; still others are considered “minor” or anomalous works in a recognized artist’s oeuvre. The rubric of “the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora” illuminates the unexpected convergences between these wide-ranging texts through several key interrelated concepts: the region, as both subnational and supranational space, and the production of alternative cartographies; the personal and the autobiographical, and the impossibility of originary narratives of individual and collective selves; queer counterarchives and the reframing of history; the role of the ordinary and the everyday, the affective and the sensorial, in producing these alternative archives and cartographies; the interrogation of the visual field and the limits of a politics of visibility and representation; queerness as an optic and reading practice that brings alternative modes of affiliation and relationality into focus. As this brief sketch of concepts central to *Unruly Visions* makes clear, I am very much in conversation with the important queer scholarship that has emerged in the past decade or so to powerfully rethink questions of time, space, affect, and archive through a queer lens. Such work has been tremendously useful in underscoring how queer spaces are more often than not marked by queer time, and the temporal and affective markings of all spatial categories.²⁸ Specifically, this work has made clear how the spatial categories of region, diaspora, and nation function simultaneously as temporal and affective categories.²⁹ For instance, as Valerie Rohy has argued, the region as subnational location is closely tied to notions of backwardness, anachronism, and abjection in relation to the larger nation-state.³⁰ As I discuss in chapter 1, contemporary artists such as David Kalal are able to exploit this temporal lag of the region in order to envision new logics of desire and affiliation across multiple times and spaces. *Unruly Visions* contributes to these collective, ongoing queer reformulations of time, space, affect, and archive by considering how the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora extend and transform our understandings of these concepts.

As I argue in the following chapter, a turn to the regional is quite often a turn to the personal and the autobiographical. Evocations of the region often take the form of deeply affective, personal explorations of regional belonging or alienation. Both the regional and the personal/autobiographical, which emerge as central categories in the work of many of the artists I discuss

throughout this book, occupy a kind of minor, degraded status and are seen as mere “digressions” that detract from a focus on more legitimate objects of study (such as the nation or the global) or aesthetic forms (such as the novel).³¹ The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora are archival practices that excavate and memorialize the minor histories (personal, familial, collective, regional) that stand outside of official nation-centered narratives. The connection between region, affect, archive, and autobiography is particularly apparent in much of the photography-based work I discuss in this book. Photography, of course, has always been a profoundly affective medium, and one cannot afford to deny the centrality of affect in producing the meaning of a photograph.³² Photography’s mobilization of affect is particularly clear in Zaatari’s work (chapter 4), as well as that of visual artists Chitra Ganesh (chapter 2), Allan deSouza (chapter 4), and, to a certain extent, Tracey Moffatt (chapter 3), all of whom work with and through the genre of the family photograph and its foregrounding of the personal and the everyday to create deeply affective counter-archives of regional (un)belonging. These alternative archives produce forms of queer desire and identification across multiple temporalities, and narrate the construction of queer selfhood and queer genealogies in nonteleological terms; indeed, the modes of queer memoir and memorialization that emerge in the work of these artists soundly reject notions of origin and authenticity. Significantly, in a number of the most clearly autobiographical texts I consider in this book, such as Saidiya Hartman’s memoir *Lose Your Mother* (chapter 4), Allan deSouza’s *The Lost Pictures* (chapter 4), and Chitra Ganesh’s *13 Photos* (chapter 2), the figure of the mother—typically connoting the origins of a self in racial, national, gendered, and sexual terms—is both foregrounded and irretrievably lost. This loss of origins is coterminous with the limits and failures of the visual field and its strategies of self-representation and reclamation. Thus the turn to the autobiographical and the personal on the part of the artists I discuss here does not function to enshrine a model of autonomous selfhood in liberal humanist terms. In the work of Hartman, deSouza, and Ganesh, this lost or receding figure of the mother becomes an occasion not for the recuperation of a narrative of an authentic self, but rather for the creation of alternative, queer forms of memoir and memorialization. The work of these artists evinces an imaginative reconstruction of personal and collective genealogies that rejects both origin stories and the truth claims of the visual, and that instead animates a multisensorial and affective relation to visibility.

