

the Indian migrant populations who were continually manipulating and shaping the settler order from the margins. Attending to settler colonial racial and gendered subject formation in flux, Tallie's reading practices, archival sources, and theoretical resources thread a narrative of transnational British settler colonialism through the unique geography of Southern Africa.

**Tiffany Lethabo King** is associate professor of African American studies and women's, gender, and sexuality studies at Georgia State University.

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DOI 10.1215/10642684-8994168

## QUEER CALCULUS, WARM DATA, AND OTHER OXYMORONS

**Alpesh Kantilal Patel**

*Insurgent Aesthetics: Security and the Queer Life of the Forever War*

Ronak K. Kapadia

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. xiii + 350 pp.

Roughly the first third of this ambitious, well-argued monograph sketches out a genealogy of contemporary American counterinsurgency and global war-making regimes. Kapadia situates his book in the post-Cold War era during which American militarism expanded into the Greater Middle East (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Palestine) and at the same time increased regimes of surveillance on the domestic front. An accomplishment in its own right, this part of the book also serves as a foundation for what arguably becomes the book's main act: a nuanced exploration of artistic practices of Muslim, Arab, and South Asian diasporic artists.

In the introductory section, Kapadia outlines several important terms that shape the book as a whole. For instance, the titular “insurgent aesthetics” is a theoretical framework that (in part) refers to the way the artists mobilize, and in the same stroke undermine, “official” archives through their practices. At the same time, he nimbly avoids suggesting that the artworks (everything from installations and painting to performance and video) he examines can be reduced to their subject matter. Instead, he describes how these works’ affective forms inform and produce a “queer calculus,” which refers to the ways in which these artists unsettle supposedly dispassionate accounts of the war, such as the statistical modes through which collateral damage is calculated and rationalized. To that end, many of the works Kapadia analyzes instantiate multisensory engagements with their viewers or revel in what the West has traditionally determined to be “lower” senses. Below I discuss some of the artistic practices Kapadia eloquently discusses in the remainder of the book.

In chapter 2, “On the Skin,” he draws on performance studies, queer theory, and ethnic studies to explore the bodily pain and masochism of Iraqi American artist Wafaa Bilal’s works such as *Domestic Tension* (2007), a performance work in which the artist confined himself to a gallery and invited the public to remotely fire a paintball gun at his body. Kapadia expands on Jack Halberstam’s writing on “radical passivity and unbeing” (88) of female masochism to encompass the racialized and postcolonial male subject, including those who are cisgender such as Bilal. Indeed, one of the strengths of Kapadia’s work is his expansive use of *queer* as both a noun and a verb. *And Counting . . .* (2010), another performance work of Bilal’s, involved him turning his skin into a canvas on which the names of various Iraqi cities are tattooed onto his back. During the twenty-four-hour-long performance, dots representing the deaths of Iraqi civilians as well as US soldiers were also tattooed onto the makeshift map. As Kapadia writes, Bilal’s insurgent aesthetics makes possible “an alternative sensorial relation to the violence of US militarism . . . the queer calculus of the forever war” (91).

This sensorial is expanded in his next chapter that explores “warm data” as an artistic strategy and a feminist decolonial methodology. It suggests that alongside the cold, hard facts found in archives exist structures of feeling that can elicit subjugated knowledge of the dispossessed. As part of Indian American visual artist Chitra Ganesh and Afghan and Lebanese American artist Maria Ghani’s ongoing collaborative project *Index of the Disappeared* (2004–present), a material archive of post-9/11 disappearance and platform for dialogue, the web project *How Do You See the Disappeared? A Warm Database* aims to make palpable the clandestine deportation and disappearance of men. For instance, a “warm ques-

tionnaire” privileged the unquantifiable and the affective while eschewing typical indices of bioinformatics and surveillance tactics. The *Index of the Disappeared* also avoids mimetic realism in the depiction of subjects in the watercolors and is text heavy, often deploying redacted text. In the advent of predictive policing and algorithmic profiling, Kapadia points out how this alternative sensorial database could of course become a tool of subjugation. These kinds of conceptual twists and turns in his theorizing and thinking appear throughout the book. They are presented with what art historian Marsha Meskimmon (2011: 91) would describe as “affirmative criticality” rather than the cold, disembodied authority of what we have come to expect from negative critique.

The final major chapter shifts to examine US entanglements in Israeli state violence and ethnic cleansing of Palestine and is aligned with scholarship that situates solidarity with Palestine as part of a critical American studies project. Kapadia focuses on a trilogy of London-based artist Larissa Sansour’s science fiction works: *A Space Exodus* (2009), *In the Future: They Are from the Finest Porcelain* (2015), and *Nation Estate* (2012). Along the way, Kapadia makes compelling connections among Afrofuturism, Arabfuturism, and even Astrofuturism. In contradistinction to the objectivity of documentary film, *Nation Estate* (2012) is a CGI-short film and digital photo series depicting a near-future world where Palestinians have constructed their own state in the form of one lone skyscraper. While there is an ease of movement within the building, it is surrounded by a wall. It is not an uncritical escape into fantasy and the future but a way to also diagnose the realities of the present.

As Kapadia points out, many of the artists whose works he explores do not have the kind of mainstream recognition they should have in the international art world. Perhaps more important than providing visibility to these practices, his careful reading of the artists’ works is a model for how an art critic can (and should) write about works by artists with complex genealogies. The book is not situated within art history and visual studies, but one hopes that this book garners as much attention in these fields, the decolonization of which stubbornly remains a lugubrious and forever delayed affair, as I suspect it will in performance studies, American studies, and critical ethnic studies (to name but a few).

**Alpesh Kantil Patel** is associate professor of contemporary art and theory at Florida International University. The author of *Productive Failure: Writing Queer Transnational South Asian Art Histories* (2017) and coeditor of the forthcoming anthology *Storytellers of Art's Histories* (2021), he is a frequent contributor of exhibition reviews to *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *frieze*, and *Hyperallergic*.

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DOI 10.1215/10642684-8994182