My own queer reading and curatorial practice deliberately places in the same frame very disparate aesthetic genres, from photography (the work of Allan

deSouza, Chitra Ganesh, David Kalal, Tracey Moffatt, Seher Shah, Akram Zaatari); to narrative feature film (Aurora Guerrero's *Mosquita y Mari* and Ligy Pullappally's *The Journey*); to installation and web-based work (Sheba Chhachhi, Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani); to watercolor painting (Chitra Ganesh, Tracey Moffatt); and to poetry and literary non-fiction (Agha Shahid Ali and Saidiya Hartman). These formally distinct works are united by their attention to the limits and possibilities of the visual: while most of the work I write about functions within a visual medium, visibility itself and the practice of looking are insistently interrogated (even in the literary texts I consider) and their inevitable failures are foregrounded so as to point to alternative sensorial regimes—touch, smell, sound, taste—through which historical memory is evoked. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora are finely attuned to the violences of the visual field and its centrality to the workings of colonial modernity. They therefore work within the visual field in order to point to that which exceeds the visual, and which the visual field cannot accommodate. They gesture to realms outside and beyond it, suggesting instead the sensorial and the affective as alternative modes and conduits for apprehending the intertwined nature of seemingly discrete historical formations. They allow us not only to see, but also to sense, the proximity of these histories and their contemporary instantiations. In other words, the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora enact an intimate relation between the visual, the affective, and the sensorial: the visual serves as a portal to other senses and affects, and the alternative modes of knowing and accessing the past they make available. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora thereby open the way to a different apprehension of time and space, history and memory, that counters those instantiated by colonial modernity and its legacies.

Moreover, while many of the artists I write about can be understood as having some relation to South Asia and/or the South Asian diaspora, I consciously place their work alongside and in conversation with that of artists who engage other diasporic histories so as to map the lines of convergence between them. In chapter 2, for example, I juxtapose the photography of South Asian American artist Chitra Ganesh with Aurora Guerrero's independent feature film *Mosquita y Mari*, a queer Latina coming-of-age story. I do so in order to trace the ways in which each work mobilizes notions of the region through a queer diasporic lens, and, in the process, reshuffles the temporality of conventional narratives of success and upward mobility so central to both South Asian and Latinx immigrant formations. Similarly, in chapter 3, by setting the work of South Asian diasporic artists Seher Shah and Allan deSouza in rela-

tion to that of Tracey Moffatt, which deeply engages the history of Aboriginal dispossession in Australia, I work against fixed notions of both diaspora and indigeneity that would situate these two categories in implacable opposition to one another. And my final chapter spans African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian diasporic histories as it situates Saidiya Hartman's memoir, *Lose Your Mother*, next to the visual art and installations of Allan deSouza, Akram Zaatari, and a collaborative project by Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani.

The concept of diaspora has typically been deployed to connote the dispersal of populations from one particular national or geographic location to multiple other sites in such a way that produces a transnational web of affiliation and affect. Therefore, understanding the work of artists such as Tracey Moffatt or Akram Zaatari (both of whom have been primarily based in their so-called countries of origin) as diasporic demands that we rethink the parameters of the term to account for the movements and dispersals that happen within, rather than simply across, dominant nation-state boundaries, and how their work engages with and interrogates those movements. Moffatt's work, for instance, as I argue in chapter 3, requires us to see diaspora and indigeneity as co-constitutive categories, rather than as antithetical, as these categories are often understood. For Moffatt, what it means to be diasporic is inextricable from indigeneity and the experience of settler colonial dispossession; likewise, what it means to be indigenous is, for her, inextricable from the experience of diasporic displacement. Similarly, in my reading of Zaatari's work, I find the concept of diaspora useful to signal the displacements and dispersals that occur within the space of the dominant nation-state itself, when subject to the vagaries of war and occupation that precipitate the constant shifting of borders—displacements and dispersals that are both material and metaphoric. Zaatari, for instance, chose to return to Lebanon after spending periods of time in the U.S. and Europe. Hence his connection to the region is marked by a paradoxical sense of distance and alienation; his diasporic sensibility is predicated not so much on geographic remoteness as it is on psychic and temporal remove. Situating the art of Moffatt and Zaatari as diasporic, therefore, does the important work of reframing the nation-state itself as "diaspora space":³³ a zone constituted by ongoing histories of settler colonial violence, war, and occupation, and shot through with the migrant trajectories, socialities, and affiliations that these histories engender. This more capacious understanding of diaspora places in tandem the displacements wrought by settler colonial occupation with those wrought by military occupation, even as the displaced ostensibly remain within the boundaries of the dominant nation-state.

Just as I stretch the category of diaspora to encompass movements and formations that may not seem to reside comfortably within its rubric, so, too, do I stretch the notion of “queer” in perhaps unexpected directions. In the work of all the artists I discuss in these pages, queerness functions as an optic through which to engage past histories and be attuned to the way these histories continue to imprint the present. This queer optic reanimates the nonnormative desires, practices, embodiments, and affiliations that can be gleaned from the past; it brings them into the present in order to envision other possibilities of social life. Indeed the queerness of the work under discussion in *Unruly Visions* resides in multiple sources. First, the work itself produces a certain way of seeing that I am calling queer: this alternative vision brings to the fore the unruly embodiments and desires buried within dominant historical narratives, and also makes apparent the intimacies and afterlives of apparently discrete historical processes. Second, the queerness of the work derives from a specific spectatorial dynamic between the artist and the historical archive. For example, as I discuss in chapter 4, it is Zaatari’s own erotic relation to El Madani’s images that brings their queer valences to the fore. And, finally, the work’s queerness is predicated on the particular affective investments of each of us as viewers; as my initial response to the image of “Abed, a tailor” demonstrates, we each come to the work with our own situated spectatorial gaze.

In short, queerness functions throughout *Unruly Visions* as a mode of reading through which we can apprehend the intimacy of multiple historical formations (racialization, diaspora, indigeneity, colonialism); bodies of knowledge (diaspora studies, indigenous studies, queer studies, area studies); geographical locations (regions, nations, diasporas); and temporalities (past, present, future). But I also deploy queerness in the book in a more straightforward sense, to foreground the workings of nonheteronormative desires, sexual practices, identifications, and embodiments, and to name two interrelated processes: first, the modes of gendered and sexual subjectification through which racialized and colonized populations are produced as nonnormative, perverse, and deviant; and, second, the imaginative, creative, and vibrant ways in which gender and sexual nonnormativity is expressed, inhabited, and embodied so as to challenge and contest the very terms upon which these subjectifications are produced.

Significantly, much of the artwork I consider here pictures seemingly depopulated landscapes or built environments devoid of living beings, whether these are the deceptively innocuous housing structures of an indigenous Australian “settlement” or the eerie nightscapes of the Australian outback in

Tracey Moffatt's photographic series *Spirit Landscapes*; Seher Shah's photographs of the U.S. Southwest, where empty stretches of sky and highway are interrupted only by what she terms "hinterland structures" such as trailers or surveillance towers; or Chitra Ganesh's reconstituted family photographs in *13 Photos*, which documents her parents' honeymoon in the early 1970s, and where the tiny blurred figure of her mother is dwarfed by the vast mountainous landscape of what may or may not be Kashmir. The status of the body in these works ranges from the barely discernible (Ganesh's *13 Photos*) to its complete disappearance (Shah's *Hinterland Structures*), to its reappearance in the realm of the immaterial and the haptic (Moffatt's *Spirit Landscapes*). These representations of apparently empty, disembodied landscapes may at first appear to be far removed from the questions of nonnormative desire and embodiment that typically concern queer studies. Furthermore, such representations may initially appear to reproduce the logic and aesthetic of "emptied space."³⁴ This logic is central to the racial, gendered, and sexualized mechanisms of American empire, but it also undergirds other nation-building projects, such as settler colonialism in Australia and, to a certain extent, India's claim to the region of Kashmir.³⁵ However, the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora demand that we read these seemingly disembodied landscapes through a queer optic that brings into focus the bodies of the disappeared and the dispossessed.³⁶ This optic makes clear not only that these landscapes are in fact inescapably embodied, but also that these apparently disparate spaces are linked through distinct yet complementary projects of empire and occupation. Moreover, given that figurative representations of the body for minoritarian and colonized subjects have been the site of profound violence in the realm of the visual, the disappearance of the body, and the imprint of its absence on the landscape, may be one strategy of contesting this long and ongoing history of representational violence.

Zaatar has commented that he "considers Earth to be the ultimate archive, the ultimate recording,"³⁷ and certainly landscapes, as envisioned by the artists I discuss in this book, are hardly "neutral representations of nature,"³⁸ as one tradition of art historical criticism would have it. Rather, they tell the story of how colonial and racial power is violently consolidated through the gendered and sexual regulation of bodies in space (through spatial practices of containment, segregation, and dislocation), and how the dispossessed powerfully contest these forms of regulation through alternative imaginings of emplacement, dwelling, and housing. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora make apparent how all spaces of "home" and dwelling are shot through

with contradictions and fissures, that there is no going back, no return to an unsullied past, no secure space of safety. In light of this knowledge, these aesthetic practices reveal how those who are subjected to the violent legacies of colonial modernity contest this violence by finding imaginative and pleasurable ways to dwell in the wake of forced containment and forced mobility. They thus act as a resonant, alternative archive that records everyday forms of dwelling in the context of containment, displacement, and dispossession, and thereby offer a nuanced sense of the relation between staying and leaving, immobility and mobility, home and exile, dwelling and removal, indigeneity and diaspora, that refuses to privilege one of these terms over the other, but always attends to their co-constitutive nature.

The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora, then, allow us to see and sense the intertwined nature of various bodies of knowledge, racial formations, and historical experiences of displacement and dispossession, as well as of housing and dwelling, that are otherwise obscured. As I suggested at the outset of this chapter, it is in the realm of the aesthetic that new forms of relationality and affiliation can be apprehended. But I also emphasize that the aesthetic *enacts*, *produces*, and *performs* these affinities and affiliations rather than simply rendering them apparent.³⁹ Throughout *Unruly Visions* I stress that these are aesthetic *practices*, not just aesthetic forms, because they do things in the world: they shift our field of vision so that alternative possibilities, landscapes, and geographies come into view.⁴⁰ First, as I have been suggesting, they enact a practice of reading, one that both produces and renders apparent new modes of affiliation, relationality, and connection between bodies, times, spaces, objects of study, and fields of thought that have heretofore been kept distinct and discrete. This practice teaches us how to read dominant archives through the minor, and for their gaps, slippages, and erasures; to do so is to engage in the practice of emplacing ourselves and others in those narratives of the past that are occluded within dominant nationalist or even diasporic ideologies. Second, the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora produce alternative archives by demanding we pay close attention to the regional, the everyday, the personal, and the discarded that typically fall outside the purview of official archives. They thereby rearrange the hierarchies of value so central to canonical notions of both the archive and the aesthetic. Third, these aesthetic practices disorient and reorient us; they unsettle normative temporalities by pointing to alternative pathways and routes through the past and to the future that bypass the familiar touchstones of hetero- and homonormative life histories. In so doing, they emplace us in a state of productive suspension, as

I argue in my reading of Aurora Guerrero's feature film *Mosquita y Mari* in chapter 2.

Given that the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora negotiate the ongoing, often traumatic histories of forced mobility and immobility, dislocation and relocation, it is no surprise that an artist such as Akram Zaatari utilizes the metaphor of suspension to name the state of being situated, as he puts it, "somewhere between a violent present and a desired for life of peace and prosperity—seemingly impossible given the continuing injustices of this world, particularly in the Middle East."⁴¹ Clearly, being relegated to a state of suspension or disorientation can very well be the effect of dominant regimes of power. One need only think of the testimonies of undocumented youth in the U.S. that I mention in chapter 2, who use the language of stuckness and "being in limbo" to describe their experience of living without papers, or the example of a stateless Bedouin man whom Zaatari encounters in his experimental documentary *This Day*, which I write about in chapter 4, suspended as he is between two states and claimed by neither. But the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora transform the states of disorientation and suspension that are the by-product of dominant constructions of national and communal (un)belonging into forms of disorientation and suspension that are potentially disruptive and productive. Being suspended need not be the same as being trapped or in perpetual stasis; rather, it may be a temporary temporal and spatial respite from the relentless forward momentum of "conventional good life fantasies," to cite Lauren Berlant's apt phrase, or from demands to stay put or to relocate.⁴² Suspension as both a spatial and temporal category, in other words, may allow for a momentary vantage point from which to envision an alternative to the here and now.

Finally, the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora descale and rescale geographies through their attention to both the personal and the regional. Questions of region as subnational and/or supranational space animate the work of Ligy Pullappally, David Kalal, Aurora Guerrero, Seher Shah, Chitra Ganesh, Sheba Chhachhi, Tracey Moffatt, Agha Shahid Ali, and Akram Zaatari. In their work, it is through the personal and the autobiographical that we grasp the contours of regional geographies that disturb and disrupt the inherited colonial and neocolonial cartographies keeping differently racialized bodies, as well as histories of displacement and dispossession, segregated and discrete. The personal and the autobiographical serve here not to prop up forms of bourgeois intimacy, with their insistent delineation of public and private spaces, but rather to reveal the violent effacements upon which

this delineation depends. As such, the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora create new cartographies that produce South-South, region-to-region, and diaspora-to-region connectivities that critique, subordinate, and at times bypass the nation-state.⁴³ These new multiscalar cartographies demand that we place in the same frame analyses of histories of settler colonialism, empire, military occupation, racialization, and diasporic dislocation, as they indelibly mark both bodies and landscapes. Ultimately, the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora are modes of emplacement: just as Akram Zaatari rearranges El Madani's photographs so that they "perform new histories," and just as my own act of queer curation seeks to juxtapose incommensurate texts in order to enable new ways of seeing the relation between archives, regions, and affect, the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora rearrange and emplace us, as viewers and readers, in a different relation to space and time, history and memory. They allow us to see, sense, and feel the promiscuous intimacies of multiple times and spaces. They bring into the realm of a "violent present" glimpses of past desires, longings, and articulations of alternative social and political worlds that provide the occasion for a different sense of possibility and horizon.